



Empowering Women in Indian Policing

This editorial is based on the Article [Push for more women, this time in the police](#) which was published in The Hindu on 30/09/2023. It talks about the inclusion of women in police forces and the enhancement of their representation through the implementation of reservation policies.

For Prelims: [Constitution \(106th Amendment\) Act 2023](#), [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences \(POCSO\) Act](#), [Internal Complaints Committees to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace](#), [Rajya Sabha](#), [Bureau of Police Research & Development \(BPR&D\)](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace \(Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal\) Act](#)

For Mains: Women's representation in police: Status, Significance, Challenges and Way Forward; [128th Constitutional Amendment Bill \(Women Reservation Bill\)](#)

In a few years from now, women lawmakers will form at least 33% of all lawmakers in India. **The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act 2023** has recently got the President's Assent. This **Act provides for one-third of total seats in the House of the People, the Legislative Assembly of every State and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to be reserved for women for 15 years**. The purpose of this amendment is to increase women's participation in policymaking. While there is no direct link between the number of legislators and the strength of law enforcement agencies, the number of women in these gives a fair idea about how representative these institutions are of the society they represent.

- While providing women a crucial role in Law Making, we should not underestimate their significance in Law Enforcement as well. The Women reservation Act, 2023 can serve as an inspiration for policymakers and authorities to take concrete steps in this direction.

What is the Status of Women in Police?

- As per the response provided by the Minister of State for Home Affairs (MHA) in the [Rajya Sabha](#) in February 2023, the **representation of women in the police force (as of January 1, 2022) remained at 11.7%** of the total State police force.
 - While many **States have mandated 10% to 33% reservation for women in the police**, not one of these States has met its goal.
 - The share of women among the higher ranks was even lower at 8.7%.

What is the Significance and Need of Women in Police?

- **Legal Mandates and Specialized Roles:** Women in the police force are essential due to legal mandates that require certain procedures, such as recording reports and conducting arrests, to be handled by women officers in cases involving women.

- Additionally, specialized legislation like the [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences \(POCSO\) Act](#) necessitates the presence of women officers. This ensures that sensitive cases are handled with the required empathy and professionalism.
- **Addressing Crimes Against Women:** Statistics from the [National Crime Records Bureau](#) reveal that a significant portion of crimes defined under the Indian Penal Code is committed against women. Having women police officers is crucial for effectively addressing these crimes, providing support to victims, and ensuring that justice is served. Their presence can lead to increased reporting of such crimes and a more empathetic response to survivors.
- **Insufficient Female Police Force:** The [NCRB data](#) also highlights that the existing women police force is insufficient, even for cases related to women. Increasing the number of women officers is necessary to bridge this gap and provide adequate coverage for all types of incidents, including day-to-day law enforcement activities.
- **Proven Competence:** Women in the police force have **demonstrated their competence in various roles and responsibilities**. They are fully capable of handling any assignment within a police institution, proving that gender should not be a barrier to their involvement in law enforcement.
- **Representation and Trust:** In a democratic country like India, **it is essential for every institution, including the police, to be representative of the populace they serve**. Increasing the number of women in the police force is a step towards building trust and confidence in the community. It sends a message that the police are accessible and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

What are the Issues in Recruiting Women in Police?

In Recruitments: Women often face several challenges at the entry level itself.

