

## **Policemoms: A way forward, being left behind**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Police organizations have a problem retaining female police officers, especially those who are mothers. Women leave the policing profession at higher rates during childbearing and child-rearing years than during any other time in their career. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of policewomen who are mothers and identify factors that contribute to poor retention rates during childbearing and child-rearing years. Guided by feminist theory, this qualitative, phenomenological study examined and analyzed gender inequality by exploring research questions focused on how women in policing perceive departmental policy and culture as they relate to motherhood and challenges/obstacles that stand in the way of gender equality or gender-neutral practices. Eleven policewomen were interviewed about their lived experiences as policewomen and mothers. The findings included 6 overarching patterns that provided insight into the reasons why female police officers are more difficult to retain, especially during their childbearing and child-rearing years. These patterns included: (a) challenges, (b) changes after children, (c) fears, (d) policy, and (e) support systems. The findings suggest that most police departments today have yet to fully understand the challenges that policewomen who are mothers face on a daily basis. The implications for social change include reformed policies and practices that could contribute to the advancement and professionalization of the policing profession as a whole by changing the traditionally masculine organizational culture and promoting a more gender-neutral environment, thus allowing communities to benefit from having a more diverse police force.

Keywords: policewomen, motherhood, policy, law enforcement, policing, gender equality

## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Police organizations have been built around a paramilitary organizational structure, and generally deploy in units, seek training and weaponry from military personnel, and adopt a ranking structure similar to that of the armed forces (Hill & Beger, 2009). This paramilitary structure is one reason why the nature of police work is closely aligned with socially accepted ideas of masculinity, such as crime fighting, physical strength, bravery, and aggression, among others (Kim & Merlo, 2010). Starting in the late 1800s, women began to make their way into the profession, although their role was not the same as men (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Roth, 2011). Women were generally recognized as having more nurturing and compassionate skill sets compared to most men, which meant that women were an asset in dealing with certain issues, especially those involving troubled youth or female inmates (Kingshott, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2009). The fact that women's roles focused on dealing with society's ills, versus crime fighting, kept them from reaching the ranks of patrol and put them into positions that were viewed as less important, such as jail matrons or social workers.

During the past century, women have increasingly gained more respect and responsibility within the profession by proving that they are equally as capable as men of performing policing duties (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Bochantin & Cowan, 2008; Schulze, 2011). As they began to integrate themselves into all aspects of police work, the number of women increased from only a few in the late 1800s to almost 15% of the federal police force in 2008 (Langton, 2010). During this period of growth, women demonstrated that not only can they perform traditional policing duties equal to those of men, but because women generally have more refined communication skills and abilities, they also are great assets when it comes to some of the more modern approaches to policing, such as community policing.

The steady growth of women into the policing profession has been viewed by some as progress; however, considering the amount of time this small increase in representation has taken and the much higher percentage of women in other professions, 15% is still relatively low (Yu, 2014). The greatest period of growth for women was between 1960 and 1990, which was when various legislative acts such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, and the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 were implemented. These acts protected women from being discriminated against and supported them as they pursued careers outside of the home. However, since the passage of these laws, the increase in the number of women entering the police profession has slowly started to stagnate or even reverse in some cases. Researchers such as Cordner and Cordner (2011); Kurtz (2012); Lee (2005); Rabe-Hemp (2011a); Schuck (2014); and Shelly, Morabito, and Tobin-Gurley (2011) noticed this stagnation and began to question why this decrease has occurred, suggesting that failing legislation, increased barriers for women, additional obstacles for women, and the policing culture may be to blame.

Childbearing and child-rearing are two barriers that may significantly contribute to women's poor retention in the police profession—barriers that do not exist or are not as equally challenging for men. Researchers have noted that retention of female police officers is the lowest during childbearing and child-rearing years (Charlesworth & Robertson, 2012; Kingshott, 2012). Upon further examination of this phenomenon, pregnancy has been specifically mentioned by female officers as posing a significant challenge to their ability to maintain “business as usual” or in some cases their ability to continue their career at all (Bochantin & Cowan, 2010b). A lack of support from police departments, gender-biased policies, and the police culture have all been cited as contributing to this retention issue (Bochantin & Cowan,

2008; Corsianos, 2011). If women are fortunate enough to make it through their pregnancy without negative setbacks in their careers as police officers, the struggle is far from over due to the additional challenges that also come with rearing young children. Cowan and Bochantin (2009); Gultekin, Leichtman, and Garrison (2010); and Schulze (2011) all have recognized the nature of police work as being very demanding and often requiring officers to work nontraditional shifts and long hours. This schedule is unwieldy and not very accommodating to police officers who have to arrange child care and attend family/school functions. These challenges are exacerbated for police officers who have rotating shifts, work nights, or are mandated to work overtime, when child care is not often readily available or available at such short notice. These unique work demands can pose challenges for male officers as well; however, research has shown that women bear the heaviest burden when it comes to child care and managing the household (Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield, & Thompson, 2010; Kurtz, 2012, Natarajan, 2014; Roebuck, Smith, & Haddaoui, 2013). This leaves female officers with greater responsibilities at home compared to their male counterparts, who generally will have a spouse who assumes these responsibilities. The demands of police work, in addition to the responsibilities of having a family, are difficult to balance, especially because these demands are often competing for the same resources and time (Hall et al., 2010). Current legislation, departmental policies, and the police culture have been insufficient in supporting these women through a natural phase of their lives while still supporting their right to remain employed as police officers (Bochantin & Cowan, 2008; Corsianos, 2011).

Police work has been recognized as a challenging career to maintain for most women, versus men, due to many of the additional responsibilities that women generally bear at home. In addition, most women are faced with maneuvering less than supportive organizational cultures and gender biased policies that add to these challenges. This is a qualitative phenomenological study that focuses on female police officers' perceptions of motherhood and policy and how these two factors may impact their ability to have a successful career in the policing profession.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Police organizations, in general, have a problem retaining female police officers, especially those who are mothers. Women have been leaving the policing profession at higher rates during childbearing and child-rearing years, generally from the ages of 21 to 35, than during any other time in their career (Charlesworth & Robertson, 2012; Kingshott, 2012). Despite legislation such as Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity Employment, the Family Medical Leave Act, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, feminist theorists would agree that barriers still exist due to the variety of ways that departments have interpreted and implemented this legislation within this unique organizational culture. Though there has been a slow increase in the representation of women over the past few decades, multiple studies have shown that the steady increase of women entering law enforcement has begun to stagnate or even reverse (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Prenzler, Fleming, & King, 2010).

This problem has negatively impacted female police officers and affected their abilities to pursue successful careers in policing. There is a social problem of gender equity that needs to be addressed and a gap in the literature regarding the reasons why pregnancy and motherhood have been significant barriers to the continuation of employment of women in the policing profession. A possible cause of this problem is that current legislation is not sufficient. This allows gender-biased policies and struggles to be accepted and the masculine culture to persist,

with pregnancy and motherhood being a significant contributing factor.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of policewomen who were mothers to determine what contributes to poor retention rates during childbearing and child-rearing years. Specifically, perceptions of pregnancy, motherhood, organizational culture, and departmental policies, including pregnancy policies, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA), and even statewide mandates. Research has shown that women face additional barriers compared to those of men in the policing profession, stemming mostly from the masculine police culture, the questioning of their competence and abilities, sexual harassment, and double standards (Bochantin & Cowan, 2008; Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011); however, an investigation as to why retention is worse during childbearing and child-rearing ages had yet to be determined.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research was guided by the following central question: How do women in policing perceive departmental policy and culture as they relate to motherhood?

The following sub-question was developed to support the primary question: From a feminist perspective, what challenges/obstacles stand in the way of gender equality or gender-neutral practices in policing?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Feminist theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study to examine and analyze gender inequality. The feminist perspective assumes that being female is, and will be, significant in most interactions that women will have throughout their lives, especially related to women's roles in relationships, societal processes, responsibilities, and expectations (Patton, 2002). Feminist theorists and philosophers, such as Hendricks (1992) and Nagel (1974), have offered guidance about the ways in which policies, regulations, and laws should govern women. Instead of treating women "like men," as they have been in masculine organizations, women should be treated as individuals by their own definition. Examining the interview responses and research literature through a feminist theoretical perspective helped this researcher let go of socially accepted standards and norms and to identify biases and obstacles that have led to poor retention of female police officers during their childbearing and child-rearing years. This perspective made it possible to identify aspects of overt/covert discrimination, issues of inequality, and instances of sexism/bias that had yet to be examined or addressed.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study utilizes a phenomenological methodology to examine the shared experience of being a mother and a police officer from the perspective of those who have lived this experience on a daily basis. This study contributes to feminist theory by using these lived experiences to drive the interests of women with a focus of changing or improving their situation and seeking equality within the policing profession. The main focus of phenomenology is to understand how humans view or perceive (whether these perceptions are accurate or not) their

lived experiences (Willis, 2007). A qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth examination of issues; it further encourages openness in participant responses and allows the researcher to collect varying perspectives and experiences, which is what this study elicited from police officers who were mothers (Patton, 2002). Moustakas (1994) states that “everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings about an experience should be set aside to allow the phenomenon to be revisited freshly, naively, and in a wide open sense” (p. 33). In this study, what it generally means to be a woman, a mother, and a police officer was set aside, allowing the participants to focus on the experiences as they have lived them.

## **Participants**

The study participants were 11 policewomen. The participants were already parents or were pregnant during the time they were interviewed for this study, and were employed by police organizations in northern Ohio. Ten of the 11 participants were assigned to patrol divisions responsible for general road patrol and answering calls for service while pregnant and/or rearing young children. One participant was promoted from patrol to an administrative position at the time of pregnancy. Of the 11 participants, two worked at small police organizations that employed fewer than 25 officers. Six of the participants worked at medium-size organizations that employed between 26 and 50 officers. Three of the participants worked at larger organizations that employed more than 50 officers.

Together, the 11 participants were the mothers of 15 biological children. The number of children and whether they had their children before or while being employed in law enforcement are listed in Table 1 (Appendix). One participant was pregnant with her first child. Seven participants each had one child. Two participants each had two children, and one officer had three children. Two participants had stepchildren in addition to their biological children.

Of the 11 participants, eight had their children while employed in the policing profession. The other three participants had their children prior to the start of their policing career; however, these officers were included as participants because they were parenting young children when they entered the profession. While some of the questions pertaining to pregnancy did not apply to these three participants, their experiences with motherhood, policy, and culture were valuable to the study because they were raising young children while in the police force.

