

Police Studies

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Republic of China by Gao Xu (Public
Security Ministry, Beijing, The
People's Republic of China)

Police Research and its Problems in
in Police Organizations by P. van
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Criminal Justice in Scandinavia: The
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Erik Beckman (Michigan State
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Patrol Activities of Male and Female Officers as a Function of Work Experience¹

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Abstract

By studying official patrol car logs, the authors were able to follow the performance of newly trained male and female officers for over 145 tours of duty. Assignment of men to more "high risk" calls, observed in early tours, disappeared as the officers accumulated more experience. Over the course of the study, there were few if any significant differences in male-female performances.

As recently as 1970, the term "policeman" still served as the generic equivalent to "police officer" in the United States of America. Thirteen years later—and despite the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1972—the odds continue to be overwhelming that a call for emergency police assistance will, in fact, bring a "policeman" to the door. When employment statistics for female officers were first reported in 1971, 1.4% of all sworn officers were women; by 1980, the figure had reached only 5% (FBI, 1972: 1981). The actual number of women assigned to patrol is undoubtedly far lower than the number of sworn female officers, for it is still common practice to deploy women in "protected" positions as dispatchers, jailers, and juvenile service officers (Potts, 1981).

The former justifications for excluding women from police work are gradually eroding in the face of growing evidence about the ability of female officers to handle street patrol. The first and more comprehensive of these studies compared 86 new patrolmen with 86 new patrolwomen in the Washington, D.C. Police Depart-

ment (Block and Anderson, 1974). Apart from the many similarities that were found, men initiated a somewhat greater number of discretionary activities (usually traffic control), while women tended to handle more dispatched calls for service. Male officers made more misdemeanor and felony arrests; however both groups of officers obtained similar conviction rates for arrests that were made. Citizens, patrolmen, patrolwomen, and police administrators shared the opinion that male officers were more effective than female officers in handling disorderly males. Patrolmen and, to a lesser extent, patrolwomen both registered a preference for patrolling with a male partner. A smaller study of 16 female officers and 16 male officers in suburban St. Louis County obtained similar results and reported few differences between the two groups (Sherman, 1975). As was true in the Washington, D.C., study, males made more arrests; however, unlike that study, women officers in St. Louis County distributed more traffic tickets.

An intensive study of New York City police focused principally upon the operating styles of 41 males and 41 females in handling street encounters (Sichel, Friedman, Quint, and Smith, 1978). Again, in most respects, men and women used similar techniques of approach. Nevertheless, female officers engaged in fewer efforts to take direct control of situations, were somewhat more deferential to their male partners, and tended to "hang back" from vigorous physical activity. On the other hand, citizen ratings of female officers were more positive than for male officers, especially on items per-

taining to competence, respectfulness, and ability to "listen and understand."

Despite this growing evidence favoring the equal competency of women officers, there is a puzzling lag in the attitudes of prospective (Golden, 1981) and experienced officers (Vega and Silverman, 1982) to acknowledge the skills which have been ascribed by researchers to women officers. In their survey of officers from three large Florida law enforcement agencies, Vega and Silverman found that only 16% of the male officers believed that women were as competent as men for police work and half felt that women should not be assigned to patrol duty. If such attitudes merely reflected male prejudices against women, one might expect that these negative views might be attenuated by opportunities to work with women officers. Such was not the case:

Significantly more officers who had worked with females in contrast to those who had not felt that females were more likely to be assigned to less violent sectors, received more backup, were not as skilled in the use of firearms, assertive enough, and generally as effective as male officers in performing police functions (Vega and Silverman, 1982, p. 35).

Based upon these inconsistencies between the earlier studies of performance and the later studies of attitude, it is felt that three issues bear further study: (1) the general tactical styles of male and female officers, (2) the relative improvement of male and female officers over time, and (3) the methodological gaps in past research.

(1) *Tactical styles.* Although there is considerable agreement about the capacity of women to "handle" police patrol, interpretations about the relative level of their effectiveness may vary according to the ideological assumptions that administrators apply to the police role. For example, if operating within the tactical assumptions of the "community service" model of policing, one might conclude that the evidence for equal competency of women is clear. Furthermore, emphasizing the citizen ratings from the New York study, one might even make the claim that the sex-role training in our culture actually makes women superior to men as police candidates. On the other hand, working from the more traditional paramilitary model of policing, one might piece together all

of the evidence showing that women are "less aggressive" in their approach to patrol (as was done by Walsh 1975, in his critique of the Washington, D.C., study). Granted that violent confrontations are a miniscule portion of police work and granted that inappropriate aggression by police only creates new problems, nevertheless there may be a positive dimension to "aggressive" policing involving initiative, curiosity, energy, and vigorous law enforcement. It is in this domain of self-initiated activity where the effectiveness of female officers remains an open question.