- **Recruitment just to fill the Gap:** Most States have a policy to fill up 30% or 33% of the vacant posts (of direct recruitment) with women in their police forces through horizontal reservation — i.e., **if the minimum reserved vacant posts are not filled up in each category of the SC, ST, OBCs and un-reserved with women on merit, women candidates are pushed up in the list to make up for the gap.**
 - Women are generally recruited against notified vacancies after permission is granted by the government to fill up vacancies.
- **Non establishment of a Permanent Board:** According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), many states do not have a permanent police recruitment board and do not have the freedom to recruit at regular intervals.
- **Inconsistent Reservation Policies:** According to the details published by the [Bureau of Police Research & Development - BPR&D](#) (as on January 1, 2021), **a few States such as Kerala, Mizoram and Goa do not have a policy of reservation for women** in the police force, and women's representation in these States is between 6% and 11%.
 - The reservation for women in the State armed police forces is restricted to 10% in some States.
- **Poor Implementation of Reservation:** Though many states have reserved a good number of seats for women but they have failed miserably to implement the policy in letter and spirit.
 - For instance, Bihar provides for 35% reservation for women and 3% for backward caste women, but the actual number of women in the force is about 17.4%.
- **Low Rate of Filling Vacancies:** On average, only about 4% to 5% of the total police positions are filled each year through recruitment, and the attrition rate (people leaving the force) is around 2.5% to 3%.
 - So, **If we want to increase the number of women in the police force from 10% to 30%, it would take at least 20 years.**

After Recruitment: Women not only face challenges in getting into the service but also they face several challenges after getting into the service. These challenges further discourage women from joining the police services.

- **Poor Support:** Many women in the force expressed discontent due to **poor infrastructure** such as the non-availability of separate toilets and lack of venues to report workplace harassment.
- **Socio-cultural perceptions:** Many people still have the **stereotype that police work is a**

masculine profession that requires physical strength, aggression, and authority - Macho Culture. This discourages women from pursuing a career in policing or makes them face discrimination and harassment from their male colleagues, supervisors, and the public.

- **Impact of family and childcare:** Balancing personal responsibilities, particularly childcare roles, remains a major barrier for women's career advancement in policing. Women may face a 'child-tax' as they navigate work-life balance, as their access to senior rank is dependent on engaging in traditional behaviours and long-hours culture.

What Steps can be taken to Improve the Number of Women in Police?

- **Create a Conducive Environment:** Creating a work environment that is supportive and inclusive is essential. This includes policies and practices that address issues like sexual harassment, equal pay, and opportunities for career advancement. Training programs should also focus on gender sensitization to ensure that male and female officers can work together respectfully and effectively.
- **Prevent sexual harassment:** Police departments must also ensure safe working spaces for women and adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and harassment, in order to make policing a viable career option for women. Departments are legally bound to set up **Internal Complaints Committees to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace.**
 - Departments must operationalise the [Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace \(Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal\) Act](#) of 2013.
- **Provide Basic Infrastructure:** Adequate infrastructure is necessary to accommodate the needs of women in the police force. This includes safe and separate living quarters, changing facilities, and childcare facilities for female officers who are mothers. Accessible and safe transportation options should also be available for female officers working late shifts.
- **Uniform Police Act:** A **uniform Police Act** for the entire country could standardize policies and regulations related to the recruitment, training, and working conditions of police officers, including women. This would ensure that female officers receive equal treatment and opportunities regardless of the state they serve in.
- **Recruitment Boards:** State-level recruitment boards can streamline the recruitment process, making it more efficient and transparent. These boards should actively encourage the recruitment of women, ensuring that the selection process is fair and unbiased.
- **Special Recruitment Drive:** Launching special recruitment drives aimed at increasing the representation of women in the police force is an excellent idea. This can involve targeted outreach campaigns, awareness programs, and mentorship initiatives to attract and retain more female candidates.

Conclusion

It's essential to address societal perceptions and stereotypes that may discourage women from considering a career in law enforcement. Education and awareness campaigns should be launched to challenge these stereotypes and showcase the diverse roles and opportunities available within the police force. Steps like the Providing reservation to women in legislatures can set a precedent for increasing women's representation in various fields, including the police force. It can serve as an inspiration for policymakers and authorities to take concrete steps in this direction.

Drishti Mains Question:

In light of the persistently low representation of women in India's police force, discuss the key challenges in recruitment of female officers. Analyze the significance of increasing women's participation in policing and suggest policy measures to bridge the gender gap within the police force.