It should be noted that although these demographic data reflected participants' current employment situations, their experiences were drawn from their entire policing careers, which may have encompassed more than one organization. Five of the participants had been employed for their entire careers at one police organization; however, six of the participants had been employed in other police organizations prior to their current organization. Six participants reported that the experiences they shared during their interviews might not have occurred while they were working with their current employer.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted with female police officers who had children to gain first-person reports of their lived reality. Convenience snowball sampling was used initially by first contacting a number of police administrators at various police departments in Ohio by phone or email that had a personal and/or professional relationship with the author, such as Wooster Police Department, Wayne County Sheriff's Office, Newburgh Heights Police Department, Smithville Police Department, Mansfield Police Department, Kent Police

Department, Canton Police Department, Massillon Police Department, Medina County Sheriff's Office, Stark County Sheriff's Office, New Albany Police Department, and Tiffin Police Department. Initially, police administrators were asked if they could provide a list of officers in their department who met the inclusion criteria for this study. The individuals who met the inclusion criterion were contacted and asked to participate in the study. If they agreed, the interviews were conducted in a neutral and private setting of their choice, such as a public library or church. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were used to elicit subjective and objective experiences and perceptions from the participants that specifically focused on motherhood, their career, and organizational policy. The interviews were audio recorded to assure accuracy of responses for transcribing. Participants were provided with a one to two page summary of key findings from their interview to review to ensure contextual accuracy and authenticity of what was conveyed during the interviews as part of the member checking process. NVivo software was used to help organize and analyze responses. The analysis process was conducted in two coding cycles. The first cycle included coding the raw data by relevant descriptive and holistic information. Eventually, the second cycle of coding included reviewing the first cycle codes and organizing them into patterns to gain insights and glean meaning from this experience. Stivers (2002) commonly approached studies through a feminist lens to be able to identify and reveal gender-biased practices. Approaching this study through a feminist lens revealed that departmental policies, state regulations, and personal expectations are, in fact, gendered instead of gender neutral. These potentially gendered policies may be compounding the challenges for police officers who are mothers.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected for this study, several strategies throughout the data collection and data analysis process were employed including: (a) using rich, thick descriptions; (b) employing triangulation; (c) conducting member checking; (d) identifying and acknowledging potential researcher biases; (e) maintaining confidentiality; (f) collecting proper documentation and keeping records.

First, rich, thick descriptions were elicited from these intensive interviews with the participants. Maxwell (2013) concluded that data that are detailed and clear enough to provide a full understanding of the phenomenon would not be as likely to produce a mistaken conclusion or entertain any potential bias. Good description takes the reader into the setting being described to the point that the reader can feel the emotions, see the sights, and hear the sounds as if they were there (Patton, 2002).

Secondly, triangulation was also used to add to the trustworthiness of the study. One method of triangulation that was used in this study was triangulation of sources. Each participant was considered a source with a different perspective that was compared against each other to corroborate common patterns that emerged during the data analysis process.

Third, member checking was used to ensure accuracy of participant responses. After the interviews were transcribed and the analysis was complete, the participants were provided with a one to two page summary of the key findings from their individual interview and asked to review their summary to ensure contextual accuracy and true authenticity of what was conveyed. Additionally, when reviewing the key findings summary, participants were allowed to include any information they had neglected to report during the interview process or to delete any information they had reported in the interview but later wanted to redact. This validation step took place via email prior to any data being used in the findings sections of the study.

Fourth, acknowledging potential bias was an important step in the data collection process and the data analysis process because the researcher is also a police officer and a mother. In order to minimize detrimental biases, a committee of external auditors were used to ensure objectivity throughout the process. Although personal bias is usually considered a limitation in research studies, this researcher's background in law enforcement was critical in gaining access to many of these police departments and participants. This researcher's status as a police officer helped the participants feel comfortable participating because she was viewed as a non-judgmental peer.

Finally, maintaining confidentiality was vital to ensuring trustworthiness for this study. In order to facilitate honest and meaningful dialogue, all participants were ensured confidentiality of participation and individual responses. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, a letter of the alphabet that was used when referring to any data that they provided.

## **Limitations**

As with every study, this study encountered limitations. The greatest limitation was that influences other than motherhood and policy might be influencing the ability of participants to maintain successful policing careers, such as marital status, race, education, etc. In addition, geographic location could also be a limitation in that all of the participants were employed by police departments located in northern Ohio. The police culture may be different in northern Ohio compared to other departments across the nation, thus influencing the experience of participants. Generalizability would be increased if the sample population had included participants from police departments nationwide; however, considering time and resource limitations, it was impossible to control for all of these variables.

## **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a policewoman and a mother. Limited research has focused on this population; however, during the past decade, researchers have noticed that the slow and steady increase of women entering into the profession has started to stagnate (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Prenzler et al., 2010). Of primary interest to researchers are the reasons why women have left the profession during their childbearing and child-rearing years more than at any other time.

Throughout the data analysis process, five patterns were identified. Many of these patterns reveal insight into the reasons why female police officers are more difficult to retain, especially during their childbearing and child-rearing years. Overarching patterns that were identified included the following: (a) challenges, (b) changes after children, (c) fears, (d) policy, and (e) support systems. Within these broad patterns, more specific sub patterns emerged, which are listed in Table 2 (Appendix) and are discussed in detail.

### **Patterns Emerging from Research Question 1**

Following is the first research question this study sought to answer: "How do women in policing perceive departmental policy and culture as they relate to motherhood?" Two patterns emerged from the interviews that provided insights into this question: (a) changes after children and (b) policy, as indicated in Table 3 (Appendix).

#### ***Changes After Children***

Having a child is a life-changing event. All participants reported that their lives changed to some extent after the birth of their children. When asked how pregnancy or motherhood impacted their work responsibilities or work status, the responses of most participants fell into two categories; they were often (a) more distracted than before they had children and (b) a majority of participants described how limitations became a part of their lives, more so than before.

Having children and maintaining the role of primary caregiver to children is a demanding job. Two participants explained that their children were a source of distraction at times while they [participants] were at work. The distraction was usually not intentional, but participants reported that they were not as focused as they felt they should have been. Participant D explained how her actions and behavior remained consistent before and after becoming a mother, but her internal dialogue has changed as a result of having children.

Suddenly your life blows up. When it was just me, I ran headlong into everything, and it was fine. I could change on a dime. Now it's like, *Okay, where's this one [child] and where's this one [child]? Who do I have to call?* It's really different... there used to be... there was no fear; you know, initially I was wild and crazy and nothing was gonna stop me. I'm kicking in this door. And now, I'm still kicking in the door, but I'm like, *Are you being safe? Are you doing what you're supposed to?* And then you remember, *Oh, so and so needs lunch money, so I need to call him and tell him to drop it off.* My world is so not my own anymore, but I wouldn't change it.

Participant G shared similar experiences in that she, too, had her children's care on her mind while at work. She shared the example of her children being home alone on snow days. She reported feeling a constant urge to check in with them to make sure everything was okay.

Limitations have become a regular part of participants' lives as a result of becoming mothers. Before becoming mothers, they felt that they could do anything they wanted to; however, since having children, they placed many more boundaries and/or limitations on themselves in order to feel that they are doing right by their children. Participant B recalled working a lot of overtime hours and special details prior to being pregnant because she was able to supplement her income. "When I became a mom, it was like, *Wow, I have to stop.*" Participant H recognized that many of the male officers in her department picked up extra shifts and stayed late for events much more than she did. This discrepancy was not because she did not want to work overtime or because she was not as dedicated as male officers, but rather it was because she had other responsibilities at home. Participant I shared similar feelings, stating, "I'm less likely to spend as much time working on certain projects, working weekends, or working late because I want to get home to her [my daughter]."

In addition to turning down special details and extra shifts, a majority of participants recalled limiting their own promotional opportunities that could further their career because of their children. For example, Participant B described not wanting to take on a supervisory role simply because she believed that her supervisors would expect more from her than she was able to give at that time. Therefore, she limited herself to remaining a patrolwoman because this position would allow her to focus more on her responsibilities at home. At least seven of the 11 participants recalled turning down or not pursuing a promotion or career-furthering opportunity in order to keep their children as their highest priority. Participant F explained that she remains on night shift in order to be able to attend all of her son's school activities during the day. Participant D explained how keeping her current rank allows her to be home with her children in the evenings:



My career opportunities are limited by being a mother. I'm a patrolman; I will retire as a patrolman. I have no desire to do the other things. I've been asked, and at one point and time I was ordered to take a Sergeant's test, but I don't want to. I'm really in a great spot right now on days [working on the day shift]. It works best for my children, and I get to tuck them in at night. I know that advancement and changing certain things will put me on the bottom rung again.

Participant F is on a crisis negotiation team, which requires officers to be available to be called to a scene at any time of the day or night. She mentioned that she never would have been able to be a member of this team when her son was younger because she would not have been able to be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Participant H shared a similar experience regarding a crime scene unit she was interested in joining. Unfortunately, she declined the opportunity because her son was too young to care for himself at that time. Participant I reported that her chief had been encouraging her to attend the FBI academy. The FBI academy is a coveted training opportunity for law enforcement officers. She recognized this as a valuable opportunity; however, she reported that she has delayed making a decision because attending the academy would require living away from home for three months. Three months was too long to be away from her daughter.

### *Policy*

During the interviews the topic of policy seemed to be a source of concern for all participants to some degree or another. Findings related to policy and Research Question 1 are discussed here. The two common sub patterns that emerged were (a) fears, and (b) confusion.

The participants described different types of fears during pregnancy, motherhood, and working as an officer. One of the first instances in which fear was recognizable was when participants were deciding when (and whether) they should disclose their pregnancy to their superior officers. Because a majority of the departments lacked an official pregnancy policy outside of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a majority of participants reported that they felt reservations and hesitation when disclosing their pregnancy, mostly out of a fear of the unknown. The opinions of participants were divided evenly about the most appropriate time to disclose their pregnancy. Three participants reported that they chose to disclose their pregnancy as soon as possible. The common reason for disclosing as soon as possible was a concern about the safety of their child. Participant C recalled, "It was pretty early. I was nine weeks, so right after, I went to the doctor. I let my chief and direct sergeant know just in case I wasn't comfortable handling any of the calls that came in." Participant D shared similar feelings in that she told her supervisors as soon as she knew she was pregnant "out of fear of something happening." She said, "You know, it's not just me now." Participant E also recalled the decision to disclose as being a scary one.

