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Police officers under pressure:
Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment, Stress,
and Job Satisfaction in Sweden

Arian Rostami

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För att delta digitalt via Zoom:

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Fakultetsopponent: Professor Magnus Sverke. Stockholms universitet,
Psykologiska institutionen, Samhällsvetenskaplig fakultet Stockholm

Department of
Epidemiology & Global Health

Organization
Umeå University
Department of Epidemiology
and Global Health

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Author
Arian Rostami

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Abstract

Police officers encounter challenging and stressful situations at work which negatively impact their health, job performance, and aspects of their lives. Regarding the gendered structure and competitive work environment of police organizations, women are under extra pressure from the pervasive gendered norms within the police organization.

This thesis aims to study sexual and gender-based harassment and work-related stress as important work environment elements from a gender perspective and to explore if and how these elements can affect police officers' job satisfaction in the context of Swedish police work.

This thesis is based on three studies including, a scoping review, quantitative, and qualitative studies. In the scoping review study on sexual and gender-based harassment in police work in the European context 16 articles on sexual and gender-based harassment against police employees were studied. Thematic analysis was applied to obtain the main patterns across and within the included studies. In the qualitative study, data collection included one group interview and 12 individual interviews with male and female police officers. Thematic and content analysis were conducted to analyze the interviews. During the quantitative study, data were collected from 152 men and women police officers applying a set of questionnaires including sociodemographic questions, the Police Stress Identification Questionnaire (PSIQ), Sexual and gender-based harassment questions, and Job Descriptive Index (JDI).

The scoping review showed that most of the European studies were focused on sexual harassment, while gender-based harassment was often overlooked or mixed with other types of harassment and discrimination. Six main themes were found in the studies; the existence of sexual and gender-based harassment, perpetrators, associated factors, consequences, individual response, and impact of organizational policies. Results from the quantitative and qualitative studies on sexual and gender-based harassment indicated that female police officers experienced a statistically significant higher percentage of gender-based harassment compared to male officers. However, there was not any significant gender difference in sexual harassment. "Sexual comments and jokes" and "mocking or telling jokes about the #metoo campaign" by colleagues were reported as the most frequent sexual harassment and gender-based harassment items. Additionally, police officers identified the presence of toxic jargon and a culture of silence, along with ineffective or negative management styles, as organizational factors that can contribute to the perpetuation of such harassment. The quantitative results showed that police officers rated higher on the "impact on significant others" stress and "operational stress" subscales. In addition, female officers reported higher stress in these subscales compared to their male counterparts. The police officers who had experienced sexual harassment reported higher "self-image" stress and "operational stress". Moreover, in studying job satisfaction among Swedish police officers, both male and female officers reported the highest satisfaction with "people on your present job" and the lowest satisfaction with "opportunity for promotion" and then "pay". No significant gender gap was found in job satisfaction subscales, nor was there a significant association between these subscales and experiences of harassment. However, organizational stress was negatively related to three domains of job satisfaction; "job in general", "pay" and "supervision".

The research findings revealed that despite substantial changes in the Swedish police organization and work culture during recent decades, the issue of sexual and gender-based harassment remains persistent. This finding highlights the need for more attention to organizational factors (cultural and managerial issues) enabling sexual and gender-based harassment. The findings also underscore the higher levels of work pressure and challenges faced by female officers and the importance of challenging prevailing gender norms affecting both female and male police officers. Moreover, addressing organizational sources of stress can improve the working conditions and job satisfaction of police officers. Finally, the thesis highlights the importance of considering sexual and gender-based harassment along with work stress to create a safer and more productive police work environment.

Keywords

Sexual harassment, Gender-based harassment, Work stress, Job satisfaction, Police officers, Work environment

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