(2) *Improvement over time.* The previous investigations have measured individual performance within a relatively brief cross-section of time. It seems quite possible that the observed sex differences might have represented just a temporary phase in the orientation of women to a predominantly male reference group and that differences might have disappeared in the course of further feedback, social comparison, and work experience. The Washington, D.C., study did report some improvement in the attitudes of police officials toward female officers over a one-year time span; however, in the absence of performance data, we cannot know whether this was due to a change in the performance of the women or simply to a change in the attitudes of police officials as they acclimated to the presence of women. Quite apart from the question of sex differences, there is very little information in the literature on the performance changes of police rookies, in general, as they gain additional street experience.

(3) *Methodological gaps.* The Washington, D.C., study is likely to remain the most comprehensive and authoritative study on policewomen for years to come. The project addressed dozens of questions which will not even be attempted in the present research. Nevertheless, any research strategy must be constructed within the confines of particular measurements, local conditions, and available subjects. While adequate for the original purpose, methodological limitations become more apparent when others attempt to generalize the findings to other populations and situations. Here are some examples:

The Washington, D.C., study was conducted at a time when the height requirement for women was still an extraordinary 5'7" (vs. 5'3" in the El Monte Police Department). Can we generalize from such a select group to police-

women of average height? Or, as Walsh (1975, p. 22) asks, "Would this be like hiring only 6-foot-tall men?" A second problem with this study was that the policewomen and comparison men worked in different districts, leaving the lurking suspicion that differences in crime problems or deployment practices may have contributed to the outcomes. The *St. Louis County* study was presented in narrative form, with few details on methodology (e.g., the number and duration of observation periods per officer) and no data tables. Thus, it is difficult to assess the adequacy of the analysis or design. Furthermore, the observations were limited to one-person patrol cars, thereby leaving an information gap on the effect of male and female officers upon the productivity of the working partner. The *New York City* study had a blind spot in the opposite direction, for department policy required that motor patrol officers work only in pairs, thereby excluding the possibility of assessing the independent activity of individual officers. The two studies are not really complementary because they addressed rather different aspects of patrol performance.

All three of the above studies obtained their central data on police performance from ride-along observers. This method has the obvious benefit of providing an independent measure which avoids having to rely upon official statistics. However, the observer method is not necessarily trouble-free. There is the problem of observer bias (e.g., in the New York study, male observers reported more favorable observations on male officers than did female observers). There is also the risk that the presence of an "audience" may affect the behavior under study (e.g., Washington, D.C., police engaged in slightly different activities in the presence of a male observer than with a female).

The most serious problem in using ride-along observers is that it is so costly; being expensive, it tends to limit the number of observations which can be gathered. The Washington, D.C., officers were observed for an average of only 1.1 working days and the New York police for 5.6 tours of duty. Because there are so few incidents in an average day, this yields a very small and unstable data base, particularly when there is a need to identify subcategories of patrol activity. For example, in Washington, D.C., observations were obtained for only 10 tours of duty for males in one-person vehicles.

During those 10 tours, just 21 service calls were dispatched to all of these men. One table of the Washington, D.C., study (Table 4, p. 16) distributes these 21 incidents through 11 categories of activity, yielding a model response of just 1 observation per call. It is this kind of unstable data which seems to have contributed to the misunderstanding and controversy in the exchanges between Walsh (1975) and Bloch (1975). By taking the calculated risk of trusting the performance measures made available in the official car logs, the present study provided a data base of 145.8 tours of duty per officer, and these tours generated, in turn, 2,773.2 recorded incidents per officer (vs. 5.3 incidents in the Washington, D.C., study and 29.4 incidents in the New York City study).

Method

This research was conducted in the El Monte Police Department in El Monte, California, a Los Angeles suburb of approximately 70,000 people. The subjects were 26 new officers who had completed both academy and field training and were ready for regular duty. Male and female groups were matched on the number of patrol shifts worked and were equated on the proportions of time allocated to day-time, swing, and graveyard shifts. At the time of this assessment, 13 males and 13 females had completed at least one block of 64 tours of duty; 10 of each group had completed two blocks of 64; and 6 of each group had completed three blocks of 64 tours of duty. Because most of these assignments were based upon four 10-hour days per week, 64 tours of duty are equal to four calendar months of patrol experience.