Although three participants chose to disclose immediately, four participants waited as long as possible to disclose their pregnancy. Their reasons for waiting differed, but all the fears were related to concerns about what would happen to them. Participant A explained that she would have waited longer if she could have, but her ever-changing body made that impossible: "I had just gotten to my three-month mark, and the reason was I couldn't snap my belt anymore. I would have waited longer if I could have." Participant B began to get sick early in her pregnancy, forcing her to disclose her pregnancy earlier than she would have preferred: "I'd say a month, and that's when I got sick and they noticed something was wrong. I wasn't going to disclose right away because I knew that they would be, like, 'You can't work any more.'" This

fear of being removed from road patrol was a common theme for those participants who waited to disclose their pregnancy. Participant A knew what would happen to her once she disclosed, so in order to avoid it, she delayed the process as much as possible:

Really, the most difficult thing was I knew as soon as I told work that I was pregnant that I would have to get taken off the road and would go to light duty. So for selfish reasons, I was thinking, *Oh, I don't want to have to work at a desk.* That's why I'm an officer; I don't like working the typical 8-to-5 job. So I waited about as long as I could until my duty belt truly just wouldn't snap anymore.

Participant K was caught off guard when she was immediately removed from road patrol. She stated, "When I told them, they immediately took me off the street, which I did not expect. I was a little disappointed, but I understood why they did it." Participant I knew that being pregnant meant being removed from road patrol and assigned light duty. However, she was in a unique situation in that she was getting promoted to a supervisory position. At that time, supervisory positions were not contracted to perform light-duty work; however, patrol positions were. Therefore, she was unsure about the consequences of disclosing her pregnancy. She waited until her promotion was official and disclosed her pregnancy the very next day.

Participant D and Participant G revealed the dangerous situations that they had found themselves in, whether by choice or otherwise. Although Participant D revealed her pregnancy immediately, her department at the time did not have any policies in place that could be consulted for guidance. She was given the choice to continue road patrol or use her sick time and go home. Unfortunately, she had not accrued enough sick time to last through her pregnancy, so she chose to remain on road patrol. The absence of policy and her subsequent decision to remain on road patrol placed her and her fellow officers who were trying to help in dangerous situations:

I continued to work because I was still a relatively new officer. I didn't know what to do. I had to live, so I just came into work until I got too big to be on the road. I was in three fights, up until my fourth month, while I was pregnant. And my uniform didn't fit anymore because I had the bump, and it was terrible.

Participant D was not the only participant who put herself in danger. Participant G struggled through severe illness and voluntarily put herself and unborn child in danger because she was not ready to disclose her pregnancy. She recalled keeping empty Cool Whip bowls in her cruiser to vomit in between calls for service. In addition to hiding her sickness, she also said, "I got shot with a Taser while I was pregnant. It was at the point where I wasn't telling them yet." When asked if it was Taser training and whether she voluntarily was Tased, she stated, "Yes, I had to keep up the facade. Otherwise, how do you say no?" Participant G kept up the facade until her body became too big as a result of her pregnancy, forcing her to buy new pants and a belt.

Although Participant J had her children prior to entering the policing profession, she shared observations that she had gathered during her long career about the reasons pregnancy is a source of fear for most female officers:

Knowing that I wanted to get into law enforcement, having children actually was going to be detrimental. I do know several women who have gotten pregnant and then were removed from the road, kind of annexed somewhere else. Clothing was a thing too; what are they gonna wear--you know, the gun belt? They were given options on the shirt, but they were kind of ousted. Then when they went back onto the road after having children, they had their issues too. They were afraid to get pregnant while working. I talked to several of them [female officers], and I was very glad that I didn't get hired by any department until after I had my children.

All of the participants in this study recalled having a sense of confusion at one time or another regarding the policies that their departments did or did not have. This confusion was the catalyst for much of the fear that participants experienced. The participants did not know what, if any, policies were available to them to support them through their pregnancy. Participants used phrases such as “Not that I’m aware of,” “I don’t know,” and “I’m not sure” when they were asked direct questions about existing policies. Participant A shared that she definitely would research her options if she were to become pregnant. The best way she could describe the way she felt at times was “flailing around, trying to figure stuff out.” This feeling of “flailing around” was a consistent theme. About half of the participants were the only woman in their department or the first woman in their respective departments to become pregnant during the last few decades.

A couple of the participants reported that policies, such as a pregnancy policy or a light-duty policy, were handled very informally. Instead of consulting a written policy, these types of situations were handled on a case-by-case basis in an informal manner. Participant D shared that her department had struggled in the past with pregnant officers and fair treatment; knowing this, she was unsure about whether the department had formal policies in place that provided guidelines for pregnant officers. Participant C, who was pregnant at the time of the interview, reported that she felt her situation was being handled in a positive manner. Nevertheless, her statements reflected reservations in that she emphasized the importance of having a pregnancy policy in writing, which would help her feel more “protected” and to “feel safer.”

## **Patterns Emerging from Research Question 2**

Following is the second research question this study sought to answer: “From a feminist perspective, what challenges/obstacles stand in the way of gender equality or gender-neutral practices in policing?” Two patterns emerged from the interviews that provided insights into this question: (a) challenges and (b) policy, as illustrated in Table 4 (Appendix).

### ***Challenges***

Every participant mentioned challenges they encountered that stood in the way of gender equality or gender neutral-practices. Three common sub patterns emerged that described the types of challenges participants experienced including: (a) culture, (b) double duty/double standard, and (c) nature of the job.

The police culture has been examined by researchers for decades because of its strength and ability to stand against manipulation and change (Denison, 1996; Karp & Stenmark, 2011; Shelley et al.,2011). The law enforcement profession traditionally has developed around the life patterns of men. Because men have comprised the dominant population in law enforcement, they have held the greatest power and influence over the evolution of police culture. Because of this tradition, women within police organizations often have experienced their work environment differently than men have. More specifically, women often have perceived themselves as outsiders with little influence in the police culture. A majority of participants reported that they did not truly feel accepted into the police culture at the beginning of their careers and even sometimes currently. Many of the participants agreed with the idea of having to “prove themselves” or “earn their colleagues’ respect”; however, they felt that this pressure (or requirement) to participate in these informal rituals did not apply to new male recruits who were automatically given respect from their first day on the job. Participant A recalled specific

training scenarios during which her male colleagues tested her physically. Participant H shared a similar experience. She recalled being pushed aside during physical encounters or fights with the public and reported that it was not until she forced herself into the situation and resolved the physical issue that she felt she earned the respect of her peers:

I was told, and I've learned, that you have to work a little harder to prove that you can do it yourself. You know, I've had fights break out to where you go to handle it, and I got shoved aside [for the males to handle it]. It wasn't until they saw me do it that they were like, 'okay, she can do it.' But if I were a guy, they wouldn't have done that. So that's frustrating.

Participant I and J referred to the "good ol' boys" when describing how they felt about having to prove themselves: "Whether we like it or not, we still have to deal with the 'good ol' boy' system. [Women are] always gonna have to prove themselves 10 times more than anybody else. I don't know if that will ever change" (Participant I). Participant J described a similar experience and was doubtful that the "good ol' boys' club" would ever cease to exist:

Yes, you do have to prove yourself as a female--no matter now or when I went through the FTO program. I don't think I was truly accepted until after I got into my first fight, so they knew I would be able to handle myself. I totally get it. But then when you get someone coming in just out of the academy and they're a male, they don't have to prove themselves like you did. You know, it's the police culture again, and you just accept it.

The deeply ingrained masculine culture not only forced many participants to feel compelled to prove themselves or go above and beyond their male counterparts in terms of their performance, but it also forced many of them to handle illegal, unprofessional, and uncomfortable situations while at work. When discussing these scenarios, the majority of participants agreed that these behaviors were not intended to be malicious in nature, but instead were stemming from stereotypical assumptions held by men in the department or ignorance on their behalf because they had never worked with policewomen in their department.

A majority of the participants reported that they maintained responsibility for a greater share of the household and child care responsibilities at home, even though nine of the 11 of the participants were married or living with a domestic partner. These participants described their household and child care responsibilities as "double duty." They reported that every day, they would go to work and then return home to begin their "second shift," whereas their husbands or partners, though helpful at times, did not have the same responsibilities. Participant F explained that she felt pressure, not only because of the expectations that she placed on herself, but she also felt pressure from society:

It's double duty now. Society says moms are supposed to do this and moms take sick kids to the doctors and moms go to parent-teacher conferences, so we put those stresses on ourselves because of society. Then we have work stress too, just like everyone else. So I think you kinda just get a dual role or a double duty.

In their responses about balancing the dual roles of mother and police officer, almost all of the participants reported that the majority of their male counterparts (i.e., male police officers) had wives. The fact that their male counterparts had "wives" seemed to elicit a sense of jealousy or resentment towards their male counterparts because participants perceived these wives to handle the majority of the responsibilities at home, leaving their fellow male officers with much more free time than participants had. Having a wife at home also contributed to a lack of understanding among male officers about the workload that their female counterparts maintained both at home and on the job. Participant A stated, "I was in the motor unit, so it was all male

officers and they all had stay-at-home wives.” Participant D described the differences between her life and the lives of most of her male colleagues:

Sometimes our guys, you know, their wives are teachers or they stay home; they think he walks on water, and that’s great for him. However, I do the exact same job you [males] do. I’m the breadwinner. I come here [to work]. I get in this cruiser and drive around. I get in fights. I do what I’m supposed to do. But then, I go home and I take an active role in my children. It’s a little different because they [male officers] think you have all this free time. I don’t have free time. As soon as I take off my junk here, I got the mom hat on, [and] I’m trying to do that thing.

Participant B shared similar experiences and feelings regarding how males perceive women officers in her department:

I think the male perception is that the women should stay at home and take care of their children and the males should come to work. But with the female officers, I feel that they think that their other half [the female officer's spouse] is responsible, you know. They don’t look at both sides of what we have to go through. All of our administration are men, and they can just brush it off to their wives.

Participant F and Participant H both described a time when they attempted to educate one or more of their male counterparts about the differences between their lifestyles and responsibilities compared to the lifestyles and responsibilities of male officers. They attempted this communication in response to comments that males made to them, obviously not fully aware of the differences in their lifestyles:

There would be days I would go to work exhausted and [a male colleague would say], “Why are you so tired? It’s just now work time?” Well no, I’ve been up since 5:30 this morning with a four year old or five year old or a sick kid. I would explain it to him like this: “Everything your stay-at-home wife does before you go to work or while you’re sleeping or while you’re doing whatever, I do all those things, and then I come to work. So, I don’t get a break, like you get a break. (Participant F)

Participant H explained to a male colleague why she did not have as much time as he did to dedicate to work:

I tried to explain to them sometimes that they have more time to give, more time that they can devote to work. Sometimes I have to explain to them [that] “I can’t do that; I don’t have a wife at home to take care of the kids like you do.”

