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The Pathway Forward: Uncovering the Barriers Faced by Women Police Chiefs

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Introduction

Women who enter the law enforcement field tend to experience gender disparity as the industry has been historically male-dominated (Diaz & Nuño, 2021). Women have proven valuable in law enforcement as they bring a different perspective and diversity, which can elicit equitable and ethical benefits for the community (Russo & Rzemysk, 2021). For example, Rabe-Hemp (2008) found that women tend to use less excessive force than their male counterparts and are better suited to de-escalation situations. However, women continue to face challenges as they move up in ranks and strive for leadership roles within law enforcement (Archbold & Hassell, 2009).

During the late 1800s, women were introduced into policing positions to ensure that women and children in custody were cared for adequately (Mishkin, 1981; Gossett, 2019). Additionally, New York and Massachusetts passed laws that required highly populated areas to have police matrons, which women filled the role. Matrons were responsible for interacting with female and juvenile inmates and performing specified activities, such as serving as gatekeepers for juvenile girls attending social functions (Batton & Wright, 2018). However, being a matron did not give female police officers the full authority to arrest individuals (Archbold & Schulz, 2012). Yet, women made strides in policing to gain more authority, such as Lola Baldwin and Alice Stebbins Wells, who were the first female police officers to receive arresting powers (Archbold & Schulz, 2012). The type of authority to arrest would bring female police officers forward; Wells, who would become president of the National Association of Policewomen, used her national platform to advocate for education and training for policewomen (Mishkin, 1981).

Wells became influential in hiring more policewomen, but it came at the expense of inequality and prejudice within the police force.

During the civil rights movement, employment discrimination became illegal and gave women officers hope for career advancement and equality in the workplace. For example, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal for an employer to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Civil Rights Act of 1964). Even with the forward movement for women in policing, men dominated the police force while women lagged. However, today, women police chiefs continue to press forward against challenges such as the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, and barriers that hinder their leadership and progress. This study focuses on the challenges women police chiefs face and the strategies to overcome them.

Challenges that Women Face in Law Enforcement

The significant gender divide among police officers appears to be more relevant to the meager number of female police officers than the current plateau effect. It may, however, be one of several factors that collectively restrict the overall percentage of women who are both interested in policing and ready and able to undergo a recruitment and training procedure that appears to be significantly more specialized to males than women (Cordner & Cordner, 2011). Recruiting women for law enforcement careers is simply one aspect of the problem. Retention is equally challenging for female cops. It is believed that women quit the police force due to work-life balance difficulties, lack of representation, and leadership (Yu, 2018).

Unlike other governmental institutions, police agencies seldom implement systematic procedures for pregnant personnel (Yu, 2018). Women may not necessarily pick careers based on parental leave regulations, but they know careers that are less "women-friendly." Most police agencies are still oriented mainly to male values or masculine norms (Workman-Stark, 2020).

Ostensibly gender-neutral rules submerge women's interests and demand yet fail to address many employees' most important life events, such as childbirth (Schulze, 2010).

The Glass Ceiling and Barriers to Entry

According to the "glass cliff" theory, women are more likely to be placed in leadership roles inside crisis-stricken departments because they are more likely to fail (Starheim & NIJ, 2019). Many qualified women applicants face disproportionately higher impediments to promotion than their male counterparts. Silvestri and Tong (2022) found that female officers are viewed as tokens, subjected to sexual harassment, and are promoted based on gender rather than their credentials and performance. Moreover, women who receive negative feedback from male supervisors decrease women's career aspirations, and women officers tend to respond to male officers' appraisal of their abilities (Haake, 2018; Ni & Huo, 2018).

Stressors, Barriers to Entry & the Glass Ceiling

According to Akpinar-Sponsito (2013), women have been challenged by the glass ceiling for decades. The glass ceiling is a situation in which women experience more significant difficulties than males in ascending the professional or managerial hierarchy. According to Starheim and the National Institute of Justice (2019), several obstacles prevent women from becoming police officers. For example, police uniforms and protective gear are mainly designed with the masculine body in mind (Cunningham & Ramshaw, 2019). Moreover, women are expected to manage the parenting of children, which is not accounted for in law enforcement (Harrington, 2000). This could force women officers seeking leadership positions to choose between their career or parental responsibilities (Akpinar-Sponsito, 2013; Harrington, 2000).