Officers were monitored on 70 types of patrol activity as recorded in the official patrol car logs. For convenience, these activities were classified under eight broader areas, with representative activities as follows: (1) *Station details*: briefing, dispatcher relief, desk relief, and prisoner search; (2) *Traffic stops*: all vehicle stops for moving traffic violations and improper equipment; (3) *Pedestrian stops*: all stops for questioning of pedestrians under suspicious circumstances; (4) *Vehicle stops*: all stops for questioning and vehicle search "for cause"; (5) *Other observations*: location checks, bar checks, and found property; (6) *High risk calls*: "in-progress" burglary or robbery, murder, assault with a deadly weapon, and shooting at a dwelling; (7) *Disturbance calls*: all

Table 1
Average Patrol Activities per Eight-hour Shift for Male and Female Officers
in One- and Two-person Cars for as Many as Three Successive Time Periods

Activity	N	Incidents	% of Shift	Sex	Mean Activity Rate				
					Deployment One	Two	Work Period		
							1st	2nd	3rd
Station Details									
Females	13	3408	23.4	3.38	3.10	3.65	3.38		
Males	13	3337	20.7	3.42	3.54	3.31	3.42		
Females	10	5746	22.8	3.65*	3.69	3.62	3.73	3.58	
Males	10	5118	20.0	3.31	3.42	3.20	3.27	3.35	
Females	6	5057	23.0	3.58	3.67	3.49	3.49	3.78	3.48
Males	6	4514	19.6	3.32	3.38	3.27	3.29	3.38	3.30
Traffic Stops									
Females	13	1828	5.7	1.88	1.51	2.25	1.88		
Males	13	2676	8.4	2.68	3.03	2.33	2.68		
Females	10	3319	6.7	2.51	2.09	2.92	2.17	2.84	
Males	10	4612	9.0	3.06	3.21	2.92	2.91	3.22	
Females	6	3170	7.3	2.69	2.25	3.13	3.32	3.71	2.04
Males	6	3601	8.0	2.67	2.84	2.50	2.57	3.43	2.01
Pedestrian Checks									
Females	13	1216	4.6	1.27	1.22	1.33	1.27		
Males	13	1497	5.6	1.59	1.49	1.70	1.59		
Females	10	2153	5.2	1.44	1.32	1.56	1.33	1.55	
Males	10	2301	5.7	1.49	1.33	1.59	1.51	1.47	
Females	6	2018	5.6	1.63	1.37	1.89*	1.42	1.71	1.75
Males	6	2272	6.1	1.71	1.52	1.90	1.43	1.65	2.05
Vehicle Stops									
Females	13	831	2.8	.80	.75	.85	.80		
Males	13	958	3.3	1.06	.98	1.13	1.06		
Females	10	1519	3.5	1.08	.97	1.19	.95	1.22	
Males	10	1468	3.2	.98	.90	1.06	.92	1.03	
Females	6	1631	4.4	1.36	1.15	1.56**	1.19	1.55	1.34
Males	6	1395	3.5	1.19	.86	1.52	.75	1.10	1.72
Other Observations									
Females	13	1345	4.6	1.18	.81	1.54***	1.18		
Males	13	1310	4.9	1.33	1.31	1.34***	1.33		
Females	10	1981	4.2	1.24	1.13	1.36	1.29	1.19	
Males	10	2191	5.2	1.47	1.37	1.56	1.33	1.61	
Females	6	1798	4.7	1.35	1.07	1.63	1.34	1.26	1.45
Males	6	2134	5.5	1.66	1.51	1.80	1.39	2.00	1.57
High Risk Calls									
Females	13	1295	6.2	1.12*	1.03	1.20	1.12		
Males	13	1485	7.1	1.50	1.42	1.57	1.50		
Females	10	2150	6.5	1.32	1.33	1.30	1.22	1.42	
Males	10	2203	6.5	1.43	1.37	1.49	1.48	1.37	
Females	6	1766	6.1	1.19	1.25	1.13	1.24	1.41	.93
Males	6	2000	6.7	1.44	1.44	1.41	1.41	1.32	1.60
Disturbance Calls									
Females	13	1752	7.7	1.70	1.58	1.80	1.70		
Males	13	1830	7.0	1.93	1.76	2.10	1.83		
Females	10	2643	6.9	1.73	1.69	1.78	1.81	1.65	
Males	10	2814	7.6	1.86	1.75	1.96	2.03	1.68	
Females	6	2115	6.5	1.55	1.59	1.52	1.96	1.69	1.00
Males	6	2320	6.9	1.72	1.62	1.83	1.66	1.51	2.00
Other Radio Calls									
Females	13	3005	17.8	2.83	2.96	2.72	2.83		
Males	13	3591	20.3	3.63	3.84	3.42	3.63		
Females	10	5142	19.1	3.19	3.47	2.91	3.07	3.31	
Males	10	5893	20.8	3.67	3.83	3.51	3.63	3.71	
Females	6	4243	18.0	3.51	3.25	3.78	2.76	3.16	4.63
Males	6	5240	20.8	3.40	3.90	2.90	3.76	3.58	2.84