In addition to feeling as though they work double duty, at least four participants described situations in which they felt they were being held to a double standard. Although the goal and perception of every department is that all officers are treated equally, several participants questioned whether that was, in fact, true. Two participants, Participant D and Participant K, experienced illegal and sexist comments after disclosing their pregnancy to their superiors. Participant D recalled being sent to the safety director to disclose her pregnancy:

He looked at me and said, “You’re telling me this why?” And I was like, “Well, I don’t think it’s safe for me to be out there on the road.” And he said, “Well, here’s what you need to do; you need to make a decision. Do you want to be a police officer, or do you want to be a mother?” I about went over a table.

She did not want to cause trouble; however, she pointed out to the safety director the double standard that was in place. She stated, “We have men here that have five and six kids. They get to procreate and I’ve given that up? And he was like, “I don’t know what to tell you because they don’t have to be off.” I was like, “Wow!” Participant K had a similar experience; however, she

heard indirectly about comments that were made:

The union told the chief [that I was pregnant] so they could find a position for me, and the comment made by the chief, who is no longer the chief by the way, was, “Well, did she ask for permission to be pregnant?” I guess everyone that was there from the union were just floored. When they told me, I was like, “He said *what!*? I didn’t know I needed your permission to have a life outside of this police department.” I just couldn’t believe someone who is in that position would say something so stupid and heartless.

The double standard between male officers and female officers was clearly demonstrated to Participant D through an observation regarding the activities of the Police Wives Chapter. The Police Wives is a chapter of women, generally wives of policemen, who engage in service activities for the department. Participant D overheard a conversation between an officer couple (male officer/female officer) during which the husband asked the wife if she made things for the Police Wives Chapter:

We have our chapter of police wives; they’re lovely ladies, but in that aspect of the police wives, we also have policemen who are married to policewomen here. One of my dear friends, her husband looked at her and said, “Did you help them make things for police wives?” And she goes, “No, did you?”

Police work is a unique profession compared to most professions. Policing operations occur 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and during this entire time, officers are at the mercy of the public. When the public calls for help, no matter the circumstances, the police respond. Providing this type of service has taken its toll on many participants. Although many of the sentiments that were expressed by female officers during their interviews would likely be very similar among their male counterparts, the fact that these women were the primary caretakers of their children made this unique nature of their job more challenging and possibly more heartbreaking as well. Participant D explained how police work has interfered with her life:

Police work interferes with every aspect of being a mom, that mom [the perfect mom]. You’re held over... you have this go on... you just can’t leave or you get called in [to work]. It’s usually when you have something planned. The police department interrupts everything. It really does. Our [police officers] challenges are unique, but I think ultimately, there are some jobs where they never close. So they know my plight. Maybe they’re not standing there with a dead body like I am, but they’re serving people or they’re driving truck or something, so they know the heartbreak.

Participant J shared similar experiences and wondered whether the nature of the job required officers to put more effort into helping strangers than into helping their own family:

I think with LE [law enforcement], we devote ourselves to others more than our family. I think that’s a common problem or issue with a lot of families that have a parent that’s in LE. You’re putting in a lot of time, a lot of time away... you have to.

Participant A recalled the holidays being the most difficult for her, especially now that social media has become so popular; she stated that seeing other families being able to spend time together has made it more difficult for her.

Although many professions have stressors, police work presents a different type of job stress. Participant G provided specific examples of how her work stress may be different from the stress that other mothers have experienced:

Most mothers do not have to worry about being assaulted in their jobs. Most of them do not have to worry about catching some random disease, like Hep C or anything like that, from some dirt bag [suspect] that they’ve just arrested. Most of them don’t have to worry

about being recognized outside of their field. If you're a nurse or something and you see somebody at Wal-Mart, it's usually not the end of the world. If you've arrested that person, it's a little uncomfortable... just the simple fact that your day off sometimes is never your day off. Granted, with most jobs you have the chance of getting called in, but most of the time you can say no. In our job, if you get called in, sorry about your luck, but you're going.

In addition to the stress, the unique hours of the job can pose a challenge when trying to find child care. Participant A recalled trying to find night-time child care for her child when she was scheduled to work the night shift: "Trying to find night care is almost impossible from an establishment; the cheapest one that we found was \$1,100 a week. That was even with a government discount for military and police."

### *Policy*

Every participant reported that policy, or lack of policy, was a source of frustration, and they attributed the lack of gender equality and gender-neutral practices to policy failures. Two common sub patterns emerged that described the types of policies that did or did not exist included: (a) lack of policy and (b) informal workarounds.

Of all the patterns that emerged, a lack of policy was the most commonly mentioned or described by these participants. All 11 participants commented to some degree about the lack of a policy. Most participants simply experienced discomfort, fear, and or a sense of feeling lost because no policies were in place. However, three participants in particular experienced extreme hardships due to this absence of policy. During the interviews, this lack of policy was described by participants with mixed feelings. Participant D explained that within her department, "there were no procedures. It was just fly by the seat of your pants and say whatever you want." Participant F stated, "There is nothing; it's horrible." Participant G said, "No, nothing was established at all." Participant J shared the logic behind her department's lack of a light-duty policy, stating, "We have no light duty anymore. We used to. So you either have to be fit for duty, or you're not." Participant G shared that not only did the absence of policy affect her, but it also became the subject of gossip within her department:

The chief that we had when I was pregnant wasn't that big on policies. I mean, there was a lot of people that used light duty back then. Now on our department, it [light duty] doesn't exist; you cannot use light duty unless you are on a workman's compensation claim. The thing that was funny is, I told two or three key people that I was pregnant, and it was just a matter of days before everybody in the world knew what was going on. Everybody was wondering what would happen and how they were going to take care of everything [my pregnancy/my work].

One participant's department had a light-duty policy that was generally used for pregnancy; however, because she was a supervisor, light duty was not in her contract, only the duties of a patrol officer. She reported that her pregnancy, and the fact that she was an administrator, caught the department off guard, and they were in uncharted waters:

Well, for me, it was different because we've had pregnant females before, but they were patrol [officers]. We've never had a pregnant supervisor before. When I told them, they immediately took me off the road and put me on light duty, but it [light duty] wasn't in our contract, so they put me back on patrol. They just made stipulations that I had to stay inside and do other things without going out. I still worked different shifts; I was on midnights then--midnights and afternoons, whereas the patrolmen... when they are

pregnant, they automatically go to day shift, light duty, out of uniform. (Participant I)

A few participants recognized that the lack of policy was an issue; however, those who worked within somewhat flexible and accommodating departments were hesitant to complain about it too much, fearing that a formal policy may make their situation worse or more difficult. Participant C was the second officer in her department to become pregnant. She was happy that the first officer carved a procedural path and that her department was very flexible and accepting when working with her. This was comforting to Participant C.

Beyond minor setbacks or feeling uncomfortable about a lack of policy, three women experienced significant hardships because pregnancy policies or light-duty policies were not in place. Participant B explained how her pregnancy was addressed:

The first month I became very sick, and the doctors told me I would have to go on light duty at work. I told them [supervisors], I said, "I need light duty." They [supervisors] said, "We don't offer light duty here." I said, "This is a village, I'm not employed by the police department; I'm employed by the village. We have desk jobs." They wouldn't do it [allow me to have a desk job/light duty]. So my health went down really quick. I was off the whole entire nine months. It was real difficult. There were no policies in effect; they [supervisors] wouldn't accommodate, so the doctor just said, "You're off." I had just bought a house; I was pregnant; it was overwhelming.

Participant D described a similar resistance and lack of accommodations by her department. She recalled being forced on leave, sitting at home, and calculating which utilities she could discontinue in order to continue to meet her financial obligations:

I didn't know what to do. I had to live, I said [to the safety director], "Listen, this isn't probably the best thing to have all this weight on her [baby] and dealing with all of these things." So they [administration] said, "You need to go home." I only had some sick time that I had amassed, but it was not gonna be enough. I went home, and I was at home for 30 days, using up sick time. I was at home trying to figure out what utilities I could cut off so that I could still afford to live and have my baby, then go back to work. After that 30 days, they [administration] called me and said, "You need to come in; we're going to give you transitional duty."

Both Participant B and Participant D contacted attorneys to remedy their situations, but they were both told that they were not being discriminated against and that nothing could be done. Eventually, Participant D's department, due to strong recommendations from powerful community members, decided to change their stance. Participant E experienced a similar situation as Participant B and Participant D but knew that taking unpaid leave was not an option for her. With no other options, she voluntarily resigned her position at the department.

Participant J was aware of the struggles that many women experienced when trying to have children in the policing profession. After all, some of her relatives were officers. She had her children prior to entering the policing profession, and she had done so intentionally:

I had heard that it would be better to get a job if you had already had your children and they would be more apt to hire you. I remember I volunteered this [information at an interview], stating something to this effect, like, "Yeah, I'm done having children now, and this is what I want to do with my career." I'm almost positive that I said something to that effect.

Participant J recalled that it was very important for her to bring up the fact that she was done having children. She felt that disclosing this information would increase the probability that she would be hired, knowing that policing is not the most family friendly of organizations.



While discussing the absence of policy, a large majority of participants mentioned that they believed there definitely should be a formal written policy for pregnancy. In addition to reporting that a policy should be in place, eight of the 11 participants shared informal workarounds from which they have benefitted to alleviate some of the burden that was caused by pregnancy and motherhood. Participants reported that they were appreciative of these informal workarounds and felt these workarounds were one way that their departments were trying to accommodate them. Participant C felt supported based on the manner in which her department responded to her pregnancy. Although no formal policy existed, she appreciated the fact that her department allowed her and her doctor to make all the decisions regarding her pregnancy:

They were very flexible and accepting. They left it up to me and my doctor as far as when I wanted to be taken off of the road and placed on administrative duty. But when I was on the road, they were very cooperative and understanding if I didn't want to go on a bar fight, or something like that.

This idea of having some control over the situation was a common theme among participants, even into motherhood. Four of the participants mentioned having to bring their child to court with them when they were required to appear for a case. Finding a sitter at the last minute or on their day off was not an easy task. Many of their departments did not object if the children had to stay in a roll-call room at the department or with some of the other officers while their mother appeared in court. Participant A stated, "I pretty much told them [the administration], 'If you want me to come, I've gotta bring her [daughter].' She could kinda sit back there with the other guys I worked with. Participant K also reported taking her child to court with her, and Participant B stated that she has never had to bring her child to a court appearance, but if the situation arose, she would. In addition to taking her child to court, Participant I has experienced the need to take her child with her to work during a regular shift since she began working in administration. She reported that she is very appreciative of her chief, who allowed her to care for her child when needed but also maintain her work responsibilities:

Yeah, our chief is very helpful. I used to roll her [my daughter] in in her stroller and spend the day working. She comes to meetings when she has to. I try not to because it's hard. I won't wear my uniform when I take her usually because I don't want to have to react, because what am I gonna do with her? So if she goes to meetings and stuff with me I usually go in plain clothes and they give me the ability to do that. She's been to all kinds of meetings. They are really good about it.