Additionally, policewomen who successfully surpass systemic hurdles and advance into leadership face several challenges (Akpinar-Sponsito, 2013; Harrington, 2000). Female officers

are subjected to resentment stemming from male officers that feel they were given a "man's job" (Harrington, 2000). Additionally, women face being cast out of work groups and subjected to the "boys club." Furthermore, women who strive to take on leadership roles that are considered traditionally to be masculine roles are marginalized (Garcia, 2003). Rabe-Hemp (2009) believes that women who take on dominant roles are not respected or acknowledged as equals. Instead, women officers who try to fit in and demonstrate their leadership skills are subjected to harassment.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The researchers chose the phenomenological approach as it is considered the best method to understand lived experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This methodology was selected to explore the participants' lived experiences and how they make sense of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). The study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The interviews were conducted via zoom as most participants are in different states across the U.S. The participants were selected using LinkedIn as a primary recruitment tool. Participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria of being a female police chief within the United States, a minimum of 15 years of experience in law enforcement, and at least four years of experience as a police chief. Over 200 police chiefs were contacted; six agreed to participate in the study and signed a consent form.

The interviewees were asked the following interview questions:

Q1 What are your challenges or non-strengths in leadership?

Q2 What strategies do you use to overcome your non-strength in your leadership role?

Follow-up questions were asked to the participants so that they could elaborate more on their responses. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Once transcribed and coded, the data were analyzed using NVivo Pro 12. The data was analyzed by looking for themes and patterns in the participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Challenges

The participants were asked to identify the challenges they face and the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. The top themes identified as challenges include a) communication, b) being in a new department, c) overtasking, d) overthinking, e) introversion, and f) role-related stress. A summary of the challenges can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Challenges

Main Challenges	<i>Frequency</i>	
Communication	3	50.00%
Being in a New Department	2	33.33%
Overtasking	1	16.67%
Overthinking	1	16.67%
Introvert	1	16.67%
General Role-Related Stress	1	16.67%

Communication as a challenge was mentioned in 50% of the interviews. The Chiefs explained different examples of communication difficulties in their work. For example, one participant explained that creating effective communication strategies requires a clear understanding of what is being communicated and why. Knowing how communication will be

perceived by the team or subordinates is also necessary. The cost of unintentional communication may be the loss of crucial information or misconstrued information.

Being new to the department is another top challenge in leadership. Participants reported feeling like outsiders and lacking street credit as problematic to their leadership. They also explained that, in some cases, the leader must build trust with the new team when transitioning to a new area. Transitioning can be particularly challenging after staying with one department for more than 15 years. One interviewee expressed an inherent lack of trust within the police force that can make challenges more difficult to overcome.

The final four themes were specific to the leader's experiences, including *overtasking*, *overthinking*, *introversion*, and *general role-related stress*. When speaking about *overtasking*, the participant mentioned the need to manage working relationships with different parties on items like policy reform. One participant also talked about their natural tendency towards *overthinking* tasks, which created challenges for her. *Overthinking* went hand in hand with *introversion* as challenges that this chief was working to overcome because of their natural tendency toward internal processing and preference for time alone. Lastly, one leader expressed that *general stressors* related to a Chief's role as ongoing challenges to effective leadership.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

In addition to the inquiry on challenges, participants identified strategies to overcome them. The strategies mentioned are a) quiet time to think, b) improved communication, c) emotional intelligence, d) supporting employees, e) consistency, and f) delegation. A summary of strategies is in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Strategies

Main Strategies	Frequency	
Improve Communication	3	50.00%
Quiet Time to Think	2	33.33%
Emotional Intelligence	1	16.67%
Supporting Employees	1	16.67%
Consistency	1	16.67%
Delegation	1	16.67%

Of the strategies mentioned, the top two were *quiet time to think* and *improved communication*. *Communication* is the number one strategy and challenge cited by the interviewees. Leaders spoke of the need to communicate clearly and concisely with their teams to *improve communication*. The chiefs explained that it could take time to learn the department's needs and often required them to reflect on them and how best to meet them. *Quiet time* describes making time to think, plan, and regulate stress. Some examples include planning for meetings, personal and professional goals, thinking clearly, and creating space to destress.

