# Women's Integration into Policing in South Korea:

# A Qualitative Study of Career Experiences and Organisational Justice

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the nature and extent of women's integration into Korean policing from a feminist perspective, focusing on female officers' experiences and the organisational context that shapes them. Women's representation in Korean policing has gradually increased, but the gender reforms since 2018 and the subsequent social backlash, including misogynistic discourse targeting female officers, raise questions about whether this progress has led to substantive integration. Drawing on Acker's (1990, 2012) theory of gendered organisations, organisational justice theory, and Brown's (1997) model of women's progress in policing, the study analyses data from in-depth and focus group interviews with 40 female officers.

The expansion of women's roles in the Korean police has largely been driven by organisational needs emphasising gender differences. Within this context, female officers' career experiences can be summarised through three key themes. ***Negotiating gendered work*** focuses on the ways female officers manage structural constraints, including gendered task assignments, exclusion, diminished authority, and harassment. ***Organisational justice and career navigation*** looks at how organisational structures, culture, and caregiving responsibilities shape female officers' career trajectories, influencing their perceptions of organisational justice. The theme of ***between tension and solidarity*** reveals the complex relational dynamics among female officers. Competition, hierarchy, and generational divides created tensions, but some officers also built solidarity through mutual support, pointing to its potential role in driving organisational change.

By placing the Korean case in a broader international context, this thesis highlights common patterns as well as features unique to South Korea, contributing to the Western-focused literature on gender and policing. The findings reveal that women's integration in South Korea remains incomplete and that full integration will require both organisational reforms and shifts

in everyday culture and relationships, alongside recognising and supporting female officers as agents of change.

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# [Chapter 1] Introduction

## Introduction

Over the past 40 years, research on gender and policing has grown significantly worldwide. Many studies have explored women's everyday experiences in policing, including the obstacles they face in male-dominated environments and how policing practices reflect and reinforce gendered dynamics. Recent years have seen an increase in comparative international studies, providing insights into commonalities and differences across countries (e.g. Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020; Garcia 2021; Prenzler et al. 2023). However, despite this growth, much of the literature remains centred on Western countries, with regions such as East Asia still underrepresented. South Korea, in particular, offers a compelling site for inquiry not only because of the limited empirical research available in English-language scholarship, but also because of recent developments marked by significant organisational reforms and an intensifying gender backlash.

Since 2018, the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) has strongly promoted policies to expand the representation of women and improve gender equality within policing. However, these reform efforts sparked debate about women's capabilities to perform police duties, which led to anti-policewomen discourse. This situation calls for an in-depth examination of the extent and nature of women's integration into South Korean policing. To do so, this study links the concept of 'integration' to organisational justice to examine whether women in South Korean policing experience equal opportunities, outcomes, and treatment as male officers. Through this, it seeks to identify the conditions and strategies necessary to substantively advance gender equality and gender justice within police organisations.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the lived experiences of Korean female officers. Through conducting both in-depth and focus group interviews, it investigates how female officers experience and respond to the gender order within the organisation. As a female officer currently serving in South Korea, I conducted this research as an insider and have reflected on how my positionality might influence the study throughout the research process.

This introductory chapter presents the research questions and outlines the background context and rationale of this thesis. Subsequently, it identifies gaps in the literature by reviewing previous domestic and international studies on women in policing, and introduces the theoretical framework and methodological approach that support the study. Finally, it provides an overall structure of the thesis.

## Background and rationale

Female officers in South Korea first joined the police force in 1946 and have undergone many role changes over the past 70 years, gradually becoming more integrated into policing. The number of female officers has grown from 79 in 1946 to 21,000 as of 2024, with female officers now accounting for approximately 16% of the total police force.[1] Until the early 2000s, women made up only about 2% of the total police force, but with the introduction of affirmative action, the representation of women in policing has achieved visible growth.

[1] Korean National Police Agency, *Police Statistics*, *Information Disclosure,* accessed 17 July 2025, https://www.police.go.kr/www/open/publice/publice0201.jsp

Along with quantitative growth, the roles of female officers have also diversified. In the early days, female officers were mainly assigned to tasks related to women, youth, and children, but they have gradually expanded their scope of activities to include areas traditionally dominated by men, such as criminal investigation, patrol, and public order management. This trend is not unique to the Korean police but is commonly observed internationally. This is because police organisations have long been structured around a male-dominated culture based on physical strength, hierarchical structures, and a control-oriented mindset, which has historically hindered women's participation in policing (Heidensohn and Brown 2000; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020). However, with wider societal changes on gender equality, such phenomena are gradually being mitigated. While detailed tasks remain segregated by gender, Korean female officers are now deployed in nearly all police work areas, as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 1 Female Officers by Function in the Korean National Police (2024)**

| Functional Division | Sum | Police Administration | Audit & Inspection | Future Policing | Crime Prevention & Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 131,807 | 4,290 | 1,649 | 771 | 10,457 |
| **Number of Women** | 21,000 | 1,024 | 376 | 85 | 1,509 |
| **% of Women** | 16% | 24% | 23% | 11% | 14% |
| **Women & Juvenile Safety** | **Traffic** | **Public Order Management** | **Intelligence** | **International Cooperation** | **Forensic Science** |
| 3,730 | 7,188 | 16,102 | 2,696 | 129 | 1,345 |
| 1,965 | 808 | 946 | 323 | 21 | 298 |
| 53% | 11% | 6% | 12% | 16% | 22% |
| **Investigation** | **Detective** | **Cybercrime** | **National Security** | **Community Policing** | **Affiliated Institutions** |
| 12,647 | 18,285 | 902 | 2,226 | 48,808 | 582 |
| 3,583 | 2,442 | 170 | 421 | 6,916 | 113 |
| 28% | 13% | 19% | 19% | 14% | 19% |

***Source**: Korean National Police Agency, Police Statistics, Information Disclosure, accessed 17 July 2025, https://www.police.go.kr/www/open/publice/publice0201.jsp*

Despite such achievements, there is still considerable debate as to whether women have been fully integrated into policing in South Korea. First, police work has long been associated with physical strength and perceived as a job suitable for men, and this perception remains

widespread in many countries, including South Korea (Natarajan 2008; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Prenzler and Sinclair 2013; Silvestri 2018). Reflecting this perception, a survey by the Seoul National University Institute of Sport Science (2018) found that 95.9% of police officers surveyed agreed that 'male police officers are necessary'. In contrast, only 28.3% of male officers and 72.2% of female officers agreed that 'female police officers are necessary', indicating a significant gender gap.

Against this backdrop, it is important to state that there has been a growing call for the need to employ more female officers in South Korea. This is related to poor policing in dealing with Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Over one in three adult women in South Korea has experienced GBV at least once in their lives (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2021). Alongside this, it is reported that women are often hesitant to seek help from the state after being victimised, and even when they do, they often experience secondary victimisation by the police (Lee and Park 2018; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2019; Lee 2019; Kwon 2019). The general outrage of female citizens at the police's poor GBV response became highly visible in 2018, when women's groups publicly protested what they perceived as gender-differentiated and inconsistent police responses to digital sex crimes involving female victims, leading to calls for more female officers (Jang et al. 2018). This incident, and the broader public backlash led by women's groups, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The KNPA undertook reforms to improve its long-criticised gender-discriminatory system and culture, including measures to increase female representation in 2018. However, the reforms were met with strong backlash inside and outside the organisation, resulting in the proliferation of anti-policewomen discourse and turning the police profession into a 'battleground for gender conflict' (Oh 2020). In particular, issues such as lower physical fitness standards for female

officers compared to male officers and the reality that female officers are concentrated in administrative positions have sparked controversy in the media and online communities. As a result, female officers have been ridiculed as ‘tax-wasters’ and ‘police assistants’, claiming they were incompetent and useless in policing (Korean Women’s Development Institute 2022). Some male officers have expressed resentment, claiming that they are victims of reverse discrimination (Yoon 2022).

Given this context, Korean female officers currently find themselves in a highly contradictory situation. They are being pushed forward in principle, but in reality, they are constantly forced to prove their qualifications amid resistance and doubts. Despite more than 70 years of service, female officers are still subject to gender-specific evaluation and suspicion both within and outside the police organisation.

The idea of integrating women into policing as an imperative is now an accepted position within the global literature on policing, but what this means and how it is done varies from country to country and remains contentious. Many developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, pursue full gender integration, with men and women playing equal roles and women standing beside men, not behind them (Schuck 2019). In contrast, some developing countries with traditional and conservative socio-cultural contexts, such as India, Brazil and the Middle East, tend to emphasise that men and women can play ‘equal but different’ roles, suggesting that when female officers are committed to serving women, female victims are better served, and female officers are empowered (Natarajan 2016; Carrington et al. 2022).

In the Korean police system, both modes can be observed simultaneously. Female officers are

assigned to various departments such as criminal investigation, public order management, and patrol, where they perform integrated roles. However, there remains a tendency for them to be concentrated in departments related to women and youth or in GBV response tasks (Kim et al. 2020). Additionally, a gender-segregated hiring practice has been maintained for a long time in police recruitment, institutionalised by applying different physical qualifications and fitness standards for men and women (Kim 2017; Hwang and Yeom 2021). Perceptions of this hiring practice also vary among Korean female officers. According to a survey by the Korean Women's Development Institute (2014), approximately 80% of female officers surveyed supported the gender-segregated recruitment practice, while approximately 20% opposed it. The main reason for support was the practical constraints of considering women's physical conditions, while the main reason for opposition was that there are no police duties that women cannot perform. This demonstrates that there are diverse perspectives and differing understandings regarding the meaning and methods of 'integration' even among female officers within South Korea.

The presence and status of women in policing are meaningful. Increasing women's representation has important implications for rebuilding police legitimacy. Engaging people from diverse backgrounds in policing can increase public trust in the police (Silvestri et al. 2013; Riccucci et al. 2014; Pyo 2023). Schuck (2019) suggests that increasing the number of women in police organisations can shift policing philosophy from a control-centred to a community-centred approach, reducing police use of force, and better service delivery to crime victims.

Of course, it is necessary to be aware that discourses that overemphasise the increase in female officers can conceal and obscure gendered power dynamics within the police force (Miller 1998;

Silvestri 2018). Nevertheless, as agents of change, female officers have the potential energy to drive the transformation of gendered organisations. They can act as catalysts for organisational change by disrupting the existing masculine police culture and influencing beneficial changes in internal police practices (Schuck 2019; Brown et al. 2020). This, in turn, can lead to positive changes in law enforcement as an outcome of gendered organisations. Based on these recognitions, this thesis explores female officers' lived experiences of integration, focusing on the contradictory situations that they currently face.

## Research questions

Given the context described above, the overarching question of this thesis is: **To what extent and in what ways have women been integrated into policing in South Korea?** To explore this, the thesis will critically investigate the idea of what integration means. Despite the large number of global studies that have been conducted on women's integration into policing (Prenzler et al. 2010; Chu 2013; Natarajan 2016; Shen 2019; Garcia 2019; Rabe-Hemp 2019; Schuck 2019; Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020; Strobl 2020; Brown and Silvestri 2020b; Carrington et al. 2022), it is not easy to find an agreed-upon definition. Shuck (2019) notes a need for a common definition of integrating women into policing and proposes this as follows.