Because a majority of the participants were not in administrative positions within their department, bringing their child to work with them was not feasible. However, there were times that supervisors allowed participants the flexibility to handle family matters while on duty. For example, Participant G shared a situation in which her daughter participated in a special athletic event on a day that she was working:

My daughter had a show one day that I couldn't get off [work] for. The sergeant I was working for at that time was like, "Just go up [to the show] on duty, and keep your radio on. It's fine, no big deal. I was at the show for over an hour. We didn't have any calls; it was a Sunday afternoon, and it wasn't a big deal. But depending on who the supervisor was, that could have had a completely different outcome.

Participant H shared a similar experience that occurred when she needed to pick up her son from an athletic practice while she was on duty. Her supervisor allowed her to take the cruiser to pick him up. They said, "Take the cruiser, go pick him up, and run him home." When her supervisors worked with her in such fashion, she found it to be helpful in maintaining a balance between

home responsibilities and work.

### **Additional Findings**

In addition to findings that were directly aligned to the research questions, other patterns emerged from the interviews. Two patterns, a) support systems and b) fears were discussed by a majority, if not all, of the participants during the interviews and are outlined in Table 5 (Appendix).

#### ***Support Systems***

All participants recognized that managing their dual roles as mothers and policewomen would be almost impossible, if not entirely impossible, without having some type of support system. The unique nature of policing, with shift changes, court appearances, and the possibility of being called into work 24/7, presents challenges that make a reliable support system absolutely critical. Every participant referred to her support system and how critical it was to her ability to maintain her career to some degree. Each participant's support system was different but typically included close family members, friends, babysitters, schools, mentors, and even social media groups.

Participant A discontinued her employment at a department where she had been working for a number of years because the department would not provide flexibility that would allow her to care for her child. She and her husband attempted to make it work for a while but realized that it was not possible. This rigid approach by her department was a primary reason she attributed to the decision to move her family back home to be closer to relatives who could help with the child care responsibilities: "The main reason, the only reason that we moved back here was for family" (Participant A). She stated that she made an agreement with her grandparents that if they moved back home, the grandparents would agree to help with babysitting since they were retired. Participant B mentioned that even though her family lives close to an hour away, they still help out by picking up and dropping off her daughter when necessary. Participant E also reported that she relies heavily on family; she stated, "I'm pretty lucky in the fact that I have my parents to fall back on in helping with my son and caring for him when I'm not able to." Participant K reported that she had a very supportive family and that she understands how critical her family members are in helping her maintain her career. "I'm kind of lucky because I have family that is supportive. If I get held over, we can call grandma and grandpa and they can come over. Without them, we would be in trouble. Without a strong family to help you out, I wouldn't recommend having kids" (Participant K).

Most participants were actively involved in relationships with their husbands, boyfriends, or the father of their children to help with child care from time to time. However, the reality for most participants was that their significant others also worked full-time jobs, leaving little time for them to care for the children. The primary responsibility of child care arrangements fell on the mothers. A few participants did not have close families that were a part of their support system. Instead, they found others that helped them maintain the balance, including close friends, colleagues' wives, school administrators, and even social networks. Participant A and Participant I relied on a colleague's relative or wife who operated a daycare for children of police officers. This option was comforting to them because they did not have to explain why they would be late picking up their children or why they were asking for care at the last minute. These child care providers offer services at any hour of the day or night, understanding

that officers do not work regular shifts. These two participants felt they could trust these individuals because of their connection to work.

Participant F reported that she used multiple strategies throughout her career to care for her child. At times, she recalled, relying on family was critical:

I used to work midnights and work weekends so that I could be home with him [her son] during the week. So, Friday after school I would pack him up and he would go to my mom's, which was about an hour away, for the weekend. My dad or my grandma would bring him home on Sunday night.

At times when she did not have the option of relying on family, Participant F relied on close friends who were able to fill the void:

I had to count on the friends that I had met. I had one great friend. I took him [her son] there in the morning; she took him to school for me, she picked him up from school for me, [and] she made our dinner; she was an awesome friend. I would wash her dishes before I left. You just have to really count on those people to help you out.

Participant F further stated that if she did not have this close friend to rely on, she did not know if she could make it work.

While some participants relied on family members and close friends, this option was not available for other participants; however, they reported that they were able to find alternative solutions. Participant D elaborated on how she essentially had to train individuals at her children's school to help them understand the nature of her job and that her children may experience an erratic schedule at times. Participant G and Participant H relied on family and friends from time to time but not on a regular basis. Instead, they relied on hired help, such as babysitters or nannies. They both reported that not only did they struggle to find this help but that they also felt discomfort when using these care options at times. Participant G reported the struggles she encountered in finding innovative child care solutions:

Child care was a pain in the butt because we work [odd hours]; most child care providers... they want someone that's Monday through Friday so you could never go to a daycare facility; you always had to find somebody that did it in their own home-- somebody that understood what you do. The worst thing is when you work night shift because your kid is going to bed somewhere else every single night... well, not every night but, it makes you feel like s\*\*\* as a mom because your kid can't even sleep in his own room. When I was on night shift, I had an Amish lady come into the house, and that was just kind of weird. I mean, it worked out great because she just slept when the kids slept, then got up with them and everything, but it was really awkward for me letting somebody else in my house. We're just very private--law enforcement--in general... to have somebody in my house, it just bugged me.

Although Participant H's son has become more self-sufficient over the past few years and can now stay on his own for short periods of time, she recalled the struggle to find child care:

Oh my gosh, [I] struggled for babysitters all the time. My family and I have friends that helped. I had to resort to using that Care.com, where they do background checks on the babysitters, and I actually had a girl who was a pre-med student at Walsh. She was really good, but she was expensive; she was \$8.00 an hour, but she was really good with him, so I always made it work.

Participant H reported that in addition to family and friends, she found a social networking group, Sisters of the Shield, which helped address her child care needs. The women that are part of this group are all policewomen who have struggled with the same issues:

If you're dealing with something or struggling with [something], you'll get tons of help. They'll say, "Oh, I've dealt with this, and this is how I handled it, and maybe you could try this." Having that extra support system has really helped.

Participant D reported an informal mentoring system that takes place within her department when it comes to dealing with administration. The female officers who have seniority mentor and support the rookie officers as they encounter issues associated with pregnancy and motherhood. According to Participant D, rookie officers are encouraged to disclose to one of the veteran female officers that they are pregnant prior to disclosing their pregnancy to administration:

I let them know [that] if you have a question, you come to one of us women, and we will lead you through it. Generally, if somebody gets pregnant around here, they run it by me. Of course, they are making the announcement, but they will run it by me. I will tell them, "If you have an issue or a problem, come see me and we'll handle it. If you're having problems with something, you tell us and we'll be the ones that yell and scream and carry on..." because, you know, when they're newer, they can't say anything [because] they think everybody's gonna hate them. So we'll deal with it [instead].

To summarize participants' views about support systems, every participant, in some way, described her idea of a support system and how critical that support system has been in helping her achieve success. These support systems materialized in many forms, but regardless of the form, participants recognized and acknowledged their importance. Participant I clearly summarized the importance of support systems with her answer to the question, "What advice would you offer a mother wanting to get into police work?" She stated, "Just make sure she has a strong family support system or friends who are going to be able to help her out."

### *Fears*

Every participant described having fears that could be traced back to being a member of the policing profession. These fears fell into two sub patterns: (a) fears about death or injury and (b) fears about their children, mostly relating to their quality of life. A large majority of the participants recalled experiencing both types of fear, while a few experienced only one type or the other.

Nine of the 11 participants described having experienced some degree of fear about being killed or injured while on the job. All of the participants acknowledged the danger inherent in police work and that every day they put themselves at risk. When asked about their fears, Participant H stated, "I fear of losing my life and leaving my son without a mom. That's a fear every day. I fear getting hurt." Participant G also mentioned that she would be ignorant for death and serious injury to not cross her mind. Participant C shared similar sentiments about her fears, stating, "Obviously the fear of death or if I were injured, how I would be able to take care of my child," and Participant F stated she was afraid "that something will happen to me, and my son won't have a mom."

A majority of participants were clearly preoccupied to some degree with death or injury on a regular basis. Participant I stated, "I mean, you always have the thought of not coming home," and a few participants recalled giving their children hugs and kisses and telling them they love them before walking out the door to go to work, thinking "I hope this isn't the last time I come home" (Participant K).

Participant B recalled that her fears had changed since becoming a mother. She stated, "I think it [biggest fear] would be leaving [my daughter]--me dying in the line of duty, but I think

that's every mom's fear that's in law enforcement because it wasn't my fear when I started... not until I became a mom." The awareness of this new fear became apparent to Participant A after returning to work for the first time following the birth of her daughter. She distinctly recalled conducting her first traffic stop after returning to work, an activity she used to enjoy, but this time it was different. She was hesitant and more concerned with her safety than she had ever been prior to having her daughter. She recalled returning home that evening and being very upset with herself. These feelings of self-preservation took her by surprise. Eventually, she overcame her new fear by intentionally forcing herself to conduct regular traffic stops.

Of all the participants, Participant J had the most unique perspective regarding the dangerous realities of her career. Rather than exuding fear or anxiety, she spoke about her faith and fears in a calm and casual manner:

Fears on the road... I guess I have my faith, so every day before I start my shift, whether it's school [as a DARE officer] or on the road, I just ask God to be with me on my shift and bring me home safely. And if it doesn't happen, it is what it is. It could be any career that you do. You could be working at Subway [sandwich shop] reception and someone comes and shoots you. So, it really doesn't matter in today's society as far as safety goes.

All 11 participants reported fears that they had experienced regarding their children. For a majority of the participants, this fear was even stronger than their fear of death or injury. Interestingly, a specific interview question was never asked about this topic, yet every participant volunteered information about fears related to their children on several occasions throughout the interviews. When they talked about their children, the majority of participants displayed a noticeable increase in emotion compared to when they talked about other topics during the interview. Four of the 11 participants became visibly emotional (e.g., fighting back tears), while discussing this topic.