*Unless otherwise specified, assume that significance tests refer only to the simple effects of sex, deployment, or time periods.
*There was a significant sex-by-deployment interaction.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .025$; *** $p < .01$.

domestic quarrels, neighborhood disputes, and gang fights; (8) *Other radio calls*: grand theft auto, burglary, collision, and petty theft. It should be noted that items 2 through 5 can be considered "self-initiated" patrol activity, while items 6 through 8 are assigned by a dispatcher.

Results

Table 1 presents the number of activities logged for male and female officers, with one subset of data showing activity rates for one- vs. two-person vehicles and another subset showing rates over successive time periods. (It should be understood that the "second person" in a two-person car was always a male.) Activity rates were converted to a standard eight-hour day to facilitate comparisons with other departments. The third column indicates the proportion of the shift that was devoted to each of the eight areas of activity. The proportion of time left "unaccounted for" was presumed to be available for "free-ranging patrol." The largest difference in free patrol time for policemen vs. policewomen occurred during the first time period (21.9% vs. 27.9%, respectively) and the smallest difference was found for data based upon all three time periods (24.5% vs. 23.0%).

Activity rates were subjected to analysis of variance, with one "between-subjects" variable (sex) and two "within-subjects" variables (one- vs. two-person cars, and work periods). When there is only one time period (up to 64 tours of duty), the analysis shrinks to a two-factor design. A separate analysis was conducted for each sample size within each activity, for a total of 24 analyses. However, it should be recognized that the three analyses within each activity were not truly independent because data from the smaller samples were included within the larger samples.

There were only two statistically significant ($p < .05$) sex differences in Table 1. In a table of 24 comparisons, one might have expected at least one difference at this level by chance alone. Policemen were dispatched to more "high risk" calls than policewomen during the first 64 tours of duty, but this difference was not maintained for officers who worked for longer periods. For officers with at least 128 days of experience, women recorded more station details than men. There was one significant sex-by-manning interaction, indicating that

when working alone, policemen made more "other observations" than did policewomen, but, when working with a partner, policemen tended to record fewer of these activities than policewomen. There were no significant changes in activity rates between periods 1 and 2 nor between periods 1, 2, and 3; nor were there any significant sex-by-time interactions. Thus it appears that new officers were well seasoned before being placed on their own. Moreover, women seemed to be "learning the ropes" at about the same speed as men. Compared to officers working alone, two-person teams reported more "other observations" (after 64 tours) and more pedestrian checks and vehicle stops (after 128 tours).

Discussion and Conclusions

The El Monte Police Department appears to have subjected its female officers to a fair and rigorous test. In contrast to law enforcement in the more affluent suburbs, police work in El Monte offers all of the risks and challenges to be encountered in any urban center. While the absolute number of policewomen deployed in El Monte is small, their practical significance is not. For during the period of this study 16.1% of all patrol time was logged by female officers. The administrative guidelines in the El Monte Police Department were clear from the outset. Female officers were to be deployed in the same way as males, except for such activities where they might be found to have special competence.

The present results have shown that, for the first four-month period, males were dispatched to a disproportionate number of "high-risk" situations; however, this imbalance was corrected in later periods. During two time periods, women were being asked to carry more than their share of station details. To test the possibility that sex-role stereotyping might have been operating to divert women into clerical tasks in the police station, a substudy was conducted of all 70 categories of logged activity. As a rough index, "over-utilization" of women was defined as any activity in which women carried at least 10% more of the workload than would have been expected from their 16.1% of logged time, and "under-utilization" was delineated at 10% below this level.