> *... the idea of integrating women into policing is synonymous with creating law enforcement agencies in which women have equal treatment, opportunities, and outcomes compared to men (Schuck 2019, p.40).*

Schuck (2019) suggests linking the integration of women into policing to the concept of organisational justice. Organisational justice refers to the subjective perception of fairness that

members feel in the processes of resource allocation, decision-making, and interaction within a working environment. Schuck explains that equality of opportunity can be linked to procedural justice, equality of outcomes to distributive justice, and equality of treatment to interactional justice as criteria for evaluating the realisation of integration. This approach emphasises that mere numerical increases or symbolic representation are insufficient, and that full integration is achieved only when female officers perceive that they are participating and being evaluated fairly within the organisation.

In this respect, integration is understood as distinct from the notion of inclusion, which often emphasises formal entry rather than substantive fairness and participation. Inclusion may refer to women being formally incorporated into the organisation as part of the police workforce, yet such inclusion can occur without substantive changes to existing organisational structures, culture, or gendered divisions of labour. As Garcia (2020) explains, women may be formally *included* within police organisations without being *integrated* into core operational and decision-making processes, or recognised as equal organisational actors. Accordingly, this thesis adopts integration as an analytical concept to examine both the extent and the nature of women's participation, positioning, and sense of belonging within the organisation, and critically analyses the integration experiences of Korean female officers from the perspective of organisational justice.

At the same time, the thesis also draws on Brown's (1997) widely used model of women's progress in policing to situate the Korean case within a broader international discourse, a model which is introduced in more detail later in this chapter. By combining Brown's (1997) institutional perspective with Schuck's (2019) organisational justice framework, this study proposes a more comprehensive approach to evaluating women's integration, which captures

both structural progress and the subjective perceptions shaped by organisational culture. The thesis is based on the following sub-research questions:

1. What approach has been adopted by the police in South Korea in its development of gender diversity and equality for its workforce?
2. How do women police experience their work as police officers (both in relation to colleagues and to the wider citizenry)?
3. How do female officers navigate and manage their career progression within policing?
4. What are female officers' perceptions and experiences of organisational justice within policing?
5. What are the impacts of experiencing organisational injustice in their careers? How do female officers cope and respond to this?

## Review of research trends and gaps in the literature

Focusing on the questions raised earlier, this section reviews the main discussions and issues in domestic and international studies on the experiences and positions of female officers within organisations. This is to identify the academic context in which this thesis is situated and the gaps within that context.

First, existing studies on female officers in Korea have mainly focused on factors affecting their job satisfaction. In particular, male-dominated organisational culture and sexism have been identified as major factors hindering job satisfaction among female officers (Kong and Choi 2014; Kong 2018; Park and Jang 2019; Han and Kim 2020; Lee and Park 2020; Lee and Nam 2020). On the other hand, organisational cultures that respect work-life balance have been found

to positively influence female officers' job satisfaction (Yoon 2019; Lee and Nam 2020; Park and Cho 2022). Park and Cho (2022) demonstrated that female officers experience improved job satisfaction when they refuse or reconfigure the gender roles assigned to them. However, these studies generally focus on how to better adapt women to existing systems, with little analysis of gendered organisational structures or power relations. Furthermore, most studies adopt a quantitative approach, which limits their ability to fully capture the dynamic and complex organisational experiences of female officers (Rabe-Hemp 2009).

There are also several domestic studies that have focused on the police recruitment system. These studies point out that gender-segregated recruitment is institutionalised discrimination and have called for its abolition (Jeon 2007; Kim 2017; Hwang and Yeom 2021). Additionally, some studies have criticised the current physical fitness tests for applying different standards based on gender and proposed improvements (Park 2019; Kim 2020; Kim 2021). However, these studies also have limitations in that they do not sufficiently reflect the subjective experiences or perceptions of female officers.

Domestic studies analysing the gendered nature of police organisations from a feminist perspective are also gradually emerging. Lee (2003) used qualitative research methods to analyse how hegemonic masculinity is reproduced within the police force, while Oh (2020) explored how young female officers perceive gender equality and what strategies they use to respond to workplace discrimination. Kim (2008), Lee (2019), and Choo (2019) point out that the 'female officer-female victim' matching strategy can have negative effects on both parties and criticise such arrangements as obstacles to achieving gender justice. However, overall, there has not been sufficient research on gender issues in the field of policing in South Korea, and in particular, there is little research that highlights the experiences of female officers in

terms of integration.

Internationally, research on women in policing has been actively accumulated mainly in the Global North. In particular, extensive qualitative and quantitative studies on the organisational experiences of female officers have been conducted in countries such as the US, the UK, and Australia. In contrast, studies on gender issues within police organisations in Global South contexts have been more limited, often confined to specific regions or receiving relatively less scholarly attention (Carrington et al. 2022; Prenzler et al. 2023). Within this context, although South Korea is situated within the Global North, academic engagement with gender and policing remains relatively underdeveloped.

Many international studies have emphasised that gendered aspects of police organisations constrain the full integration of women (Heidensohn 1992; Prokos and Padavic 2002; Silvestri 2003; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Silvestri 2017; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020; Garcia 2021; Prenzler et al. 2023). However, research focusing on how female officers perceive fairness within their organisations and how these perceptions relate to their experiences of integration into policing remains limited. This thesis aims to fill this gap by focusing on how female officers experience and perceive organisational justice in South Korea, and by conducting an in-depth analysis of their position and career paths. Through this analysis, the thesis seeks to identify the barriers that hinder the full integration of women into policing and contribute to the development of gender-just policies and theoretical discussions.

## Theoretical framework

This thesis adopts a feminist perspective that focuses on highlighting women's experiences and

revealing oppressed knowledge as its theoretical starting point (Tracy 2019). The feminist approach provides a critical perspective that makes women's voices visible and reinterprets structures and relationships centred on power and gender. Through this, the thesis aims to analyse how female officers are positioned within police organisations and how they respond to gendered organisational structures and reconstitute meaning. Whilst the thesis is framed by an overarching feminist lens, it is further shaped and informed by the ideas found in the three theoretical positions described below: gendered organisation theory, organisational justice theory, and the model of women's progress in policing.

**Gendered organisational theory**

First, this thesis draws on Acker's (1990) gendered organisation theory as its overarching theoretical framework. This theory analyses and theorises organisations from a feminist perspective. This theory does not view organisations as gender-neutral entities but focuses on how they are structured and operate according to gender. This is the fundamental perspective of this thesis on police organisations and provides important theoretical resources for understanding the gendered characteristics of policing and the dynamics of gender power. Acker (1990) describes gendered organisations as follows.

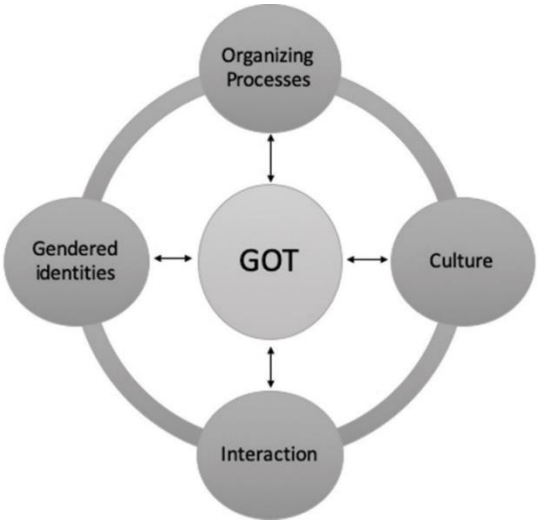
> *To say that an organisation, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker 1990, p.146).*

This suggests that gender differences are not simply 'present' but structurally embedded in all organisational activities, including power, emotions, and identity. Acker's theory focuses on analysing gender hierarchies formed within institutional and structural conditions rather than

reducing gender issues to individual attitudes or characteristics (Nkomo and Rodriguez 2019).

Subsequently, Acker (2012) expanded the theory and proposed the concept of 'gendered substructure'. This explains the specific mechanisms through which gender discrimination operates in terms of four components: *organising processes, organisational culture, gendered identity, and job interactions*. First, gendered substructure is supported by the *organising processes*. Specifically, inequality is inherent in job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory authority, and workplace norms. The second is *organisational culture*. This refers to the cultural reproduction of beliefs about gender differences and perceptions of equality/inequality. The third component is *job interactions* with colleagues and superiors. Women tend to be disregarded or excluded in everyday interactions within organisations. The fourth is *gendered identity*. This refers to the identity that individuals construct while performing their roles, which is not fixed but can change (Acker 2012). These components interact with each other, causing the organisation to function as a structure that reproduces gender hierarchies. This substructure is particularly strong in hierarchical organisations such as the police force, where it can influence all aspects of female officers' placement, evaluation, and recognition.

**Figure 1 Acker (2012)'s gendered substructure: figure from Alobaid et al. (2020)**




This theory has been used in various studies to reveal the structural mechanisms of gender inequality within organisations. However, Nkomo and Rodriguez (2019) point out that while Acker's theory is useful for diagnosing structural inequality, it does not sufficiently advance towards providing directions for achieving substantive equality or gender justice. This thesis accepts this critique and seeks to explore the possibility of organisational change that can realise gender justice based on the lived experiences of female officers, rather than merely confirming that police organisations are gendered. In other words, it focuses on seeking practical strategies for restructuring organisational culture and norms centred on women's voices, going beyond the analysis of gender inequality inherent in organisational structures.

**Organisational justice theory**

Second, this thesis utilises organisational justice theory as a theoretical framework for analysing the organisational experiences of female officers. Organisational justice is a concept centred on members' perceptions of the fairness of workplace resource distribution, decision-making processes, and interactions, providing an important analytical framework for understanding how members perceive and interpret their organisation.

Colquitt et al. (2005, p.5) categorise organisational justice into three dimensions: *distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice*. First, *distributive justice* refers to the perception of fairness in how resources such as wages, promotions, and job assignments are distributed. Members compare their outcomes with those of their peers and perceive unfairness when they believe their contributions are not proportionate to their outcomes. This is judged based on various criteria such as equality, need, and contribution, and particularly reflects perceptions of harmony within the group and distribution based on individuals' well-being (Colquitt 2008).

Second, *procedural justice* refers to the perception of fairness in the decision-making process by which resources are distributed. When procedures are perceived as fair, employees exhibit positive attitudes toward managers' decisions and higher satisfaction with outcomes. Thibaut and Walker (1975) demonstrated that the more members feel they have control over procedures, the more they evaluate them as fair. Leventhal (1976) proposed six criteria for ensuring procedural justice: consistency, bias suppression, information accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality. Members who believe that procedures are fairly designed are more likely to accept decisions, even if the outcomes are unfavourable.