These specific fears related to their children were mentioned by every participant, but were communicated in different ways. Participant D characterized this fear overall as "the heartbreak" she felt she was causing her children. She described how her job, as a result of her death or injury, could cause her children pain, but she also explained that the nature of her job also causes her children emotional pain, or "heartbreak," because it affects their quality of life: I'm afraid that somehow, someday, I'll be gone, and that will cause my children pain. Hopefully, it's [potential death] not because of something I missed, because I try to be vigilant and see and do everything I can to come home. They [my children] are used to seeing injuries; they don't like it, but luckily they're little soldiers and have lived this, so they've adjusted well to that. I'm so afraid of me being the reason that they have pain. They get scared sometimes. They're at an age where they understand things on the news, and sometimes they get this little panic and say things like, "Mom, I need you to watch for people."

Other participants also reported that they witnessed this fear that their own children carry regarding the safety of their mother. Participant B recalled comments her daughter has made, such as, "Bye mom, love you!" as she is getting ready to leave for work. Participant B knows that her daughter is worried that her mother will not come home because her daughter is old enough to watch the news and see "that the world is turning against officers." Participant B reported that it is difficult for her to know that her daughter has this fear weighing on her mind. Participant F reported that her son has made similar comments as she leaves for work, such as, "Be careful mom; I'll see you in the morning" or "Be safe mom." Participant B reported that she makes a point to say, "I'll see you in the morning" every day to alleviate some of his

fears because she knows what is on his mind. Participant H reported that her son shows his fears by asking questions, such as, “Are you okay, Mom?” or “What happened at work?” Sometimes after he has seen or heard a story on the news, he will ask, “Has that ever happened to you?” Because she is aware of her son’s fears, Participant H reported that she is careful about what she tells her son regarding her work activities; she knows that too much information can easily scare him. Participant E reported that she has taken a similar approach in that she is very conscientious about what she says around her son. On one hand, she wants him to be aware, but on the other hand, she does not want to overwhelm him with fears that are beyond his control.

In addition to the fears that participants reported causing in their children, participants also reported feeling that they are “the worst mom ever” (Participant K); “the bad mom” (Participant D); “the tired mom”(Participant K); “the grumpy mom” (Participant F); or simply “not like Joe’s mom” (Participant D), who, according to Participant D, seemed to be the “perfect mom.” All of the participants reported that they (a) felt some form of guilt for not being more available for their children to some degree or (b) that their children made them feel guilty because of their parenting style. Not being more available or missing out on family functions impacted a large majority of the participants. Although almost all participants give their families a lot of credit for being understanding, they recognized that having a mother who is a police officer still takes a toll on their family members. Participant G and Participant I recalled missing many of the same family events and gatherings:

Let’s see, I have missed more Christmases and birthdays than I care to admit. I have missed choir concerts for my son. They [children] don’t get to do a lot of fun stuff. If it’s not planned and it’s not on my day off, it doesn’t happen. (Participant G)

Many of the participants understood that they will never be the “room mom” at their children’s school because of their job (Participant E) or that they will have to miss events and send others in their place (Participant J). At the same time, they also admitted that while these options are helpful, they can never replace the presence of their mother at school functions. As Participant D stated, “Even if they [her children] don’t complain about it, you’re not there. You’re supposed to be, but you’re not there.” These women feel they are letting their children down to a degree, and this weighs on them. Participant H shared her concern about how her son may be supportive of her career today; however, she wonders if he will resent her later:

I worry about when he gets older... looking back and being angry at me for not being there more--you know, angry for me not having a more normal job. And I’ve talked to him about that, and I’ve said, “You know, if it bothers you, I’ll find something else. He’s always been very supportive. He says, “No, Mom. This is what you were supposed to do; you know you’re a good cop... this is what you should be doing.” Thankfully, he’s so good; he’s been very supportive, but I do worry about that. I worry that he misses out on things because of that and he may resent me later for that.

Participant F described a time when her son struggled being away from her because of her job. She had forgotten about the situation because it had been so long ago; however, her son reminded her about it when she mentioned participating in this interview:

I was actually talking to my son about coming here today. I think it impacts kids a lot to have a mom who is a police officer... more than a mom who is a teacher or a librarian or something. He told me, and I forgot he had done this, but I used to work midnights and work weekends so that I could be home with him during the week. So, Friday after school, I would pack him up and he would go to my mom's, which was about an hour away, for the weekend, and she or my dad, or my grandma would bring him home on

Sunday night. He said, "Remember how sometimes I used to call you crying because I just wanted to be home?" That was when he was four or five. I was, like, "Yeah, that was horrible."

Five of the participants reported feeling that their parenting styles were a direct result of the events that they have seen and experienced in the policing profession. Participant G shared her concerns about being too strict on her children and the result it could have:

It's kinda like that phrase, "The preacher's daughter is always the worst." I'm worried that I'm going to be so stinking strict on these kids that once they reach 18, they are going to do something absolutely nuts and that it's just gonna piss me off.

Participant I stated, "You see other cops' kids getting in all types of trouble, so I may shelter her [daughter] more and pay more attention to things. She might not have as much fun as other kids." Participant J reported having similar concerns and recognized that officers are usually harder on their children than they probably should be:

I think it's that we have to be especially aware as LE [law enforcement] sometimes because we are harder on our kids than I think we should be; we want that perfect child, and there isn't a perfect child.

Participant K also reported that her experiences in the field likely influence her parenting style, even though she tries to be realistic about the situation:

You see these kids that you deal with all the time, and you just pray to God that your child does not end up like that... like on drugs or their behavior is just atrocious. Sometimes I might come home and she [my daughter] misbehaves, and I have to take a step back and be like "Okay, this is not the same child that I was dealing with at work..." just praying that your kid doesn't end up like the kids on the street.

Participant F was not sure whether her parenting style has been influenced more by policing or by her parents, who also were very strict:

Well, according to my child, I am very grumpy and I don't let him do things that his friends are allowed to do. He doesn't go to someone's house whose parents I haven't met, and he's still in bed by 9:30 at night because nothing good happens when it's dark out. Those are the things he will tell you. I think I'm more strict than some of his friends' parents, but that's how I grew up too. I don't know if it's policing that made me that way or just how I grew up also.

These participants clearly understood that their career influences their children's lives. The desire to shelter their children stemmed not only from what they have seen on the job but also from a fear that they have about how others will treat their children because their mom is a cop. Many participants reported that they worry about how their children are treated at school because of their career. Participant B reported that her daughter thinks her career is "cool" now but knows this will change once she enters junior high school:

Right now it's cool that her mom's a cop and there's a cruiser in the driveway, but I know when she gets into junior high, things will be different. You know, "Don't tell her anything because her mom's a cop, and she's gonna rat you out."

Although Participant I's child is not yet school age, she reported that she already has similar concerns about her daughter. To minimize the effect her career may have, Participant I reported that she already decided not to change her name when she gets married, keeping her daughter's last name different from her own. Her daughter has the last name of her fiancé (the child's father). "I won't change my name because I have to go on TV sometimes doing press releases, and I feel like maybe if I don't change my name, they won't recognize or connect me [with my

daughter] as much” (Participant I).

Participant J’s children are now adults. When they were younger, school aged, they were bullied to a degree because their mom was an officer. Participant J did not know how this had affected her children at the time that it occurred; however, now that they are older, they have shared these experiences with her:

We talk a little bit more [now that they are older]. My son said that if kids would start to say something to him, he would just get ready to fight them. I’m glad that he didn’t; I didn’t know that. My daughter, she had to get a different group of friends, which was better for her anyway, but she had gotten the, “Oh, you know your mom’s a police officer” [taunted by other children] and kinda taunted her a little bit, and it bothered her too a little.

A few participants reported that they have adopted proactive strategies with the intent of helping their children avoid these types of situations. One strategy has been to send their children to school districts outside of the jurisdiction in which they work or to send their children to a private school. As a result of these steps, participants believe that their children will have fewer confrontations, such as facing peers that their mom had to arrest the night before.

I don’t send my son to public school here because I don’t want him to have to deal with, “Your mom is such a b\*\*\*\*!” I don’t think men are viewed that way; your dad’s the tough cop... that’s cool. But if your mom does something, she’s the horrible b\*\*\*\*, unfortunately. So he goes to school 20 minutes away. (Participant F)

In addition to concerns regarding their parenting style and strategies they have used to protect their children from external threats, participants also noticed that the stress and demands of their job impact the type of person they are while at home. Participant D explained how it is very difficult for her to engage with her family at times due to exhaustion from work:

By the end of the day when I pick up my adorable 14 year old, who wants to tell me everybody else’s business, I’m done. I don’t want to hear that anymore. I’ve heard everybody else’s business today. “I need you to just shhh...” so I’m kind of afraid of what do I do when I’m done here [when she retires]. Will I talk to people, or will I be the mean old lady that says, “Get out of my yard,” you know?

Participant F acknowledged that she has a difficult time mentally leaving work at work sometimes. She stated, “We have some stress that you can’t leave at work; even if you’ve left the paperwork and taken off your uniform, it’s still on your mind. That affects how you go home and deal with your family. I’m grumpy mom.” Participant K shared a story about her daughter’s school project, which highlighted her daughter’s perception of her while she was at home:

Well, it [the job] definitively takes away from your family time. Sometimes you feel like you’re the worst mom ever. You never see your kids, or you don’t get to do the things that you want, or your kid comes home with a school project and it talks about “What my moms like,” and she [daughter] says, “All she [mother] does is sleep because she works midnights.” So, they [children] don’t understand.

These experiences were clearly painful for participants.

## **DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION**

The qualitative phenomenological design allowed participants to share a multitude of experiences. This research design also allowed this researcher to gather new and unique insights from participants and to validate a number of similar studies that existed in the research literature. Specifically, challenges stemming from an absence of policies addressing women’s



issues and maintaining a double workload were prominent throughout the findings and confirmed prior research studies. However, the fears and guilt that participants reported related to their children was unexpected.

### **Double Duty**

Women have been slowly challenging the stereotypical role of the stay-at-home mom and wife and have been making progress in the professional workforce. Today, women comprise approximately 50% of the national workforce in the United States (Yu, 2014). Although women may have positions equal to those of men, their roles at home, e.g., being a wife or a mother, have not changed, which has resulted in an increase in their overall responsibilities and day-to-day workload. Hochschild's seminal work, *Second Shift* (1989), documented the struggles of women attempting to find a balance between work and family. This publication supported findings that women generally shoulder the majority of household responsibilities, despite the slow shift of gender roles (as cited in Schulze, 2011). The idea that women continue to maintain responsibility for the majority of household responsibilities was supported by a majority of participants in this study, who reported that they maintained a greater share of responsibility for the household and child care duties at home. These duties included cooking and cleaning; managing finances; arranging child care; maintaining spousal responsibilities; and organizing family schedules, including sporting events, school functions (Agocs, Langan & Sanders, 2015; Kurtz, 2012). Even though nine of the 11 participants were married or living with a domestic partner, they continued to experience this unequal distribution of work. Participants described their household and child care responsibilities as "double duty." They reported that they would go to work every day and then return home to begin their "second shift," whereas their husbands or partners, though helpful at times, did not experience this same burden.