The four other themes appeared less frequently but are still important. The themes are *emotional intelligence*, *supporting employees*, *consistency*, and *delegation*. *Emotional intelligence* is displayed through monitoring the tone of voice, controlling the reaction to tough or challenging situations or people, and regulating personal feelings. Similarly, leaders are trying to strengthen their leadership by learning strategies to support employees. Examples of *employee support* include listening to new ideas from direct reports and ensuring that detectives and officers have what they need for their work. The final two themes are *consistency* and *delegation*. One interviewee explained the importance of communicating consistently and ensuring that her actions match her words. Lastly, one chief shared that *delegation* is one way she releases a healthy amount of control to her team and learns to trust them with specific tasks.

Findings

The findings indicate that female police chiefs highlight communication, environmental, and psychological factors as challenges in their roles. Women police chiefs can make impromptu judgments without the assistance of their colleagues, but they have trouble forming interpersonal connections with their peers. The study finds that women police chiefs face challenges due to a lack of support, cultural norms that are resistant to change, and historical stereotypes.

Additionally, the study finds psychological impediments to their leadership, such as overtasking, introversion, and job-related stress. Conversely, the study finds strategies to overcome those challenges, such as communication improvement and retaining credibility via consistency and proper delegation.

Challenges

Communication

Half of the women chiefs of police interviewed in this study reported communication difficulties in their leadership position. One participant said making spontaneous decisions is a non-strength. She made decisions without communicating potential factors associated with a decision with others who could have provided valuable insight, explaining:

I've definitely fallen prey to... "this is a great idea." Body [cameras] as an example...one of my officers came and said, "hey, I've got this friend that has this company and we can get [body cameras] at like a quarter of the cost and let's try it." [I thought] Yeah, it's a great idea, you know, off the cuff. We spend like \$2,500 on it and get the system set up. It breaks within four months and the company had gone under in that time, so there was

no one to repair it. And the greater problem was during that four months, I hadn't thought about what we have to have... a policy...do we have the infrastructure to actually take all of this video?...We buy a couple of terabyte drives to store the video. There is also retention periods, public disclosure request. How do we get the stuff over to the prosecutor? Myriad [of] issues.

Many reasons can explain why a woman police chief might make the mistake of hastily making decisions without communicating with others first about potential factors that impact that decision. One reason may be attributable to women in law enforcement juggling multiple identities. Women police officers have been described as actively resisting and portraying stereotypical norms of femininity and policing; in other words, women in policing have integrated performing multiple identities associated with a woman and a police officer (Rabe-Hemp, 2009). In our participant's case, their behavior may be an attempt to meet the expectations of a police officer and a woman. Furthermore, our participants may also be trying to meet the expectations of a leader. A study by Andreescu and Vito (2010) found that based on police managers' perception, a primary ideal leadership behavior in police organizations is to reconcile conflicting demands and reduce disorder in the system.

Furthermore, another communication challenge reported was difficulty connecting with staff "that had an inherent distrust." The participant elaborated, "I think that's inherent in policing. There's a lot of skepticism and distrust." The police subculture of the "siege mentality" includes the belief that people cannot be trusted (Manning, 2005, as cited in Nhan, 2014; Skolnick, 2008). According to the participant, the brotherhood, or strong bond amongst police officers, may also affect internal interactions and professional relationships. Past research has revealed that the challenges women face in policing, such as negative assumptions, a toxic

culture (Sanders et al., 2022), and a lack of support (Ong'ale & Masiga, 2021), are evident throughout their experience from the police academy to leadership positions. The stressful and dangerous nature of police work creates a distinct subculture that produces mental, physical, and behavioral problems for law enforcement officers (Woody, 2005).

Being in a New Department

Participants noted the next most reported challenge relates to *being in a new department*. An incoming chief of police must navigate through existing cultural norms and organizational systems. But when a woman police chief steps into the role of police chief in a department that they didn't 'grow up' in, they may face resistance that manifests into challenges for various reasons. Similar to the challenge of communication-related to trust issues within a department, being new in a department is a challenge that may be linked to the police culture of not trusting outsiders (Kääriäinen, J., & Sirén, 2012) or cynicism and adhering to the code of silence (Donner et al., 2018). Due to assumptions based on gender, women often report needing to prove themselves or their competency and capability in their position (Haarr & Morash, 2013; Helfgott et al., 2018; Bishu & Headley, 2020). For example, in describing this challenge, one participant in our study explained:

I will say that certainly coming to a different police department, I have no street cred... They don't know that I've handled the same challenges that they're handling, others call me names that I've been able to deal with. And I think that's probably one of the biggest [challenges]. A little bit of being a woman is a challenge.