Third, *interactional justice* primarily deals with perceptions of fairness in interpersonal relationships and is divided into two sub-dimensions: *interpersonal justice* and *informational justice*. The former refers to whether members feel they are treated with respect and courtesy by those in authority within the organisation. The latter refers to whether members feel they have received sufficient and accurate explanations regarding the reasons for decisions or the decision-making process (Colquitt 2008).

Such perceptions of organisational justice are directly linked to members' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural responses (Stone-Romero and Stone 2005). Many studies have demonstrated that perceived organisational injustice is closely associated with negative outcomes such as job stress, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intentions (Colquitt et al. 2001; Greenberg 2004; Judge and Colquitt 2004; Charman and Tyson 2024). In particular, studies related to police organisations have found that experiences of fair treatment influence how officers interact with external communities (Schafer 2013; Van Craen 2016; Carr and Maxwell 2018). These studies demonstrate that the more police officers perceive themselves as being treated fairly by their organisation, the more likely they are to adopt fair and cooperative attitudes toward citizens. Bradford et al. (2014) showed that perceptions of organisational justice positively influence various factors such as police officers' community policing attitudes, organisational identity, and confidence in job performance. In this context, organisational justice matters not only for individual job satisfaction or emotional well-being, but also for broader issues such as internal and external relationship-building and the realisation of justice itself.

Such discussions are particularly important for understanding how female officers experience and perceive organisational justice in gendered organisations. Acker (2006, p.443) defines *organisational inequality* as a systematic disparity between participants regarding opportunities, treatment, and outcomes, suggesting that a structurally inevitable disparity between men and women arises in gendered organisations. This is because job design that assumes men as the ideal worker, male-centred informal networks, and gender-based expectations and exclusion create a structure that makes it difficult for female workers to have fair opportunities. In this context, how female officers perceive and interpret organisational justice critically reveals the gender inequality structure present and serves as a key perspective

for developing practical strategies to achieve a gender-equitable organisational culture.

**Women's progress in policing**

Third, this thesis utilises Brown's (1997) model of women's progress in policing as a theoretical framework for analysing the integration of women into policing in South Korea. The process and manner of women's integration into policing can take different forms in different countries. Brown (1997) analysed the progression of women in policing in European countries and presented a six-stage transnational model: *Entry→ Separate restricted development→ Integration→ Take-off→ Reform→ Tip-over*. This model explains the process by which women move from gendered roles to mainstream roles, with the final *Tip-over* stage requiring a critical mass of 25% female officers.

Brown's (1997) model has long been a leading theory explaining the progress of female officers within organisations, but recently, limitations have been raised regarding its inability to encompass experiences from the Global South and non-Western countries (Shen 2019; Chu 2019; Strobl 2020; Hautzinger 2020; Natarajan and Babu 2020; Shen and Schulz 2022; Carrington et al. 2022). For example, female officers in Brazil, India, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Taiwan, and Dubai tend to be more familiar with or prefer working in women-only units or handling women's and children's issues rather than performing the same duties as men (Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020). This reflects a reality that differs from Brown's (1997) assumption that female officers aspire to gender equality and struggle to play a role equal to men. Hautzinger (2020) proposes a hybrid model where gendered (separated, specialised) and non-gendered (integrated) roles coexist, arguing that it is necessary to acknowledge that different ways of performing roles can exist simultaneously. Strobl (2020) also emphasises that a cyclical model, in which progress and regression repeat themselves, is a more realistic

explanatory framework than a linear or evolutionary model.

Despite these debates, Brown's model is considered a useful theoretical tool for analysing women's entry into policing, gender role expectations, experiences of resistance, and the context of institutional change (Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020). Comparative studies applying this model have already been conducted in various countries, contributing to the cross-cultural analysis of the status and experiences of female officers. While this thesis does not aim to conduct comparative research, it seeks to utilise Brown's model to analyse the integration process and institutional advancement of female officers in the Korean context, thereby capturing both Korean-specific characteristics and international similarities. Although South Korea institutionally aims for gender equality, male-dominated hierarchical structures still influence actual organisational culture and practices. Applying and critically engaging with Brown's model under these conditions will be a meaningful attempt to situate the experiences of Korean female officers within a broader international discourse.

## Methodological approach

This thesis adopted a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of female officers. Drawing on an interpretivist perspective, it examined how participants interpret and make sense of their experiences within the organisation.

This thesis collected data from a total of 40 female officers, including 29 participants in in-depth interviews and 12 in focus group interviews (FGIs), with one officer taking part in both. The FGIs were conducted with members of the Police Gender Studies Network (PGSN), a registered study group and women-only network composed of female officers within the KNPA.

The group was formed in 2018 and currently consists of about 90 female officers. They have formed a network of continuous learning and mutual support among women through regular book clubs and seminars. The reason for combining in-depth interviews and FGIs was to collect in-depth narratives of individual experiences while exploring the potential for practical action toward achieving gender justice within the organisation through a group of female officers who practice solidarity.

The interviews were conducted from September 2023 to September 2024. In-depth interviews were conducted both online and in person, depending on the researcher's overseas stay and domestic visit schedule. All participants were located in South Korea at the time of their interviews, except for one participant who was abroad. FGIs were conducted online in three groups, considering the difficulty of gathering participants with varying work schedules at the same time and place.

One of the key characteristics of this thesis is my positionality. I am a female police officer (Superintendent) and a member of the PGSN. I conducted this research while on leave from the police organisation, drawing on my approximately 16 years of service since joining in 2006. This position requires a reflexive approach throughout the research process. This is because the researcher is not merely an external observer but a subject belonging to the same social and organisational context as the research subjects, and must continuously reflect on how their social background, assumptions, and values may influence the research topic (Band-Winterstein et al. 2014; Hesse-Biber 2017). A reflexive discussion on this positionality will be detailed in Chapter 5.

In addition to interview data, this thesis referred to government-issued documents such as

policy reports and police White Papers. Supplementary sources included media coverage related to female officers, as well as practitioner-authored books and commemorative publications. These materials played an important role in contextualising the gendered history and institutional changes of the police organisation, particularly in areas where official records were lacking.

## Structure of the thesis

This section provides a brief overview of the thesis and the key focus of each chapter before proceeding with the main discussion of the thesis.

Chapter 2 (Theorisation of the Gendered Nature of Policing) reviews and discusses the international literature on gender and policing drawing on Acker's (2012) gendered substructure framework to argue that police organisations are not gender neutral but gendered in various ways. This chapter provides a conceptual foundation for interpreting the experiences of Korean female officers.

Chapter 3 (Gender Representation and Reform in Policing) explores the meaning and current status of women's representation in policing based on international literature and available statistical data. More specifically, it draws on Brown's (1997) model to analyse the progress of women in policing and consider the implications of integration. It also critically analyses reform efforts to improve female representation in policing and the contradictions inherent in such reform attempts.

Chapter 4 (Gender and Policing in South Korea) provides specific insight into the structure and institutions of the Korean police organisation and the integration process of female officers. It

analyses institutional elements such as recruitment and promotion systems, as well as the social discourse surrounding female officers. This chapter provides background information to understand the Korean context and lays the groundwork for the analysis presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 (Research Methodology) describes the methodological approach adopted in this thesis, and documents the data collection methods, procedures, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. It also provides a substantive discussion on my positionality as a serving police officer and the various issues that arose whilst undertaking this study.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 draw on the research findings. Chapter 6 (Negotiating Gendered Work: Challenges and Responses of Female Officers) examines the challenges female officers encounter in the course of their police work. These difficulties are manifested in gender-based job allocation, exclusion, and experiences of harassment, and the chapter also analyses how female officers respond to these challenges and develop survival strategies. It also discusses how their adaptation to or challenge of male-centric norms influences the reproduction or change of gendered norms within the organisation. Chapter 7 (Organisational Justice and Career Navigation: Gendered Strategies in Policing) analyses how female officers perceive organisational justice and how these perceptions influence their career strategies. Focusing on experiences of unfairness in job assignments, performance evaluations, and promotions, as well as responses to such experiences, and factors that constrain or promote career development, this chapter sheds light on how women's career trajectories are shaped by institutional and cultural factors. Chapter 8 (Between Tension and Solidarity: Female Officers' Interactions and Organisational Change) demonstrates how relationships among women within the organisation

are complexly shaped by various factors such as generation, hierarchy, and competition. At the same time, it analyses how some female officers have begun to create possibilities for organisational change through solidarity. Based on this, the chapter proposes strategies to promote the empowerment of women in policing.

Chapter 9 (Conclusion) summarises the main findings of the thesis and answers to the research questions. It discusses the study's academic contribution, theoretical implications, and offers policy recommendations for the Korean police organisation. It also outlines limitations and suggests directions for future research on gender and policing in South Korea.

## [Chapter 2] Theorisation of the Gendered Nature of Policing

### Introduction

The police is a gendered profession, and there is a broad consensus in the literature that, both historically and in contemporary times, the 'ideal' police officer has been constructed as male or hypermasculine (Heidensohn 1992; Prokos and Padavic 2002; Silvestri 2003; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Silvestri 2017; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020; Garcia 2021; Prenzler et al. 2023). This ideal has been embodied in figures with strong physiques, control, and a dedication to work over private life (Silvestri 2017). Such criteria have rendered certain genders 'suitable' and others 'exceptional' within the police organisation. This goes beyond mere stereotypes, revealing that the belief that policing is a man's job has been deeply embedded in the structure and operations of police organisations. This chapter critically examines how these gendered ideals have been reproduced in police organisations across different countries from an international perspective.

To this end, this chapter adopts Acker's (2012) *gendered substructure* as a theoretical framework, focusing on four components—*organising processes, organisational culture, gendered identities, and job interactions*—and reviews the literature, primarily international studies. The discussion in this chapter will provide a useful theoretical foundation and insights for interpreting and exploring the experiences of female officers in South Korea.

### Organising processes

Organising processes is a key factor in perpetuating gender inequality in organisations and can

be observed in the general requirements for jobs, class hierarchies, and recruitment and hiring practices (Acker 2006). This section will examine specifically how hiring and training practices and promotion systems are gendered in police organisations.

**Gendered of hiring practices**

Acker (2012) argues that gendered organisations tend to reflect ideal body images and perceptions of the appropriate gender and race in their hiring requirements and processes. This means that the hiring requirements and processes reveal the 'ideal' worker characteristics assumed by the organisation. Dick and Cassell (2004) demonstrate that police work is often perceived as dangerous and urgent, requiring deployment at very short notice and 24-hour shifts. Consequently, men are often labelled as the ideal officers, and images of the male body and masculinity become pervasive in organisational processes. As a result, police hiring criteria are designed to screen out candidates who do not exhibit macho traits such as toughness, confidence, bravery, and aggression (Prokos and Padavic 2002; Rabe-Hemp 2008). Specifically, most police agencies use physical ability tests that replicate the physical tasks required for police work, which include jumping over barriers and objects, climbing stairs, and carrying heavy objects (Dawes et al. 2017; Drew and Archbold 2023). However, Garcia (2021) points out that the police recruitment process that emphasises physical fitness in most countries does not reflect the reality of police work. The fact that police spend more time maintaining order and providing various services than on crime-related activities has been widely noted (Martin 1999; Pearson and Rowe 2020).