Hall et al. (2010) found that police officers attempted to balance competing domains of their work lives and their home lives. These researchers noted that by attempting to achieve this balance, they quickly deplete their emotional and physical resources, often leaving them exhausted, burned out, and in many cases, unable to maintain success across both domains. This research was focused on all police officers, including men; however, this study maintains that women have even greater challenges when it comes to balancing work and home life adding to the stress that they feel. Many participants described the strategies they use to manage their stress and reported that they try to keep their work life and home life separate. However, especially for policewomen, this separation is nearly impossible, especially when they must remain on call in both domains on a full-time basis. As a result, it should be no surprise that women have left the policing profession in large numbers after having children. Managing a household is a lot of responsibility, but trying to do so while also maintaining a career in a not-so-family-friendly profession is even more difficult. Even if it were possible to maintain a balance, many policewomen have decided that it is not worth the stress and the sacrifice.

The policewomen who have been strong enough to remain in the field have recognized that managing their dual roles as mothers and policewomen would be almost impossible, if not entirely impossible, without a support system. The unique nature of policing (e.g., shift changes, court appearances, the possibility of being called into work at any time of the day or night) presents challenges that make a reliable support system absolutely critical. Participants reported that most of their support has been found externally, that is, outside the work setting; however, research has indicated that support from within the work environment can positively influence the well being of employees. If the policing profession truly wants to progress, an examination

of the workload/expectations placed on policewomen, both at home and at work, needs to be explored in order to support and promote gender equality. Establishing child care policies is one example of how police departments could support women and help them balance this double workload. According to Gultekin et al. (2010); Hsu (2014); Kurtz (2012); Roebuck et al. (2013); and Sorenson (2011), child care policies can exert a meaningful influence on women by creating employment opportunities, improving retention, and establishing social equality, thus helping women reconcile tensions between work life and family life. Until this imbalance is at least acknowledged, women will never have the same opportunities as men. Officially, they may be able to apply for the same positions, but when it comes to actual equality, women have continued to be disadvantaged in the workplace. Ultimately, they have too many competing devotions that spread their talents, energies, and finances too thin to allow them to perform at their best or to accept advancement opportunities.

### **Fears and Guilt**

The mental and emotional toll experienced by working mothers is one that has recently begun to emerge in the research literature. Simone de Beauvoir (1953/1989) noted that having a child creates enough pressure and stress to paralyze a woman's life. Beauvoir has suggested that women can only continue working if they abandon their children to others for care and strike a delicate balance between professional interests and family life. According to Beauvoir, this balance comes with a heavy price of concessions, sacrifices, and acrobatics, all of which require a constant state of tension that many women prefer not to endure. In this present study, the participants echoed Beauvoir's sentiments in that they felt completely torn between two (often competing) devotions.

As women, participants reported that they feel pressure from a natural maternal instinct to have children and be mothers. This is generally something that most women today want for their life. Motherhood is also encouraged by society (Beauvoir, 1953/1989). However, second wave feminists have also influenced society and suggest that women should rather strive for equal rights and equal opportunities in the workplace because child-rearing and other care activities are undervalued and unpaid (Beauvoir, 1953/1989). In response, many women have chosen to pursue a professional career, with all of its associated demands. As a result, society has asked women to pursue two very different roles that are fundamentally incompatible under existing social, political, organizational, and economic structures. Social expectations require women to manage these two roles without providing a fully sanctioned support mechanism to effectively do so. One participant in a study conducted by Bochantin and Cowan (2010b) captured the unfortunate outcome that most likely occurs as a result of the tension created by these dual roles:

There are a lot of choices that go hand in hand with being a female cop. One really important decision to make is whether or not to have children. It is my opinion that the cons usually outweigh the pros of having a kid in this line of work. (p. 247)

Haussenger (2005) explained that women who choose motherhood understand that they will be forced to balance motherhood and work on their own with very little or no support. This balancing act is an expectation placed on women "because as many will remind us, 'It is your choice' [to have children]" (pp. 5-6). Haussenger rightly has pointed out that women are aware of this expectation and do make the choice to balance work requirements with motherhood. This point was clearly illustrated by one of the participants in this study, who explained that she felt this pressure not only because of the expectations that she placed on herself but also the pressure she felt from society. In fact, most participants acknowledged their failure to maintain this

balance to some degree in that they failed to meet their own expectations and or the expectations they believed that society has placed on them. However, there is one problem with Haussenger's notion that having children is a deliberate choice: Women are not the only ones involved in the decision to have children. Men/fathers are equally responsible for the choice to have children, yet they have not experienced the same social pressures as women that lead to feelings of failure and guilt.

Social pressures associated with being a "perfect mother" can be found throughout society: on television, within peer groups, on social media, at school functions, at work, and even from children themselves. Many women question whether they can truly "have it all" (i.e., motherhood and a career), especially when choosing one domain means they may not perform up to their expectations in the other domain and that they may experience feelings of guilt, frustration, and failure. For example, O'Reilly (2012) reported that one mother said, "I was crying because I could not win. Because as a worker, I was turning away from my work at exactly the most important moment; yet, at the same time, as a mother, I had already stayed too long [and missed something important at home]" (p. 123). This mother is not alone. All 11 participants in this study reported that they experienced fears regarding their children—fears that were overwhelmingly related to feelings of guilt and failure. One mother labeled these feelings as "the heartbreak" because she felt responsible for potentially causing emotional stress for her children. However, it was obvious from her body language and facial expressions she also was experiencing this stress herself. She described the source of her stress as twofold. First, she noted how her chosen profession—i.e., police work—could cause her children pain as a result of her death or injury, but secondly, she also explained that the nature of her job also causes her children emotional pain, or heartbreak, because it affects their quality of life. One participant stated that "the worst thing is when you work night shift because your kid is going to bed somewhere else every single night... well, not every night, but it makes you feel like s\*\*\* as a mom because your kid can't even sleep in his own room" (Participant G). The emotions in this mother's story can be felt from two perspectives: first, her son's perspective (e.g., having to sleep in a house other than his own, such as the home of grandparents, a friend's house, a babysitter's house, etc.), and secondly from the mother's perspective of "feeling like s\*\*\*," not meeting society's expectations, and not meeting her own expectations of what it means to be a "good mom."

Often, these interviews seemed more like confessional sessions in which participants felt the need to explain how they could not meet the standards that they feel are required of them, whether these standards arose from their own expectations or those promoted by social pressures. The sentiment that they were not "perfect mothers" appeared in many forms throughout the interviews, such as "I've missed this school event," "I've missed this athletic game," "I should be more like Jimmy's mom," "my child calls me 'grumpy mom' or 'sleepy mom,'" "I missed Christmas and many other holidays," "I take work stress home and it affects my kids, and I feel like I'm there more for strangers than my own family," just to name a few. Not only did participants report feeling guilt about mothering, but they also reported that they fear their children will be treated differently or harmed because of the fact that their mother is a police officer. They feared that their choice of a profession could add to the emotional pain their children experience. The "heartbreak" was palpable in each interview.

Some participants reported struggling with the fact that they were purposefully going to work and participating in high-risk, dangerous, irresponsible behaviors that they were fully aware could potentially rob their children of their mother, whether literally by death or indirectly

by a lack of quality time and bonding (Agocs et al., 2015; Cowan & Bochantin, 2009). Before becoming mothers, participating in high-risk, dangerous, irresponsible behaviors was fun and exciting; however, after becoming mothers, these behaviors, though still fun, became laced with a lingering worry. One mother stated, “My actions are the same, but my thoughts are different” (Participant D). Although she was engaging in the same dangerous behavior as she did before becoming a mother, her internal dialogue was much different in that it focused more on her children and remembering to be as vigilant as possible to ensure that she made it home safely.

In addition to experiencing a new thought process, many participants felt forced to place additional boundaries and/or limitations on themselves in order to feel that they were being responsible mothers. The constant challenge to ensure that children are properly cared for despite unyielding schedules has caused many women with demanding careers to opt out of accepting promotions or progressing in their careers because they have viewed the personal cost as being too high (Roebuck et al., 2013). At least seven of the 11 participants recalled turning down a promotion, choosing not to pursue a promotion, or declining a career-advancing opportunity in order to keep their children their highest priority and to fulfill their expectations as mothers.

In conclusion, the policing profession is stressful, and the results of this stress have been demonstrated by the high divorce, alcoholism, and suicide rates of officers. Adding the guilt and fear that policewomen experience regarding their well being of their children and their abilities to be a “good mother” is enough to paralyze these women, as Beauvoir explained. This paralysis was demonstrated by the overwhelming emotions and all-consuming thoughts that these women shared about their children and their drive to “have it all.” In addition to the double workload that participants reported experiencing, the mental and emotional anguish also has made an impact on them at a deeper level. These uncomfortable and disturbing feelings interfere with their quality of life, self-esteem, workplace morale, and family dynamics. Support, by way of policy and mentorship would benefit policewomen personally and professionally, and it likely would improve the lives of their families as well.

## **Policy**

The low representation of women in traditionally masculine professions, such as policing, in addition to the recent decline in the number of women in these professions during the past decade, has caused researchers such as Archbold and Schulz (2012), Bochantin and Cowan (2010b), Kurtz (2012), and Rabe-Hemp (2011a) to question whether women still could be facing discrimination to some degree despite laws such as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Of all the patterns that emerged in this study, a lack of policy was most commonly mentioned or described by participants. All 11 participants commented to some extent on the absence of a policy in their departments addressing issues related to pregnancy and motherhood. They explained that they experienced discomfort, fear, and/or a feeling of loss because no policies were in place to address these issues.

In previous studies, this absence of policy has been perceived by policewomen as a lack of support by their departments, and some have even reported that being pregnant or being the parent of toddlers or young children is used as an excuse or an attempt to hinder them or push them out of the profession (Bochantin & Cowan, 2010b; Cowan & Bochantin, 2009; Kurtz, 2012). Although the participants in this study never directly mentioned feeling that an absence of policy was a way to push them out, many of them were taken aback when discussing the absence of policy and wondered why this issue has not been addressed. They understood that women have been in the police profession for decades, and the fact that an attempt to accommodate or support policewomen through this natural life process has not been made was an obvious slight

towards them. The fact that progress has not been made for more than half a century illustrates the lack of importance that this issue held in most police departments. Participants holding this perception would explain why some were fearful of disclosing their pregnancy to their superiors. Once they were not able to work long hours, work extra hours, fit into their uniform, or maintain their firearms certification, they did not know what their professional future held.