This participant faced name-calling when entering a new department as chief. Unfortunately, this participant's experience isn't unique. Women have experienced gender harassment and

discrimination, especially in law enforcement (Haarr & Morash, 2013; Lonsway et al., 2013; Yu, 2015).

Overtasking

One police chief mentioned overtasking, clarifying that she gave herself numerous tasks and held various roles, including being "president of the Chief's Association...president of the F.B.I., National Academy, executive board, chief of the city and trying to be a parent." This statement highlights the various roles women play in society as a woman and leaders in a male-dominated profession. Regression analysis conducted by Rief and Clinkinbeard (2020) suggests that women police officers are still feeling less than fully integrated within the workgroup and that women are more likely to encounter workplace incivilities than men. Because of those incivilities, women think they fail to fit the value of the workgroup. Women are more likely to feel work-related pressure when the culture is not supportive, when work requires them to perform beyond their normal duty, and when they work overtime (Duxbury & Halinski, 2018). Those could cause women police officers to work extra hard to prove themselves, and when overtasking, women police officers tend to be affected more by overtasking.

Past research has emphasized the stereotyping roles women are expected to adopt, such as communal roles (Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002), and their experiences of gender-related harassment (De Haas et al., 2009; Rabe-Hemp, 2008) based on societal expectations as a barrier preventing women from entering the police force or advancing their careers (Shjarback & Todak, 2019; Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002). In contrast, this study's results suggest that even once a woman has reached the leadership position in law enforcement, a woman's expected role, such as parenting, still influences their experience while

in their leadership position and may manifest as a self-imposed challenge. In addition to trying to meet the expectations of a leader and a woman, women police officers usually put more effort and longer tenures to get accepted (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). This challenge can also be explained by considering the participant's personal beliefs and the brevity of their position as police chief or pressures to perform or represent their group. For example, this participant stated, "I've always felt like life is short, so take advantage of it and do as much as you can in the time you have." This participant may also be alluding to the brief time police chiefs hold their positions, especially in recent years (Police Executive Research Forum, 2022).

Overthinking

Another challenge that was specific to the leader's individual experience was overthinking. Participant #2 mentioned, "I get too much inside my head sometimes and I have to communicate a vision and my initiative a little bit more regularly and thoroughly so people understand where I'm coming from." The challenge of being an *introvert* was described in tandem with the challenge of *overthinking*. Introverted leaders, who prefer to process their thoughts and decisions internally alone, might be socially disengaged (Lebin et al., 2019) and may be missing out on the advantages of having a diverse group involved in planning or decisions (Tyssen, 2007). Additionally, followers may have difficulty trusting, understanding, or agreeing with their opinions, thus, making it difficult for the introvert to influence others or garner support for their goals. The problem with overthinking or overanalyzing a situation, problem, or idea is that these thoughts are not shared with others. As mentioned by the participants, "Not letting others in can present challenges" with self-promotion and difficulties with communicating vision and initiatives, or challenge with others understanding the motivations, reasons, or circumstances that led to her actions or opinions.

Introvert

Participant #2 explained, "I tend to be a little introvert and internal processor... I don't seek out social opportunities to get to know people... It's something that I've worked on over a period of time." By itself, being an introvert is not necessarily a problem. As the participant explained, however, the introverted personality impacts how she processes thoughts and communicates. Thus, an introvert's preference to process internally and avoid social environments can lead to undesirable outcomes for a woman leader, such as misunderstandings or problems with communication. When introverted leaders are socially disengaged and because an introvert prefers to process information internally (Lebin et al., 2019), their followers may perceive them to be aloof, uninterested, or disconnected from their struggles. This could affect the leader's ability to influence others and impact relationships within the organization and the leader's confidence and assertiveness. Lee (2022) suggests that personality is crucial in determining how successfully and morally leaders engage with their subordinates in the workplace. A leader must be able to connect with their followers to communicate, motivate, and organize, yet an introverted leader tends to be invisible (Lebin et al., 2019).

General Role-related Stress

Police chiefs must juggle several stakeholders, including city officials, the community, and subordinate police officers, and perform necessary tasks in their position as police chiefs. Participant #6 explained all the challenges she met being chief "... has to do with the stress of being a chief or leader in general." Police chiefs are facing role-related stress due to their responsibilities. Difficulties and pressures that often accompany the job of police chief lead to departures from the position due to reasons such as stress and personnel or organizational issues (Ranguet & Dodge, 2002). Police chiefs experience role overload due to excessive volumes of

work, such as high call volumes and caseloads and associated administrative loads, the assignment of duties ancillary to the officers' primary work responsibilities, and temporary workload increases associated with major events. The workload is also related to demands and stress levels that result in strained or depleted psychological resources, such as inhibiting appropriate reactions to vulnerable individuals and assessing the impact of crucial situations (Hofer, 2021).