Police recruitment practices that strongly emphasise physical ability can result in the exclusion of female applicants (Birzer and Craig 1996; Lonsway 2003; Schuck 2014a). Lonsway's (2003) research has shown that the majority of police agencies in the United States (US) conduct

physical agility tests, and that agencies requiring such tests tend to employ approximately 30% fewer women officers than police agencies that do not include them in their hiring process. Lonsway (2003) argues that these tests lack consistency and validity in their protocols and are based on myths rather than actual abilities required for policing. Cordner and Cordner (2011) also reported that female officers viewed physical fitness testing as a barrier to entry into the police force. Schuck (2014a) suggests that physical fitness requirements need to be supported by empirical evidence demonstrating their effectiveness in general police tasks, their ability to predict performance with uncooperative citizens, and their impact on negative organisational outcomes, such as employee health care costs and absenteeism. However, physical fitness tests continue to be implemented without such evidence. These kinds of hiring practices reinforce the notion that policing is a job for men (Garcia 2021). Recruitment practices that prioritise physical fitness and gendered stereotypes of the ideal officer may discourage potential female applicants and dampen their interest and confidence in pursuing a career in the police force (Yim 2009; Todak 2017; Rossler et al. 2020), ultimately darkening prospects for gender diversity in policing.

Policing researchers recommend that police selection criteria based on gender should be redefined. Todak (2017) argues that the police recruitment process should focus on the importance of communication and community engagement skills instead of physical ability to increase women's interest in police careers. Inzunza (2016) calls for improvements in selection practices, noting that among selection practitioners within Spanish and Swedish police organisations, there has been a shift in the criteria for judging the suitability of police applicants from a traditional emphasis on physical ability and loyalty to a more contemporary emphasis on their ability as peacemakers and problem solvers. Lonsway (2003) and Schuck (2014a)

suggest abolishing physical ability tests, replacing them with health-based screening tests, and postponing them until after the academy, if necessary.

**Gendered training practices**

The training of new recruits also contributes to the reproduction of a gendered substructure. Training here includes both experiences in training academies and field training experiences. This is because most recruits go through a training academy, followed by a field training experience, where they are formally and informally taught about police work. Through this process, recruits are socialised and learn about the dominant cultural beliefs (Charman 2017).

According to Garcia (2021), police training has a gender bias that undervalues qualities associated with women and femininity. This is due to the paramilitary nature of police academies, which emphasises an authoritarian management style, strict physical fitness standards, and rigorous physical training (Haarr 2005). These qualities are often associated with men and masculinity, and they are maintained through an informal 'hidden curriculum'. This curriculum teaches male trainees that it is acceptable to exclude, degrade, and objectify women, and to disrespect women in positions of authority (Prokos and Padavic 2002). In doing so, it also conveys to female trainees that such treatment is something they might expect or must learn to endure as part of their integration into the organisation. Chappell and Lanza-Kaduce (2010) found that paramilitary themes overrode themes in the formal curriculum, such as community policing and problem-solving, by linking them to non-curricular elements such as marching, posting, discipline and war stories. War stories are narratives of specific incidents or situations narrated by instructors during academy classes or field training, emphasising the danger and uncertainty of police work (Ford 2003).

Gendered training can make female recruits feel 'othered' from the outset and can also reduce their confidence in their work (Garcia 2021). Rabe-Hemp (2008) found that most female officers experienced sexual harassment, discrimination, and disrespectful treatment during their police academy and field training stages in the US. They acknowledged that the training process established hegemonic masculinity embedded in police culture. Similarly, Haarr (2005) discovered that sexism experienced during training influenced female recruits to leave their service voluntarily during the early stages. Furthermore, female officers go through a police training curriculum that exaggerates gender differences, and they may be acculturated to masculine policing values and attitudes that limit them to work with women and children early in their careers (Garcia 2003; Rabe-Hemp 2008). Such gender role stereotypes affect female trainees' self-efficacy in certain areas of police work. Chu et al. (2020) analysed the case of a police college in China and found that female trainees were less confident than male trainees in their ability to perform police work well in both physical and mental terms. These results not only highlight the psychological barriers women face in the early stages of entering police organisations but also serve as an important starting point for exploring the potential for mental resilience and adaptability, as some female officers have either overcome such perceptions or conditions or have not internalised them from the outset.

Scholars argue that more than gender sensitivity training is needed to address these persistent issues. Chu et al. (2020) argue that police academy curriculum should focus on enhancing female trainees' skills that increase their confidence in their role as police officers and on improving their mental resilience. Some scholars emphasised the need to increase the number of female instructors at the academy to encourage positive perceptions of women in policing among trainees (Brown et al. 2014; Kim and Gerber 2019). Meanwhile, Wesley Haba et al.

(2009) found that feminist orientation, rather than gender, is the most consistent predictor of support for female officers, indicating the need to integrate feminism into the formal curriculum as early as the police training stage. This means that police training must include education that allows all members to reflect on gender equality and discrimination.

**Gendered barriers to promotion**

Acker (2012) explained that class hierarchies that contain gender and racial patterns are constantly created and renewed through organisational practices, thereby sustaining gendered organisations. When examining the rank distribution within police organisations in many countries, a gendered pattern is found, with women predominantly occupying lower ranks (Prenzler et al. 2010; Shjarback and Todak 2019; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020; Garcia 2021; Silvestri and Tong 2022). Various factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in higher ranks.

First, there are cases where female officers who wish to be promoted are excluded or discriminated against. In particular, the old network of men within the police force, where male bonding and nepotism operate, is identified as a factor hindering women's advancement (National Institute of Justice 2019; Clarke and Smith 2023). Silvestri and Tong (2022) show that female officers in Europe experienced gender stereotyping, appearance judgements, viewing women as a threat to the status quo, and other subtle forms of gender discrimination during the promotion process. In this process, a police culture, which values empirical factors and idealised leaders that align with men, as well as the power of informal patronage, acted as barriers to women's promotion. *Homosociality*—the orientation of men towards other men—is particularly important in informal patronage (Silvestri and Tong 2022). Garcia (2021) also

analyses that women are less likely to have social capital, such as networks that provide mutual support relationships or access to resources within police organisations, which may limit their promotion opportunities. Gendered deployment can also act as a factor hindering women's promotion. For police officers aspiring to leadership roles, it is important to a build a balanced career profile through diverse experiences. However, women are often placed in organisational structures that make it difficult for them to secure such opportunities (Drew and Archbold 2023). However, the impact of these barriers may vary depending on the organisational structure. Alexander and Nowacki (2021) analysed how the organisational structure of police agencies affects the promotion of women in the US. The researchers found that the higher the proportion of female officers within an agency, and the more employees engaged in non-routine tasks (especially community policing), the more likely it was that women would work as managers in that agency. This implies that organisational structure changes may undermine the basis of the networks on which male ties operate.

At the same time, there are also cases where female officers do not wish to participate in the promotion process or give up promotion for various reasons. Archbold and Schulz (2012) summarise the general reasons why women choose not to participate in the promotion process, based on existing literature, as follows: preference for current shift work and assignments, family and childcare commitments, nepotism policies, tokenism and bias within the administration, self-perceived lack of police experience, disinterest in promotion, and the possibility of reduced pay. While some of these factors may impact both genders, others tend to affect female officers more. For example, Drew and Saunders (2020) point out that factors such as support from higher-ranking officers, encouragement from promoted colleagues, increased working hours, and family care responsibilities have a greater impact on female

officers than male officers when considering promotion. In this context, more gendered factors influencing the promotion decisions of female officers are gaining attention.

Tokenism is a factor that significantly affects female officers and can hinder their aspirations for promotion. In a male-dominated organisational culture, female officers are conscious of being regarded as 'tokens' and may hesitate to seek promotion to avoid the perception that their success is attributed to gender rather than merit. While studies by Archbold and Schulz (2008) and Archbold and Hassell (2009) indicate that female officers view their promotion prospects positively due to organisational needs, they avoid seeking promotion because they worry about being seen as promoted for being women. Male supervisors who overly encourage women to seek promotion or imply that they only need to meet minimum requirements to be promoted can also suppress women's promotion aspirations (Archbold and Schulz 2008). This is because token women are aware of negative views held by their male counterparts. A study conducted at a time when affirmative action initiatives to promote female officers to senior positions were being vigorously implemented within the Australian Police Force found that approximately 80% of male officers believed that female officers were more likely to be promoted because of their gender rather than their ability or experience (Drew and Saunders 2020).

Pregnancy and motherhood issues are one of the key factors limiting women's aspirations for promotion. Garcia (2021) points out that pregnancy can make certain work schedules and police duties more challenging for women who are reproducing members of society. Although work-family balance is a concern for all police officers (Drew and Saunders 2020), female officers felt a great burden of caregiving (Schulze 2011). Women are more likely than men to adjust their work efforts based on their spouse's characteristics and their children's needs, as found in Maume's (2006) study. Female officers with children may also find it difficult to cope

with the new work schedule that comes with a promotion (Wertsch 1998). These factors can hinder female officers' upward mobility in the workplace. Alexander and Charman's (2024) research on senior police officers in England and Wales revealed that individuals in senior leadership roles displayed comparable career trajectories, irrespective of their gender. Nevertheless, the authors caution that this homogeneity conceals the gendered differences inherent in the career advancement process, especially concerning the management of family obligations within a policing context characterised by long working hours, as will be discussed in the following section. The study highlighted that concerns regarding the reconciliation of family responsibilities with professional commitments significantly influenced women's engagement with leadership roles. These findings imply that the advancement of female officers is shaped not only by individual capabilities and ambitions, but also by life circumstances, including caregiving responsibilities, alongside the gender norms and structural limitations that surround them.

Some scholars have shown interest in identifying the factors that positively influence the likelihood of female officers being promoted or their promotion aspirations. Women's interest in seeking promotion is directly linked to improving their representation in management positions. In Whetstone and Wilson's (1999) study in the US, female officers who pursued both childcare and promotion had to take advantage of a 'very short window of opportunity'. This implies that female officers must time their promotions according to the developmental stages of their children. Morabito and Shelley (2018) also examined the mechanisms by which some women are successfully promoted in police organisations in the US. They explained that systematic identification and monopolisation of *kairotic moments* by female officers is crucial to their successful promotion. They argue that the conditions that lead to *kairotic moments* for

female officers are, first, the belief that they are capable and competent officers; second, the presence of family support, especially sharing household chores and childcare with a spouse; and third, the attainment of academic qualifications, such as a university degree (Morabito and Shelley 2018). Huff and Todak (2022) also found that the higher the education level of female officers in the US, the higher their interest in promotion and career advancement.