Schulze (2010) conducted a study reviewing the leave policies of 203 police departments and found that only “6.9% had their own policy in place that provided some type of light duty assignment and 5.9% designated unpaid, or paid leave in excess of FMLA as well as some type of light duty assignment,” which left the remaining departments with policies that defaulted to federal mandates (p. 181). These results align directly with the findings and reflect the type of policy, or lack of policy, that existed in the participating departments. Because a majority of the departments lacked an official pregnancy policy outside of the FMLA, participants reported that they felt reluctant and hesitant when disclosing their pregnancy, mostly out of a fear of the unknown. Their reasons for waiting to report their pregnancy differed, but all the related fears they reported were the result of concerns about what would happen to them. The absence of policy and their subsequent decision to remain on road patrol placed many of these women and their unborn fetuses in dangerous situations and created increased liability for the department.

Without a light-duty policy as protection, participants reported that they either stopped working, sacrificing wages and other benefits until they returned to work, or ignored medical advice and continued to perform all job duties as long as they were physically able in order to keep their wages (Grossman & Thomas, 2009). Gatrell (2013) reported that policewomen worked through severe morning sickness, hid the pain of medical procedures, and even placed themselves in physically dangerous altercations to avoid disclosing that they were pregnant out of fear that they would be further marginalized. This study revealed similar situations in which policewomen would go to extremes to hide their pregnancy or avoid being removed from road patrol. Some participants reported that they had engaged in physical fights, vomited between calls for service, and were willing to be Tased as a part of their training--all because of a lack of policy and a fear about what would happen to them as a result of their pregnancy.

The findings of this study, along with prior research, seem to indicate that most police agencies are ill prepared to adequately handle the needs of pregnant police officers. The masculine traditions and culture within most police departments hinder their ability to operate with a feminist perspective and truly understand women’s needs. Instead, individual employees, in this case female officers, not the organization, assume responsibility for all issues related to motherhood and pregnancy that do not fit squarely within existing policy (Bochantin & Cowan, 2010b).

One important question that arises from this study, and other similar studies, is why society expects so much more from one gender than it does from the other. A double workload, the mental and emotional baggage resulting from expectations placed on mothers, and the fact that women do the work of mothering while attempting to maintain a full-time job through workarounds seems excessive, especially when society and their own departments are claiming that they are equals. Police departments today cannot expect women to improve these issues on their own. Working women already are extremely busy, and many are hesitant to speak up because they do not have the support to do so. If departments took initiative and reached out to female officers for guidance about how to create a more gender equitable workplace, they might be surprised at the interest and help they might receive.

## Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

Based on the findings, two recommendations for future research would be recommended. First, expanding the study to include police departments outside of northern Ohio, and potentially sampling departments across the entire nation would help to strengthen the validity of the study and increase generalizability of the findings. Secondly, conducting a similar study with male officers who are fathers. The purpose of this future study would be to identify the ways in which the challenges that male officers (who also are fathers) face are similar to or different from the challenges that female officers (who also are mothers) face. This type of comparative study would help determine whether the challenges experienced by female officers are the result of parenthood, which male officers also experience, or whether these challenges were a product of stereotypes and assigned gender roles incongruent with the masculine police culture.

Without social and organizational reform, the findings of this study have suggested that history, tradition, and the existing police culture will continue to marginalize women despite evidence supporting the value of women in police work. Considering the many challenges and obstacles that women in the policing profession have faced it should not be surprising that women have not been retained. The representation of women in the policing profession has remained stagnant, and the largest number of women are leaving the profession during childbearing and child-rearing years as evidenced by the representation of women in the (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Prenzler et al., 2010). This stagnation and exodus of women can be easily attributed to the lack of support that pregnant women and mothers in the policing profession have continued to experience. When female officers reflect on their situation, despite their desire to have a family and also maintain a career, giving up a career that they love for their family has been an easy choice because it is not realistic to maintain them both, given the current organizational climate within most police departments.

New legislation and departmental policy reform could benefit female police officers and better support them in managing the family-life/work-life balance that has been identified by women as one of the primary challenges that prohibits them from remaining in the policing profession (Cowan & Bochantin, 2009; Prenzler et al., 2010; Yu, 2014). Implementing policies and practices could potentially contribute to the advancement and professionalization of the policing profession as a whole by changing the traditionally masculine organizational culture and promoting a more gender-neutral environment, allowing communities to benefit from having a more diverse police force. Higher retention rates can also alleviate a large financial burden on departments that can be associated with high turnover rates (Shelley et al., 2011). As more women are able to enter the field, and “move into leadership positions, organizations themselves will begin to change and will become less hierarchical, more participatory,” and as a result, the police culture may eventually change to reflect a more supportive environment (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Stivers, 2002, p. 77).

Organizations that lack policies to support women as they encounter normal life experiences, such as pregnancy, maternity leave, and breast feeding, should consider drafting policies with the help of female officers. Progressive policy changes could include 24-hour on-site child care for emergency service workers as a part of the benefit package (similar to the policies of Fortune 500 companies) or they should be offered as a government initiative similar to policies and benefits provided in Sweden and Norway (Sorensen, 2011; Yost, 2012). In addition, mentorship programs or support groups for policewomen could be implemented to better assist them through some of the challenges of pregnancy and motherhood. Pregnancy

policies could be developed or revised to support female officers (Grossman & Thomas, 2009; Kingshott, 2012). Flexible working hours, flexible shifts, and other family-friendly policies could be explored. These changes would benefit not only women but also men as well. Making progressive policy revisions and implementing them could benefit female police officers by providing support that helps them manage the family-life/work-life balance that has been identified by women as the primary challenge that prohibits them from remaining in the policing profession (Cowan & Bochantin, 2009; Prenzler et al., 2010). These policy revisions could potentially contribute to the advancement and professionalization of the policing profession as a whole by changing the traditionally masculine organizational culture and promoting gender-neutral practices and policies.

Progressive policies and practices could also provide much-needed support for female officers and contribute to their fight for equal rights and against gender discrimination, especially during their childbearing and child-rearing ages. If these policies reduced or eliminated obstacles, an increased number of females could be recruited and retained in the policing profession. If the policing profession truly wants to progress, an examination of the workload/expectations placed on policewomen, both at home and at work, needs to be conducted in order to support and promote gender equality. Establishing child care policies is one way police departments could support women and help them balance this double workload. According to Gultekin et al. (2010); Hsu (2014); Kurtz (2012); Roebuck et al. (2013); and Sorenson (2011), child care policies can exert a meaningful influence on women by creating employment opportunities, improving retention, and establishing social equality, thus helping women reconcile tensions between work life and family life. Until this imbalance is at least acknowledged, women will never have the same opportunities as men. Officially, they may be able to apply for the same positions. However, when it comes to actual equality, women have continued to be disadvantaged in the workplace. Ultimately, they have too many competing devotions that spread their talents, energies, and finances too thin to allow them to perform at their best or to accept advancement opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

Though great progress has been made in the past few decades, policing is still far from being a profession of equal opportunity. There is little known about the life of policewomen, especially those who are mothers. Policewomen have a very difficult job, not only while on duty, but also in their efforts to maintain some semblance of a normal life at home. Unfortunately, these two domains of their lives are not very compatible, often competing for their time, energy, and resources on a daily basis. Through the interviews conducted for this study, policewomen have provided meaningful insights into what it means to be a policewoman and a mother in today's world.

The participants in this study indicated that their workload as police officers is demanding and rigid, whereas their work as a mother is emotion-filled and never ending. Managing both is nearly impossible and work/family integration is not wise in this profession. Once their shift ends at the police department, policewomen go home to begin their second shift being a mother. With a lot of planning and support from others, most participants have been able to attain some level of success. However, even though they have been able to logistically maintain both their career and their family, they were not able to escape the guilt and fear that comes with being a mother and a police officer. The fear of dying or being injured and not being able to care for their family, the fear of how their children will be treated because they

are officers, and the guilt that they feel for not being the “perfect mother” because of their career choice, haunts them nearly every day.

Unfortunately, police departments have yet to fully understand the challenges that policewomen who are mothers face on a daily basis. This has been illustrated by the absence of policy that has been implemented regarding women’s health issues pertaining to pregnancy and maternity leave and a lack of support that many policewomen receive during childbearing and child-rearing ages. Police administrators need to create effective policy to support and retain women in their department and also to recruit new officers in the future. If these policies could remove obstacles, potentially more women could be recruited and retained in the policing profession. Implications for social change include strengthening and modernizing the policing profession by recruiting and retaining more female police officers, who have been found to benefit the profession due to their increased and refined communication, problem-solving, and de-escalation skills. In addition, female police officers contribute to community policing efforts and have natural abilities to be transformational leaders. Leaving such assets behind cannot be afforded with the tumultuous relationship between many communities and the police today. Recruiting and retaining more women could help move the field toward a more professional era of policing, which is being demanded by the community today. On an even larger scale, implementation of gender-neutral policies and practices could be expanded in professions nationwide to promote true equality.



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**APPENDIX**

Table 1  
Participant Designation, Number of Children, and Timing of Birth

Participant	Number of Biological Children	Number of Stepchildren	Timing of Birth
Participant A	1	0	During Employment
Participant B	1	0	During Employment
Participant C	1	0	During Employment
Participant D	2	0	During Employment
Participant E	1	0	During Employment
Participant F	1	0	Prior to Employment
Participant G	2	1	During Employment
Participant H	1	0	Prior to Employment
Participant I	1	0	During Employment
Participant J	3	2	Prior to Employment
Participant K	1	0	During Employment

Table 2  
Patterns and Sub patterns Identified Through Analysis of Participant Interviews

Pattern Codes	Challenges	Changes After Children	Fears	Policy	Support Systems
Sub patterns	Culture	Distracted	Death/Injury	Fear	Family/Spouse
	Double Duty Nature of the Job	Limits	Children	Confusion Lack of Policy Informal Workarounds	Friends/External Mentoring

Table 3  
Patterns Emerging from Research Question 1

Pattern Codes	Changes After Children	Policy
Sub patterns	Distracted Limits	Fear Confusion

Table 4  
Patterns Emerging from Research Question 2

Pattern Codes	Challenges	Policy
Sub patterns	Culture Double Duty Nature of the Job	Lack of Policy Informal Workarounds

Table 5  
Additional Patterns Identified Through Analysis of Participant Interviews

Pattern Codes	Fears	Support Systems
Sub patterns	Death/Injury Children	Family/Spouse Friends/External

