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Challenges faced by female police officers within the South African Police Service (SAPS):

A case study of two police stations in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

Police work has been traditionally defined as male work. To this effect, the culture of policing remains highly masculine or 'macho'. This way the policing fraternity appears to have no room for what is regarded as feminine. As a result, women encounter a lot of challenges within the police fraternity. This study employs qualitative semi-structured interviews to solicit challenges faced by especially female police officers. Firstly it examines the gender division of labour within the policing system. Secondly the study evaluates the gender attitudes of male officers towards their female counterparts. A non-probability type (convenient) of sampling has been used to select the participants since the interview depended on the availability of participants. Major findings illustrate that the South African Police Service remains patriarchal or masculine. However, there has been a movement towards the integration of women into this masculine culture. Findings demonstrate a huge gap in gender representation with men dominating high positions while women occupy lower ranks. Secondly, the findings demonstrate that the division of labour is highly gendered. However, it is important to note that women are beginning to integrate into lighter masculine role while also still performing feminine roles within the SAPS. Thirdly, challenges faced police officers seem to be gendered. Challenges faced by women are mainly attributed to the persistent 'masculine' cop culture that prevails in the police fraternity, where male police officers lack confidence and value in female police officers as 'real' police based on their gender. This is also reflected in societal attitudes of the larger society.

Keywords: Gender; Masculinities; Gender division of labour; Femininity.