In summary, in policing, women are highly likely to have different experiences from male officers from the moment they enter the profession due to gendered organising processes such as recruitment, training, and promotion. These processes can strongly influence female officers' perceptions of organisational justice in terms of opportunities and outcomes. This thesis explores how such gendered organising processes systematically affect the entire career life cycle of Korean female officers.

## Organisational culture

Organisational culture is another substructure that supports gendered organisations. Acker (2012) explains that organisational culture includes definitions of gendered behaviours that are generally acceptable and unacceptable, as well as multiple images of masculinity and femininity. Policing has a strong organisational culture comprising a range of gendered meanings, symbols, values, and ways of thinking, seeing, and doing. This section will first discuss police culture in general and then focus on specific characteristics relevant from a gender perspective.

**Police culture attributes**

Police scholars have long studied police subcultures and occupational cultures, characterised as *cop culture* and *canteen culture*. The concept of police culture encompasses the informal biases, values, attitudes, and work practices that are prevalent among rank-and-file police officers (Waddington 1999). Paoline (2003) conceptualises police occupational culture as a shared set of coping mechanisms through which officers collectively respond to the structural strains of policing, particularly those arising from street-level interactions with citizens and organisational interactions with supervisors. While organisational culture refers to the overall culture of an organisation, subcultures are more localised and context-specific cultures within certain areas of the organisation. In this section, the term police culture is used as an umbrella concept encompassing both occupational cultures and subcultures.

While scholars differ on the attributes of police culture, orthodox descriptions include a culture of denial, broad discretion in law enforcement, a crime control-focused mindset, trouble avoidance, a culture of caution, social isolation, an *us versus them* mentality that prioritises defensive solidarity with colleagues, cynicism, pessimism, and an emphasis on masculinity (Paoline 2003; Loftus 2010; Waddington 2012; Angehrn et al. 2021). These attributes can tolerate organisational corruption and resist reform (Paoline and Gau 2017). However, there is debate about whether police culture can be assumed to be homogenous and universal. Some argue that it is not, as the culture is influenced by a variety of factors within a society (e.g. Paoline 2003; Cochran and Bromley 2003; Cockcroft 2014; Reiner 2017). Some scholars have moved beyond simplistic and deterministic definitions of police culture, noting that culture is shaped by the institutional structures in which it exists and the behaviour of its actors (Campeau 2015; Sanders et al. 2022).

There are discussions on whether the characteristics of police culture change along with police reforms and changes in the policing environment. Loftus (2010) highlights the durability of police culture in the UK, questioning whether police culture has changed as much as policing has evolved over the years. Loftus explains that incomplete changes in the policing environment, performance indicators based on a crime control mindset, a fragmented and unstable social environment, and the basic role of the police in enforcing the law have led to police culture persisting without decisive change. On the other hand, Campeau (2019) finds that 'cultural inertia' in Canadian policing is often known to exacerbate reform efforts, but that this is being undermined by a new generation of police officers. Brown et al. (2019) also find that recent developments and reforms within UK policing have resulted in a coexistence of cop culture (old) and managerial culture (new) in policing, suggesting that traditional cultures are facing potential challenges. Charman (2017) and Pearson and Rowe (2020) challenge the concept of a unified and consistent police culture, emphasising that different subcultures are formed based on generation, social background, and job roles. They show that police culture has the potential for gradual change based on internal differences and tensions, as seen in the attitudes and experiences of new police officers who clash with or distance themselves from the existing culture.

Despite ongoing debates surrounding diversity and change within police culture, gendered beliefs and norms remain a prevalent theme that has been extensively researched and documented by scholars worldwide. In this section below, I will focus on the gendered aspects of police culture, including crime control orientation and the emphasis on masculinity and long work hours, and explore how they affect both the internal and external workings of police organisations.

**Gendered police culture and its impact**

First, a crime control orientation is a prominent feature of police culture. The perception that the role as crime fighter is an intrinsic function of the police has long dominated police organisations. In the myth of the police role as crime fighters, the police are summarised as a force for good, fighting dangerous others (Waddington 2012). In this myth, the core competence of each police officer becomes the ability to be physically robust. This perception has contributed to the belief that women are not suited for law enforcement due to traditional gender stereotypes. Despite research showing that well-trained female officers are as capable as well-trained male officers (Schuck 2019), the preference for a crime control orientation and the belief in women's unsuitability for police work has long persisted. Silvestri (2017) argues that despite opportunities to fundamentally reshape cultural notions of being a police officer by emphasising community policing, victim protection, and better investigative techniques, the orientation towards action, risk, and excitement in policing has not diminished. Chen (2016) found that many police officers in China believe that the most important task of policing is crime control; in this study, many officers believed that aggressive policing and fewer restrictions on the police's use of force were effective in controlling crime and helped protect police authority and safety.

However, the actual spectrum of police work is vast. Martin (1999) points out that while law enforcement duties are often seen as masculine tasks involving fighting crime, in reality, much of police work is dirty, unimportant, tedious, or unpleasant. Most calls involve service requests or maintaining order, which are often dismissed as feminine tasks. Martin expresses concern that the police tend to emphasise the concept of a 'police force', neglecting that they also constitute a 'police service'.

A crime control-oriented mindset is closely linked to hegemonic masculinity within police organisations: the 'cult of masculinity' has been identified as a hallmark of police culture (Young 1991; Silvestri 2006; Silvestri 2017; Brown and Silvestri 2020a; Angehrn et al. 2021). The concept of masculinity here is not a fixed entity, but a construction of practice achieved in social behaviour (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). While the content of hegemonic masculinity may vary depending on the particular society, it is generally strongly associated with notions of paid labour, the subordination of women, heterosexism, uncontrollable sexuality, authority, control, competitive individuality, independence, aggression, and violence capability (Prokos and Padavic 2002, p.442) . In policing, the cult of masculinity has been used to define women as unfit or deficient, often in association with physicality. In several studies, female officers have agreed that they are undervalued due to their physical stature (Hassell and Brandl 2009; Stichman et al. 2010). Claims that policing is dangerous for women and that the situations they may encounter in their day-to-day work are too much to handle contribute to discourses of hegemonic masculinity based on physical strength (Silvestri 2017).

The presence of female officers poses a threat to the police identity constructed around masculinity and male solidarity (Hunt 1990; Martin and Jurik 2006). In this regard, the 'boys club' describes exclusionary practices and relationships towards female officers as an informal system of male bonding and power maintenance (Rabe-Hemp 2008; Shelley et al. 2011; Sanders et al. 2022). The boys club, influenced by a masculine ethos rooted in physicality and a traditional crime-fighting mindset, requires female officers to prove their fit, unlike men, to enter the inner circle (Sanders et al. 2022; Alexander and Charman 2024). This culture places women in a position where they face structural constraints on exercising authority and power within the organisation. Obholzer (2019a) defines authority as the legitimate right to make

decisions that affect others within an organisation, explaining that it functions effectively when authority from above (approval from above), authority from below (trust from below), and authority from within (inner confidence) are in balance. In contrast, power derives not only from formal position but also from informal resources such as personal influence, networks, or charisma (Obholzer 2019a). Within a male-dominated organisational culture, female officers experience both authority and power in a weakened state, which can lead to their continued exclusion from decision-making and influence within the organisation.

Within such cultures, the implications of gendered authority and power extend beyond internal dynamics. Studies have shown that when law enforcement agencies have a culture that is heavily masculinised, it can have negative consequences. Organisational cultures that place a value on physicality and aggression lead police officers to use more violent means in law enforcement (Haarr and Morash 2013; Choo 2019). Rawski and Workman-Stark (2018) identify *show no weakness*, *strength and stamina*, *put work first*, and *dog-eat-dog* as characteristics of a competitive culture of masculinity in policing, and show the negative impact on officers at the individual, organisational, and community levels. The study found that *show no weakness* prevents officers from receiving the organisational support they need to cope with the pressures of the job; *strength and stamina*, *dog-eat-dog* lead to the ostracisation of officers who are unable or unwilling to conform to masculine norms; *put work first* hinders career advancement opportunities for women, who tend to have greater family responsibilities. Furthermore, communities are more likely to experience aggressive attitudes and excessive use of force by officers (Rawski and Workman-Stark 2018).

Notably, a masculinised police culture systematically adversely affects Gender-Based Violence (GBV) victims. Research has provided extensive evidence of a lack of empathy for victims,

failure to provide adequate information, lack of referrals to appropriate support services, siding with perpetrators, blaming victims, and a reluctance to take victims' complaints seriously (see Carrington et al. 2022). This reflects a tension between the emotional demands of victim-centred policing and the dominant masculine norms of police culture. Emotional labour, which necessitates the active management and regulation of emotional expressions in various situations (Hochschild 1983; Black and Lumsden 2020), is a fundamental aspect of police work. However, this requirement may be especially salient for female officers, who are often expected to adhere to gendered expectations concerning acceptable emotional displays and are more likely to be assigned to roles requiring empathy and care-oriented forms of emotional labour (Martin 1999; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Angehrn et al. 2021).

On the other hand, Silvestri (2017) points out that the uncritical acceptance of the term machismo or the cult of masculinity can work in ways that significantly hinder analysis of the variation and complexity of gendered performances and identities within the police. Silvestri explains that understanding the realities of gendered police cultures that are both inclusive and exclusionary, enabling and disabling, progressive and regressive, requires a much more complex awareness of how gender is routinely played out within the police. In this respect, Silvestri highlights the importance of 'time' in police culture. The idea is that how time is used, valued and understood within the police plays a key role in maintaining gender inequalities in public and private life (Silvestri 2017).

Within police organisations, there is a culture of acceptance in which 24-hour shifts, overtime, and being expected to be on call at all hours of the day and night are commonplace (Dick and Cassell 2004). Ellis (2017) notes that women leave the police force at a higher rate during maternity and parenthood than at any other time, citing the above working practices as an

essential reason. Charman and Tyson (2024) also point out that organisational inflexibility within police organisations, including conflicts with family care responsibilities and restrictions on part-time work, is one of the key factors that make it difficult for women to continue their careers. Silvestri (2006) explains that police officers seeking leadership positions must demonstrate their ability to be available for work at any time to gain the organisation's trust. However, female officers with limited time resources find it difficult to meet these standards, placing them at a disadvantage in upward mobility within the organisation (Silvestri et al. 2013).

Ultimately, police cultures associated with *doing time* make it challenging to improve women's representation in policing, including retention issues and a lack of female managers. Many countries have made policy to improve this, such as introducing part-time and flexible working. Research has shown that these policies have succeeded in some areas (Ward and Prenzler 2016). However, Newton and Huppatz (2020) show that without a change in organisational culture, it is difficult to ensure the effectiveness of these policies. The Australian female officers in their study could not fully utilise part-time and flexible work schedule options because approval was at the discretion of their superiors (mostly men). Similarly, recent UK-based studies suggest that despite various initiatives aimed at improving work–life balance, both men and women continue to experience pressure to work long hours to demonstrate trust, commitment, and competence, with women being more adversely affected by these expectations (Silvestri 2018; Alexander and Charman 2024).