Strategies

Improve communication

In addition to their challenges, participants also discussed the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. As such, participants described improving communication as a strategy to overcome the issues associated with the communication. One participant explained, for instance, that developing effective communication strategies requires a thorough comprehension of what is being communicated and why. According to interviewee #1, police chiefs can try to slow down the conversation to prevent the situation from escalating—this was a lesson for the interviewee to "slow your roll. Sit back. Let's make this a little more thoughtful decisions." The same interviewee elaborated that this strategy was best for the skeptics in the room, adding that "the best thing you can do is get those grumpy people that don't like anything in the room so they cannot deflate things."

On the other hand, when the challenge of communication is internal, such as a woman police chief who is an introvert and internal processor, participant #2 suggested a strategy to confront the situation head-on by trying to force themselves "out there into social things"- and communicate with other parties. "I must communicate a vision and my initiative more frequently and comprehensively. It's a huge plus if individuals comprehend my perspective." In addition,

according to one interviewee, it is sometimes necessary to "put myself out there and taking chances, not reckless chances, but chances." Participants attempt to address communication issues with clear and concise sentences "...so you have to be clear and concise with your expectations, and you can't be all over the place with one decision." The same participant also emphasized consistency and attentiveness to enhance communication. "If you're making decisions here, they want to see you apply it. So just making sure that I'm consistent and know to hear, being open to hearing other people's viewpoints."

Improving communication as a strategy to overcome challenges is aligned with the literature, which mentions that females in leadership positions use communication skills to overcome masculine culture and are often associated with female leadership in general (Collica-Cox & Schulz, 2019). Communication is a valuable ability that female leaders can employ outside the workplace and is closely related to crime prevention efforts (Ho & Cho, 2017). Communication is essential for establishing and maintaining relationships, as well as for attaining personal and professional success. Effective communication can assist individuals and organizations in achieving their objectives, resolving issues, and fostering mutual trust and comprehension. Hence, communication is a vital talent required in nearly every part of life and is critical for success in both personal and professional contexts.

Quiet Time to Think

When police officers shift to a new department, they confront barriers. A tactic employed by police chiefs who feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities is to take time alone to reflect. When there are too many things to finish, overtasking can arise. Participant 1 noted the need to manage working relationships with several parties on policy reform-related issues. When faced

with a chaotic and overwhelming scenario, one technique for the participant would be to find a quiet location to reflect.

"You have some quiet time, and I think those strategies work the best because it allows you to slow down, for me anyway, and think, what am I doing? What's important? Where should my focus be worth my time? And the quiet time helps to reflect on what I'm doing or what I should or shouldn't be doing and how other people are impacted by that."

Leaders must engage in reflective conduct to make the best decisions. Leaders must frequently rely on their intuition in a world that is becoming increasingly complex; nonetheless, a poor decision can exacerbate the confusion and be disastrous. Critical thinking and reflection are examples of reflective behaviors and activities that enable leaders to understand the internal and external world more clearly and make better decisions (Luqman, 2012). Moreover, Rosenberg (2010) believes that transformative leadership requires constructive responses to unexpected and unanticipated change, which creates reflective practices necessary to enable adaptive and ethical answers. However, there is a paucity of research describing reflective behavior in the police sector; research on reflective behavior in leadership tends to concentrate on general leadership (Rosenberg, 2010), education (Luqman, 2012), and nursing management (Matsuo, 2012). The reflective conduct of participant number one may illustrate that reflective behavior not only assists organizations in making the best decisions but also assists leaders in finding their rhythm and being effective in the face of adversity.

Emotional Intelligence

The participants discussed that there are many times they find themselves needing to support their officers or control their emotions and voice. Reflect by one of the participant #4: "I've learned throughout my career to try to control my emotions and control ... Control even

just the pitch of my voice." Emotional intelligence (E.I.) is one of the strategies mentioned by participant#4 to practice when communicating with others; E.I. is viewed as a way that leads to better self-control and understanding of others, and it is recognized as a crucial part for everyone, including police officers:

"emotional intelligence and certainly people, you know, that get under your skin trigger you to take more care and how you react to them; so, again, the emotional intelligence piece and then just really just supporting the work that's done in detectives and by police officers..... but I'd say the emotional intelligence for anyone is probably important."

