

# A MODEL POLICY FOR WOMEN IN THE POLICE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Role of Women and Women's Organization

Women constitute about 7% of the police strength in India. This number is expected to rise, with many States and Union Territories providing for 30% (and more) reservation for women in the police in specific ranks. However, this is not enough. The discourse on mainstreaming women in the police by making policing inclusive, non-discriminatory and efficient in India is missing in policy circles.

One way to mainstream women in the police is to develop a model policy that will challenge the deep-rooted patriarchy in the institution. Unfortunately, till now, not a single State police department has attempted to even draft such a policy. Thus, neither the Central nor State governments can get very far by merely adopting reservation to increase gender diversity without considering the need for policymaking. A model policy, while laying the foundation for equal opportunities for women in every aspect of policing, should also strive to create a safe and enabling work environment. Without this, all other efforts will remain piecemeal.

One of the first steps to ensure a level playing field for women in the police is to increase their numbers. Merely providing reservation is not enough; police departments should develop an action plan to achieve the target of 30% or more in a time-bound manner. This also applies to States that have not provided a quota as yet. Departments should also undertake special recruitment drives in every district to ensure geographical diversity. To achieve the target, the police should reach out to the media and educational institutions to spread awareness about opportunities for women in the police. Current data reveal that most women in the police are concentrated in the lower ranks. Efforts should be made to change this. The impulse to create women-only battalions for the sake of augmenting numbers should be eliminated.

Second, the model policy should strive to ensure that decisions on deployment of women are free of gender stereotyping to facilitate bringing women into leading operational positions. At present, there appears to be a tendency to sideline women, or give them policing tasks that are physically less demanding, or relegate them to desk duty, or make them work on crimes against women alone. Women police officers should be encouraged to take on public order and investigative crimes of all types, and should be given duties beyond the minimum mandated by special laws. Desk work too must be allocated evenly among men and women.

A major burden of family and childcare responsibilities falls on women. Yet, police departments still lack proper internal childcare support systems. Departments need to be mindful of this social reality and exercise sensitivity in making decisions on transfers and posting of women personnel. As far as possible, women should be posted in their home districts in consultation with supervising officers.

Most State police departments have received funds under the Modernisation of State Police Forces Scheme for providing separate toilets and changing rooms for women, and for constructing separate accommodation for women with attached toilets in all police stations and units. Police departments must ensure the best use of this fund.

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.

Some of these suggestions have already been made by the National Conference of Women in Police. However, Central and State governments have not yet developed or adopted a comprehensive framework towards achieving substantive gender equality.

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