As the importance of changing police culture is emphasised in gender equality initiatives, scholars are focusing on whether police reform and changes in the policing environment can bring about changes in gendered police culture. For example, changes in the police paradigm,

such as a stronger outward orientation, an emphasis on professionalism, and the spread of community policing, can promote the weakening of crime-fighting identities (Silvestri et al. 2013). The emphasis on equality and diversity agendas has also been linked to increased representation of women in policing, which may in turn weaken masculine cultures and foster more supportive organisational structures for women (Schuck 2019). The '#new breed' of police officers in Charman's (2017) UK study recognised the diversity of the police role, as they expected policing to be a service and a role to help citizens rather than a crime fighter. Jon (2022) also identifies positive changes to the masculinised police culture in Norway as a result of broader changes in society and gender composition within the police force. However, there is also evidence that the masculinity of police culture persists despite reforms. Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir (2022) study of Iceland found that despite changes in external conditions, the ideal of the police officer as masculine and physical is still alive and well within organisations. Brown and Silvestri (2020a) similarly analyse structural changes in the UK, such as the entry of university graduates, evidence-based policing practices, and a professionalism agenda, including an emphasis on procedural justice, that could undermine the male version of police culture, but the evidence to date suggests that their impact on gender equality has been weak.

In summary, within a police culture in which men's bodies, their sexualities, and their relationships to life beyond work are portrayed as the image of the ideal police officer (Silvestri 2017), women are often constructed as less suited to policing roles, positioned as a challenge to established police identities. Drawing on these debates, this thesis explores how and to what extent women are integrated into policing in South Korea by examining how police culture shapes female officers' work experiences and career trajectories.

## Gendered identities

Gendered identity is another factor that shapes gendered organisations. Scholars have explored how female officers construct their identities and images for integration and acceptance within police cultures where dominant norms of the 'ideal' police officer are organisationally and culturally defined in masculine terms. This section examines the discussion of female officers in relation to tokenism, and then explores various studies of occupational identity as a coping mechanism utilised by female officers.

### Tokenism and women in policing

The police are both a gendered organisation and one of the bureaucracies with historically low female recruitment rates, which is common across the world. Kanter (1977) defines a group heavily dominated by a particular type of person as a skewed group, naming those who make up 15% or less of the group as tokens. Kanter (1977) describes the effects of tokens as *visibility*, which creates pressure on tokens to perform; *contrast*, in which the dominant group isolates tokens by reinforcing cultural barriers; and *assimilation*, which traps tokens in restricted roles. Tokens can feel great pressure to perform well because they know that their actions have symbolic consequences (they may be representative of an entire category). Conversely, dominants may exclude tokens from informal socialisation networks by exaggerating differences between themselves and subordinate members when challenged or uncomfortable. The three token effects mentioned above can result in psychological and physical stress for the token group (Kanter 1977).

Historically positioned as a minority within the organisation, female officers often perceive themselves as tokens and tend to behave in certain ways due to the pressure to prove themselves.

This has been consistently confirmed in numerous studies, indicating that they experience high levels of stress and difficulties in performing their duties effectively (Martin 1979; Belknap and Shelley 1993; Wertsch 1998; Krimmel and Gormley 2003; Gustafson 2008; Archbold and Schulz 2008; Angehrn et al. 2021). For example, Krimmel and Gormley (2003) found that US female officers working in police stations with less than 15% female representation reported lower job satisfaction and experienced fatigue and low self-esteem compared to female officers in police stations with higher female representation. Haarr and Morash (2013) also show female officers in the US expressed feelings of pressure to constantly prove themselves against male colleagues' expectations of their capabilities throughout their careers.

On the other hand, the tokenism theory has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on numerical proportions. For instance, Yoder (1991) points out that Kanter's theory overlooks the fact that the gender of the token can affect its status. Token women and token men may have different experiences, and tokenism only seems to affect women who work in gender-inappropriate jobs (Yoder 1991). Williams (1992) also explained that token men working in female-dominated occupations such as nursing, primary school teaching, librarianship, and social work were not discriminated against as tokens. Instead, token men were able to advance their careers through structural advantages. Ott (1989) and Yoder (1991) argued that when the proportion of token groups increases and their presence becomes more noticeable, rather than the tension easing as predicted by tokenism theory, the majority group's perceived threat increases, leading to intensified resistance and backlash. For example, in Taylor Greene and del Carmen's (2002) US study, female officers in both high and low female representation agencies had similar perceptions of their male colleagues, with a few exceptions, and acknowledged workplace stress. This suggests that a simple increase in numbers alone is

unlikely to alleviate gender hierarchies or conflicts within organisations.

Explanations based on tokenism are useful for understanding the difficulties faced by female officers as a minority group within the organisation. However, they are insufficient for gaining a deeper understanding of the various coping strategies and occupational identities of female officers as agents. The following section discusses how female officers construct their identities to be integrated and accepted in gendered organisations.

**Occupational identities of female officers**

Within gendered organisations, female officers must navigate the conflict between societal norms about women, personally preferred gender expressions, and acceptable gender expressions for police officers (Kringen and Novich 2018). In this context, the concept of *doing gender* provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the behaviour of female officers. *Doing gender* emerged when West and Zimmerman (1987) emphasised that gender is not a natural, intrinsic attribute of an individual—attributed status—but rather something repeatedly done in interactions with others—achieved status. According to them, *doing gender* is a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that create differences between women and men that are not natural, essential, or biological. *Doing gender* appropriately can contribute to maintaining, reproducing, and legitimising institutional arrangements based on sex categories (West and Zimmerman 1987). For example, female officers may benefit from being accepted by their peers through *doing gender*, but it can also reinforce organisational environments where women are excluded and devalued (Kringen and Novich 2018). Meanwhile, *doing gender* also implies that gender is something that can be deconstructed and undone. According to Deutsch (2007), *undoing*

*gender* means resisting gender norms or engaging in social interactions that reduce rather than reinforce gender differences. The *doing/undoing gender* approach can help to expose the agency of male and female actors in maintaining or challenging the status quo (Chan et al. 2010).

The identity strategies of female officers within the police organisation can be understood as practices that negotiate the tension between organisational norms and gender norms. Hochschild (1973) pointed out that in traditional organisations, professionalism tends to be de-feminised, while femininity becomes de-professionalised. Within this structure, Martin (1979) explained that female officers adopt one of two strategies. *POLICEwomen* seek equal treatment with men, actively participate in patrol duties, and pursue success within the organisation. In contrast, *policeWOMEN* conform to male-dominated expectations, avoid patrol duties, or strategically utilise gender stereotypes. While the latter strategy is more easily accepted by male colleagues, it can also result in the informal restriction of female officers' roles. In this way, the strategies adopted by female officers are not simply a matter of role selection, but rather part of a continuous process of negotiating their identity between the exercise of authority and gender norms within the organisation. This is deeply related to the reality that, even when authority is officially granted, it is not fully recognised in practice.

Numerous studies have revealed that female officers experience *doing gender* in a more nuanced and multifaceted way. For example, Rabe-Hemp (2009) questions binary strategies such as *POLICEwomen*/*policeWOMEN* and shows that US female officers are collaboratively engaged in both *doing gender* and *doing police work* in their daily work. The female officers in this study saw themselves as more proficient than their male colleagues at feminised modes of policing, such as responding to victims, community policing, and dealing with children and

young people, because they were more empathetic and communicative and less likely to use force. This can be understood as an attempt to reconstruct or positively appropriate existing gender norms rather than simply repeating them, and can be explained by the concept of *redoing gender*. This concept was formally used by Morash and Haarr (2012) in their analysis of the diverse identities and practices of female officers. According to Haake (2018), *redoing gender* is a process of learning and reshaping existing gender norms in new and different ways within an organisation. However, Rabe-Hemp (2009) argued that these strategies can contribute to reinforcing hegemonic masculinity within organisations by emphasising gender differences.

Meanwhile, Morash and Haarr (2012) reveal that female officers in the US have complex and positive occupational identities that do not conform to a single sex category. While acknowledging fundamental differences between women and men (*doing gender*), many female officers in their study recognised that these differences were tendencies rather than absolutes. Additionally, a significant number of women valued femininity over masculinity, reversing the hierarchy of gender differences (*redoing gender*). Some officers also recognised that, at least in some times and places, police work is not inherently associated with gender or sex categories (*undoing gender*). By showcasing the diverse identities of female officers, the authors challenge the notion that they are a homogeneous group and emphasise that their location in the police hierarchy differs. The study found that low-ranking women were more likely to essentialise gender differences, while higher-ranking women resisted externally imposed negative identities (Morash and Haarr 2012).

Other studies note that *doing gender* is not fixed but is constantly negotiated. In Chan et al.'s (2010) longitudinal study, Australian female officers were divided into three groups: *doing*

*gender/ undoing gender/ doing and undoing gender*. The *doing gender* group believed that women were inherently different from men and should not perform the same police tasks as men. In contrast, the *undoing gender* group wanted women to be treated equally as policemen and felt that physical fitness should not be a gender issue. Finally, the *doing and undoing gender* group believed that men and women should be treated equally as police officers while acknowledging that men and women bring different qualities to the job. This group did not see difference and equality as mutually exclusive. Here, *doing and undoing gender* are similar to the concept of *redoing gender* mentioned earlier, but they are not identical. *Redoing gender* refers to practices that reconstruct or appropriate existing gender norms in new ways, while *doing and undoing gender* can be understood as negotiated practices that both accept and challenge those norms simultaneously. In fact, female officers who participated in this study showed a tendency to move toward *doing gender* rather than *undoing gender* as their career and rank increased. The authors note that participants took on childcare responsibilities over time and, through demonstrating their police capabilities to a certain extent, police work became less pressing for them. This demonstrates that *doing gender* is fluidly constructed within the context of individuals and organisations.

Some scholars have argued that the concept of *doing gender* has become increasingly 'misused', becoming a theory to explain the persistence of gender and the inevitability of inequality. They argue that research should focus on *undoing gender* (Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009; Chan et al. 2010). In line with this argument, some recent studies emphasise the *undoing gender* aspect of female officers (Haake 2018; Jon 2022).

The concept of androgyny has also been used more contemporaneously to explain the occupational identity of female officers. Androgynous individuals are people who score high

on both masculinity and femininity in the sex role inventory and tend to avoid strict adherence to masculine or feminine traits (Brown and Silvestri 2020b). In Swan's (2016) study, 38% of US female officers exhibited androgynous tendencies, while approximately 40% of UK female officers in Brown and Silvestri's (2020b) study demonstrated such tendencies. The concept of androgyny is useful for understanding the fluctuating and fluid occupational identities of female officers.