The participant discusses the importance of E.I. in the police workplace and says that E.I. is vital for all professions, including the police. E.I. is judged essential in police work circumstances, such as de-escalation, because it lets officers recognize their own and others' emotions (Magny & Todak, 2021). This police chief's emphasis on E.I. may be because gender has a substantial impact on E.I. (Rajan et al., 2021) and females typically have a higher E.I. score (Hypšová and Štindlová, 2021). This indicates that E.I. is an integral approach for female police chiefs to employ to encourage their officers.

Supporting Employees

E.I. is linked to employee support as a strategy. Respondent #4 notes, "the emotional intelligence piece and then just really supporting the work that detectives and police officers do." Emotional intelligence enables officers to be conscious of their and others' emotions (Magny & Todak, 2021). Once women police chiefs have gained E.I. and become more attuned to the emotions of others, they may be able to recognize the needs of others and respond accordingly. Identifying support needs is essential because they may not be apparent or make others unwilling to share them honestly. When police officers genuinely seek mental health assistance, they

virtually stake their entire reputation on their ability to maintain the confidentiality of the other party (Newell et al., 2021). This is particularly important for law enforcement officers who work with distressing material, as exposure to violent images or videos can have a profound mental impact and lead to trauma-related psychiatric and medical conditions (Price, 2017). One of the coping mechanisms identified in the literature is talking to their peers (Denk-Florea et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to accommodate the needs of employees, especially when the police culture discourages them from expressing certain emotions.

Consistency

Consistency is important for any leader to maintain their credibility; it might not be a strategy but more of a standard; the employees will not only want to see the action but also want a consistent one. Consistency is noted by participant #5: "if you're making decisions here, they want to see you apply it over there, making sure that I'm consistent and know hearing, being open to hearing other people's viewpoints" According to Nelson et al. (2014), a leader needs to acquire new abilities and maintain an open mind continually. As a leader, consistency may be related to dependability and trustworthiness. When developing the Police Transformational Leadership Scale (PTLS), Can et al. (2017) assumed that trustworthiness would be one of the most critical aspects of transformational leadership. However, they discovered that "fairness and honesty" were significant indicators of transformational leadership among police officers.

Delegation

As a leader, delegation is necessary because it empowers your team, fosters trust, and promotes professional growth (Ugoani, 2020). Participant #6 describes herself as a perfectionist and passionate about her work. These traits, combined with the responsibility of being a police chief, mean she needs to balance or prioritize some of the duties.

"I think one of my biggest challenges is that I can be a bit of a perfectionist. I always want things to be done perfectly and I can get frustrated when they're not. I can be very passionate about my work. This is both a strength and a challenge, because while it motivates me to do my best, it can also lead to burnout. I also think that it has to do with the stress of being a chief or leader in general."

This participant is trying to address this challenge with delegation out of her experience:

"I would say that I have definitely learned to delegate more." Delegating some responsibility to a subordinate is an excellent strategy for improving overall team performance and efficiency. Klein et al.(2016) found that dynamic delegation enhances extreme action teams' ability to perform reliably while also building the skills of their novice team members. Delegation or empowerment can also positively affect the efficiency of leadership and organization, according to research on leadership and crisis management (Mahmoud Abdel Aal Hassan, 2022). Scholars identified the importance of delegation or a shared leadership approach in police occupation long before the pandemic, suggesting that a shared leadership approach could effectively deal with complicated and complex problems (Herrington & Colvin, 2015). While there is much research on empowerment leadership and shared leadership, the use of those techniques is less researched in the law enforcement field.

Conclusion

This study focuses primarily on the experiences of female police chiefs. Unlike previous research that focused on the challenges of women in policing in general, the dual duties that departments and society want for women police officers, and the overall pressure that stems from the inherent masculine culture of police, this study focuses on the challenges of women policing in particular. This study narrows its focus from policewomen to women police chiefs with the

expectation that those who have overcome such obstacles may have a fresh opinion or perspective on women in law enforcement now that they are in leadership positions. The women leaders in this study reported facing obstacles such as communication, departmental shift, occasional overthinking that may be linked to introverted personality, and general role-related stress. Additionally, they discussed ways to overcome challenges, such as improving their communication skills, reflection, emotional intelligence, consistency, supporting their subordinates, and delegation. The finds are essential to the development of effective police chiefs and for future research.

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