The activity showing the most extreme over-utilization was for "prisoner search." Policewomen conducted 74.4% of all searches. This

was attributable to the fact that, while a full-time male jailer was usually available to search male prisoners, there were too few women prisoners to justify a regular female jailer. Other areas of over-utilization of female officers, outside of station details, might also be justifiable in view of the victims involved: rape, 38.0%; found child, 36.9%; indecent exposure, 30.9%; and child abuse, 28.2%. Contrary to expectations, women served slightly less than their fair share of dispatcher relief (10.2%) and desk officer relief (10.3%). However, applying the criterion of "10% below expectations," there was no activity in which women officers were under-utilized. Most important, for those who endorse the paramilitary model of "aggressive policing," there were no significant differences in the performance of men and women on any of the four major areas of self-initiated patrol activity: traffic stops, pedestrian checks, vehicle stops, and other observations. If there is one area of weakness in deployment practices within this department, it is the failure to develop a more selective dispatching system which might capitalize on the two-person vehicles. Whatever may be the benefits of a two-person car, it does not appear that double productivity is one of them.

The present findings, then, support the earlier investigations in Washington, D.C., New York City, and St. Louis County which have indicated equal competency for women officers. It is unfortunate that the present research did not include a "pre-post" assessment of the attitudes of male officers to see if the female officers in El Monte were given "credit" for carrying their full share of the workload. Conversely, in the absence of performance data from the earlier attitude study by Vega and Silverman (1982), it must remain an open question whether the female officers in the three Florida law enforcement agencies were being fairly or unfairly assessed by their male counterparts.

There is one final topic that must be broached—though with several reservations—the question of local work rates. Block and Anderson (1974, Tables 2, 3, and 4) provided data on activities-per-tour for Washington, D.C., police which might be compared to the rates shown in Table 1. In Washington, D.C., one-man cars handled 5.30 incidents-per-tour (2.10 dispatched, 3.20 self-initiated). Using only the data for 128 tours of duty, comparable one-man data for El

Monte were 13.76 incidents-per-tour (6.95 dispatched and 6.81 self-initiated). For one-woman cars, the respective figures were: Washington, D.C., 4.22 (3.17 and 1.05); EMPD, 12.00 (6.49 and 5.51). For two-man cars: Washington, D.C., 5.28 (2.56 and 2.72); EMPD, 14.09 (6.96 and 7.13). And for man/woman teams: Washington, D.C., 4.59 (2.45 and 2.14); EMPD, 13.02 (5.99 and 7.03).

Utmost caution is in order because it is quite possible that the EMPD car logs may include items (particularly in "self-initiated activities") that would be considered too trivial to record in Washington, D.C. On the other hand, one might expect that the criteria for dispatching vehicles for service calls are probably not too different from one urban department to another. Furthermore, examining some specific categories of activity, it appears that the magnitude of the difference remains almost as large as the cumulative figures cited above, reducing the likelihood that the summary figures are purely an artifact. For example "total traffic" activity in Washington, D.C., was 1.63 for two-man units and 1.00 for man/woman teams, with EMPD figures being 2.92 and 2.92, respectively. Pooling the Washington, D.C., figures for "public fights" and "argument in or near residence" yields figures which might be compared to EMPD disturbance calls. The respective rates for Washington, D.C., vs. EMPD were as follows: one-man units .40 per-tour vs. 1.75; one-woman units, .17 vs. 1.69; two-man units, .28 vs. 1.96; and man/woman units, .21 vs. 1.78.

The strongest evidence for a claim of true differences in work load between the two departments is derived by computing a ratio of the number of sworn officers vs. the number of serious crimes per year (using 1976 as the origin of the current data base). In Washington, D.C., 4,340 sworn officers faced 49,726 Part I crimes for a ratio of 11.5 crimes per officer; while in El Monte, there were 79 sworn officers and 5,176 Part I crimes, for a ratio of 65.6 crimes per officer (FBI, 1977). There may be justifiable reasons for a lighter workload in Washington, D.C., such as larger patrol beats, heavier traffic congestion, or protection of foreign diplomats, but the point is clear that the present test of policewomen was made under extraordinarily demanding conditions.

If there is a moral to be derived from these comparisons, it is that we should moderate our tendency to believe that we are measuring the

capacities of men or women in some absolute sense. If we treated our findings in concrete terms, we might be drawn to conclude that EMPD policewomen can work circles around Washington, D.C., men. The safer generalization is that local work rates strongly affect local performance. If male officers predominate in numbers or in experience, it can be expected that they will set the pace. Then, given adequate selection, adequate training, and adequate opportunities for feedback and social comparison, it appears that women will more or less approximate this pace.

Notes

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