Meanwhile, organisations may encourage or coerce female officers to *do gender* appropriately through formal policies or informal practices. An individual's gendered identity can affect their willingness to accept or reject these gendered roles within the organisation. Female officers are known to use less force than male officers, to be more ethical, and to have higher communication skills in their interactions with women and children (Silvestri et al. 2013; Barnes et al. 2018; Schuck 2019; Shoub et al. 2021). As a result, organisations may assign female officers to units that frequently work with women and children, which can be seen as a gendered policing strategy that emphasises *doing gender*. Some female officers may prefer this strategy, particularly those who embrace *doing gender*, as evidenced in countries like India, Kuwait, China, Taiwan, and Dubai (Chu 2019; Shen 2019; Strobl 2020; Natarajan and Babu 2020; Carrington et al. 2022). On the other hand, female officers who adopt an *undoing gender* strategy may feel pressured and resist gendered policing strategies. Humiston and Rabe-Hemp (2020) note that female officers' preference for gendered roles may provide them with growth opportunities but also contribute to re-establishing existing gender role norms.

In summary, female officers in gendered organisations are often regarded as tokens, face higher performance pressures than their male colleagues, and are prone to isolation or limited roles. In this context, female officers accept, resist, or negotiate gender norms based on their

occupational identity and seek integration within the organisation in various ways. This thesis aims to analyse how Korean female officers construct their occupational identities and how this influences their survival strategies and career navigation.

## Job interactions

Acker (2012) explains that gendered substructures are created and reproduced in work interactions between colleagues and between people at different levels of power. Women in male-dominated settings may face exclusion or marginalisation in these interactions, and sexuality, in particular, can complicate work relationships (Acker 2012). This section examines the literature on the experiences of harassment and discrimination that female officers face and interactions between female officers.

### Status of harassment and discrimination

Sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the police is a common phenomenon around the world. Kringen and Novich (2019) analyse cases from countries as diverse as the Netherlands, Australia, the US, South Africa, Taiwan, and India, showing that sexual harassment and gender discrimination against female officers persist in countries with and without a high proportion of women in the police force. In a study by Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir (2018), Icelandic female officers experienced ten times more sexual harassment and 1.6 times more bullying than their male counterparts; notably, one in seven male officers in the study held reverse discrimination perceptions, believing that women's position within the police was better than men's. In a study by Somvadee and Morash (2008), approximately 87% of the sampled US female officers reported hearing lewd jokes or offensive comments,

and approximately 70% reported being treated differently because of their gender. In this study, female officers, in particular, reported experiences of not being allowed to demonstrate their skills, such as being continually assigned the least important tasks in high-risk situations based on male colleagues' views that women could not 'do the job'. This reflects the reality in which female officers' formally granted authority is repeatedly disregarded within a gendered organisational culture. Drawing on interviews with male and female Canadian police officers, Murray (2020) demonstrates that most male officers engage in gender-blind sexism by refusing to acknowledge gender inequality in their organisations, while female officers experience workplace sexism and engage in daily adaptive strategies to resist gender inequality. These gendered realities can occur regardless of where women are positioned within the hierarchy. Brown et al. (2019) and Alexander and Charman (2024) show that senior female officers in the UK continue to experience sexual harassment and gender discrimination within their organisations, pointing to the ineffectiveness of anti-harassment policies in the workplace.

Meanwhile, it is expected that such harassment and gender discrimination practices will change in line with broader societal changes, the rise of gender equality agendas in policing, and the establishment of official policies against sexual harassment. In particular, formal policies against sexual harassment can define specific behaviours as unacceptable and stipulate penalties for perpetrators, thereby deterring harassment and tolerance of such behaviour (Connell 1991; Somvadee and Morash 2008). However, Martin and Jurik (2006) have observed that, due to social and legal changes, as well as changes in organisations that appear gender-neutral, women experience less overt hostility but face more subtle barriers in everyday interactions and organisational practices. Rabe-Hemp and Miller (2018) also highlight that while traditional blatant harassment or discrimination is gradually being replaced by less overt

practices, such as excluding women from decision-making processes or implementing policies to create an equal workplace that do not consider women's bodies.

**Dynamics of harassment and discrimination**

Many scholars suggest the perceived threat that the very presence of female officers brings to police organisations as a cause of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. This links to the masculinity-emphasising organisational culture discussed earlier, demonstrating that each component of the gendered substructure influences and interacts with one another.

Based on Hunt's (1990) analysis, the presence of female officers poses a threat to the sociopolitical world of male police corruption and patronage and masculine work identities such as crime-fighting; Hunt argues that men often resort to belittling women to reinforce their cohesion, minimise the risk of exposure and punishment, and maintain their sense of masculinity. Brown et al. (2019) explain the sense of threat felt by male officers based on social identity theory. This theory suggests that individuals define themselves based on the social identities they have or are given by others. To maintain their self-esteem, individuals tend to emphasise their differences from outgroup members and view ingroup members more positively (Stone-Romero and Stone 2005). Brown et al. (2019) explain that male officers may treat female officers unfairly and view them as an outgroup to protect their identity. The study also found that female officers who identified more strongly as *POLICEwomen* were more likely to experience sexual harassment from male officers, possibly due to being perceived as a greater threat to male groups (Brown et al. 2019). Berdahl (2007) also found that women who exhibited 'uppity' behaviour that challenged male dominance experienced more sexual harassment than women who did not. The perceived threat to female officers also affects respect for female leaders. As Silvestri (2006) notes, female leaders pose a double threat to the

natural order of policing as ‘female officers’ who are ‘in control’. In Haake’s (2018) Swedish study, most female police leaders reported that men are favoured over women as leaders in their agency. Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir (2018) shed light on the traits of male officers who hold unfavourable attitudes towards their female colleagues. Their research indicates that younger policemen and those unsatisfied with their career growth are likelier to harbour negative opinions of women. The study suggests that this could be attributed to unfulfilled masculine entitlement (Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir 2018).

Female officers’ responses to workplace harassment and discrimination can vary. Haarr and Morash (2013) found that US female officers adopted a range of strategies, including straight talk, working hard to prove competence, enduring, seeking help from a mentor, avoiding, and taking formal action. Unfortunately, sexual and gender-based harassment can take on the characteristics of organisational violence in gendered organisations, which leads many female officers to hesitate before taking an active response. This can be due to fear of retaliation, barriers to promotion, or a belief that reporting will not lead to resolution (Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir 2018; Brown et al. 2019; Garcia 2021; Casey 2023). Of course, responses may also depend on a female officer’s situation and position in the organisation. Haarr and Morash (2013) explain that higher-ranking women may be more proactive in taking formal action, such as reporting to authorities and filing lawsuits, than lower-ranking women. Participants in this study also show that as they rise in rank or tenure, they take various approaches to dealing with problems than they did earlier in their careers. In another study, female officers participated in sexual comments or jokes by male colleagues because such participation signalled their being ‘in’ the working group (Somvadee and Morash 2008, p.490).

For some female officers, career choices are influenced not only by professional goals but also by efforts to avoid or cope with discriminatory and hostile environments. Brown et al. (2013) have summarised studies from several countries, including the US, New Zealand, Sweden, the UK, and India, which show that male officers are reluctant to patrol with female colleagues. These attitudes are often rooted in mistrust of female officers' abilities to provide backup, potential emotional entanglement, and suspicion of accusations of deviance by male officers (Brown et al. 2013). Martin (1989) also explained that one of the reasons female officers move from patrol to support roles is the desire to work in a less hostile environment. Haarr and Morash (2013) also found that some female officers opted for career changes, such as switching divisions or moving to another police department, to escape unfair treatment by male colleagues.

**Interactions between women**

Under such conditions, positive interactions among female officers can be a significant factor in their empowerment. In particular, solidarity among women can enhance their perception of interactional justice that has been diminished by male colleagues or supervisors. However, relationships among female officers are difficult to explain in one dimension. Some literature shows that female officers provide support to their female colleagues, while other literature shows that female officers keep their distance from each other or prefer to work with male officers instead (Belknap and Shelley 1993; Martin 1994; Haarr 1997; Del Carmen et al. 2007). Rabe-Hemp (2009) discovered that female officers in the US refrain from supporting other women and socialising with them for fear of being isolated by their male colleagues or associated with negative stereotypes about women. Only half of the female officers who participated in Archbold and Schulz's (2008) US study responded that they felt camaraderie

with other female officers, and older women felt more camaraderie with female colleagues than younger women. The researchers suggest that this may be because older and more experienced officers have already proven their abilities to their colleagues, while younger women have not yet done so. Sanders et al. (2022) discovered that Canadian female officers understood brotherhood as gender-neutral and sisterhood as gendered. The women who participated in the study associated brotherhood with protection, camaraderie, and solidarity, and readily accepted it, while they rejected sisterhood because they believed it served as a means of identifying gender differences and thus hindered their inclusion. Sisterhoods were also difficult to form because of the gendered competition within the organisation, which created rivalries with other female officers (Sanders et al. 2022).

Webber and Giuffre (2019) analysed existing research exploring conditions that undermine solidarity among women in the workplace. The analysed studies broadly explain the difficulties in forming solidarity among women due to: firstly, negative stereotypes women hold about other women (e.g. Derks et al. 2011; Johnson and Mathur-Helm 2011; Sheppard and Aquino 2014); secondly, women's insufficient awareness of gender inequality (e.g. Rhoton 2011; Harris and Giuffre 2015; Britton 2016); and thirdly, women's self-devaluation of women's relationships, groups, and networks (e.g. Markiewicz et al. 2000; O'Neil, et al. 2011; Wright 2016). Webber and Giuffre (2019) criticise the discussions above for perpetuating negative stereotypes about women, overlooking larger structural inequalities within the workplace, and casting women as the culprits perpetuating gender inequality in such environments. Instead, the authors suggest a shift in research focus towards investigating the positive effects of intra-workplace female solidarity and identifying the conditions that foster it rather than focusing on women's lack of support for each other (Webber and Giuffre 2019).

Consistent with this perspective, Silvestri (2003) analyses cases in which female officers in senior ranks in the UK formed informal mentoring and support networks among women to alleviate feelings of isolation and to perform leadership roles. Similarly, Murray (2020) shows that Canadian female officers form communities with other women and mentor junior female officers as one of their strategies to overcome organisational exclusion. Likewise, Lavender and Todak's (2022) study on US female officers found that, even when formal mentoring programmes existed, informal mentoring was more widespread. However, they point out that each agency uses a strategy of assigning one woman to each department or leadership position to demonstrate a vague commitment to gender diversity, and analyse that this intensifies competition among women and hinders the formation of mentoring relationships (Lavender and Todak 2022).

Meanwhile, drawing on interviews with British female officers, Jones (2017) explores how formal mentoring programmes can support women in policing. Jones emphasises that these programmes can be a process of mutual growth for both mentors and mentees. In this study, mentoring was particularly effective in enhancing affective domains, where it helped to increase self-awareness and confidence. However, mentoring has also been criticised for potentially being associated with assumptions that women require 'extra help' to succeed (Clark and Smith 2023). In Haake's (2018) Swedish study, some female officers rejected the idea of developing initiatives exclusively for women, such as female-to-female mentoring programs. Haake mentioned the potential risk that support strategies targeting only women could reinforce the perspective that women are deviant or weak, while men are normal or strong, who do not require special measures.

This thesis goes beyond previous discussions to examine how workplace interactions affect

female officers' overall career exploration and police work performance. Additionally, through focus group interviews with female officers who practice female solidarity, as proposed by Webber and Giuffre (2019), it will explore the positive impacts of female solidarity and the conditions that facilitate its formation.

## Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter clearly demonstrates the gendered nature of policing and how structural and cultural constraints within police organisations, including gender stereotypes, have hindered women's participation in policing. Furthermore, the existing literature suggests that the career paths of female officers are constantly influenced, shaped, and negotiated at the structural level of gendered organisations. This thesis aims to empirically analyse these dynamics within the context of South Korea.

The next chapter examines the implications of women's representation in policing and the effects and limitations of organisational reforms aimed at improving representation. It provides an important comparative framework for interpreting the Korean context in the chapters that follow.

## [Chapter 3] Gender Representation and Reform in Policing

### Introduction

As many countries have implemented policy efforts to promote gender diversity in policing, the proportion of female officers has increased globally over time. Along with this, numerous international studies have explored what the presence of women means in policing and whether women possess qualities that differ from those of men in this field. While research findings are controversial, many countries have implemented measures to increase the proportion of women in policing as a means to enhance the legitimacy of police organisations, provide better police services, or drive organisational transformation.

This chapter examines discussions related to women's representation in policing from a global perspective. Here, the global perspective is not limited to listing various national cases, but rather recognises the tendency for discussions on women in policing to be concentrated in certain regions, mainly in the Global North, and seeks to examine a wider range of regions. This will help identify common challenges and regional differences related to gender representation in policing and provide a foundation for understanding the Korean context.

This chapter begins by examining why the presence of women in policing matters, focusing on aspects such as legitimacy, performance, and disruption. Then, centring on Brown's (1997) model, it highlights the process of integrating women into policing in stages. Brown's model has often been regarded as a starting point for evaluating how we might consider integration. This chapter details this model and critically assesses its value given contemporary discourse. It then examines the current state of gender representation in various countries, analysing the trends and implications revealed by these figures. Finally, it analyses the complex nature of the

policies and discourse that have been introduced to improve representation.

## Women's contribution to policing

In order to discuss women's representation in policing, it is first necessary to examine why their presence in policing is important. In this regard, representative bureaucracy theory provides a useful framework. This theory suggests that if bureaucracies reflect the demographics of the public they serve, they will be more responsive to that public (Song 2018). Researchers have identified three forms of representation: *passive representation*, where the demographics of the bureaucracy match those of the general population; *active representation*, where bureaucrats' values can translate into policies that benefit citizens with the same backgrounds; and *symbolic representation*, where the mere existence of bureaucrats can change citizens' attitudes and behaviour (Riccucci et al. 2014).

Schuck (2014) summarised the arguments of scholars and policymakers regarding the need to increase the employment and promotion of female officers over the past 40 years into three perspectives. The first is the moral perspective, which states that government-sponsored organisations should provide equal opportunities to women. From this perspective, women's representation is a matter of organisational legitimacy and social justice. The second is the performance perspective. From this perspective, women are seen as possessing unique skills, values, and perspectives in police work. This perspective maintains that female officers are more adept than men, especially in emotional labour and emotional work, and that organisations can benefit from having more women in their ranks. The third is the disruption perspective. From this perspective, women are seen as a destabilising force in police culture

because they are less likely to integrate the hypermasculine values of police culture into their own identities. By linking the previous discussion on representative bureaucracy with these perspectives, *passive representation* can be closely linked to the moral perspective, *active representation* to the performance perspective, and *symbolic representation* to the moral and disruption perspectives. This section examines international literature on the significance of women in policing, categorising it into three dimensions: legitimacy, performance, and disruption.

**Women and police legitimacy**

Police legitimacy is determined by the extent to which they are viewed as justified and respected by the public. When police organisations lose legitimacy, their ability to properly exercise social control and respond to victims of crime can be negatively affected (Tyler 2006; Schuck et al. 2021). Issues related to equality and diversity have continued to question the legitimacy of the police, which, in turn, impacts public satisfaction and trust in them (Silvestri and Tong 2022). Increasing the representation of women in policing has been used in many countries as a way to rebuild their legitimacy during times of crisis (Brown 1997; Archbold and Schulz 2012; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015; Schuck 2019). In this respect, Schuck (2019) argues that police cannot co-produce community safety with the public if women are denied their rights and excluded from the process of determining which control mechanisms are best suited to maintaining social order. A key message about the legitimacy of women's presence in policing is captured in an interview with a female officer in Brunei who participated in a study by UNODC et al. (2020).

*The police force is very unique, it is not like the army where they serve the nation. Police*

*serve the community. And the best way to serve the community is to reflect your community. So if your community is 50-50 then your force must also be 50-50 (UNODC et al. 2020, p.103).*

Recent empirical research has explored the impact of female representation in policing on citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy. Studies have focused mainly on gendered areas of work, such as units responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). In the US, research indicates that increasing the number of women in such units positively impacts citizens' perceived job performance, trustworthiness, and fairness towards the agency (Riccucci et al. 2014; Schuck et al. 2021). A study of South Asian countries similarly found that gender representation in GBV response units increased citizens' perceptions of police performance and fairness (Baniamin and Jamil 2023). There is also research that supports the presence of female officers in terms of police legitimacy in areas outside of GBV. Both male and female college student respondents in Todak's (2017) US study felt that increasing female representation in the police force would improve citizen perceptions of the police and provide an opportunity to address the negative social climate surrounding policing. The US study by Novich et al. (2018) demonstrates the negative impact of the biased gender composition of the police workforce on citizens' perceptions of legitimacy. Due to a male-dominated police force that was required to search only suspects of the same gender, the gang members in the study had concerns that the police were enforcing the law unfairly and penalising men.

**Performance of women police**

Female officers are primarily thought to have strengths in being less aggressive, using less force, and thus receiving fewer citizen complaints than their male counterparts. Lonsway et al. (2002) conducted a study that provided empirical evidence supporting this belief. The study

found that male officers in the US were significantly more likely to be involved in excessive force problems, resulting in higher civil liability payouts, sustained allegations, and citizen complaints than female officers. Similarly, an Australian study by Porter and Prenzler (2017) revealed that although women account for 26% of police officers, they only make up 15-16% of officers who receive complaints or are subject to specific allegations. Multiple studies have also indicated that female officers were less likely to use force or extreme control behaviours during citizen arrest situations than their male counterparts (Brereton 1999; Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2005; Rabe-Hemp 2008; McElvain and Kposowa 2008; Prenzler et al. 2023).

Schuck (2014b) investigated the underlying factors contributing to gender differences in police officer behaviour. Schuck found that female and male officers in the US use different types of emotional labour techniques when interacting with citizens. Female officers were more likely than male officers to use empathy, self-control, active listening, and conflict resolution skills (Schuck 2014b). These findings are consistent with the argument that female officers can excel in community policing (Miller 1999; Natarajan 2008; Natarajan and Babu 2020). In Rabe-Hemp's (2009) US study, female officers described themselves as more effective than men in protecting women and children or communicating with community members because they believed they possessed greater empathy and communication skills. However, qualitative evidence from Canadian policing suggests that these same gendered attributes are interpreted ambivalently in practice—valued as occupational assets in some contexts, yet also framed as excessive compassion or a liability for operational effectiveness in others (Angehrn et al. 2021).

In this context, there is an expectation that the performance of female officers in responding to GBV will be different to that of their male counterparts. For example, in Page's (2007) study, US female officers were less likely to accept *rape myths* (Burt 1980) when dealing with victims

of sexual violence compared to male officers. Sun (2007) shows that US female officers are more likely to adopt a supportive approach when dealing with citizens involved in domestic violence compared to male officers. Carrington et al. (2022) and Natarajan and Babu (2020), analysing the case of women's police stations in Argentina and India, respectively, argue that female officers are more effective and victim-friendly in responding to GBV than male officers. Other studies show that the presence of female officers has a positive effect on the willingness of GBV victims to report incidents (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; UN Women 2011).

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that there are conflicting findings on women's performance in policing. When it comes to competence in responding to GBV, some studies show that female officers also engage in negligent practices similar to those exhibited by male officers in handling GBV incidents (Nelson 1996; Jamel 2010; Wentz and Archbold 2012). Additionally, while some studies express concerns that an increase in female officers may lead to a weakening of police performance (Lott 2000; Smith 2003), other studies support that there is no correlation between the proportion of female officers and organisational outcomes (Shoub et al. 2021; Pyo 2022). Furthermore, there are studies showing that there are no gender differences in job performance qualities between men and women. For instance, studies have shown that male and female officers make similar arrest decisions when confronting suspects (Stalans and Finn 2000). There are also no gender disparities in using physical force/coercion (Terrill and Mastrofski 2002; Paoline and Terrill 2004), and some studies have shown no significant gender differences in citizen complaints about the police (Bergeron et al. 2008; Hassell and Archbold 2010). These contrasting findings highlight the limitations of essentialist approaches that seek to justify the presence of women in policing by emphasising gender differences.

Public or organisational gendered expectations of female officers can be detrimental to female officers. These gendered expectations often lead to women being assigned to tasks deemed 'female,' which can limit their professional development by preventing them from experiencing other types of work. Amid these expectations, female officers often experience role conflict between their role as fair law enforcers and the expectation of advocating for women's rights (Nelson 1996; Grant 2000; Hautzinger 2020). Grant (2000) found that American citizens have higher expectations of female officers in responding to domestic violence, and when female officers fail to meet these expectations, they are more likely to be evaluated more harshly than their male counterparts. Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2005) point out that just as expectations of what women cannot do have hindered women's advancement in the past, expectations of what women can do better than men are also potentially harmful.

**Women as disrupters**

Discussions from a disruption perspective emphasise that increasing the representation of female officers can improve organisational integrity or that female officers can act as catalysts for police reform and transformation.

First, there is a widespread belief that increasing the number of women will improve organisational integrity because women are more honest and ethical than men (Goetz 2007; Corsianos 2012; Barnes and Beaulieu 2014; Ahmad 2020). This belief has led to the practice of replacing male officers with their female counterparts in police traffic departments with high levels of bribery (McGirk 1999; Tegel 2014; Watson and Close 2016). Studies show that women are less likely to engage in corrupt activities than men, which supports the idea that women are more ethical than men (Swamy et al. 2001; Dollar et al. 2001; Torgler and Valev

2006; Rivas 2013).

However, if this approach is based on essentialist notions, it can be challenged by opposing findings. For instance, a study conducted by Waugh et al. (1998) in Australia disputes the assertion that female officers are inherently more ethical or likelier to report misconduct than their male colleagues. More recently, Ivkovi et al. (2023) also conducted a comprehensive review of empirical studies from several countries and found no consistent gender differences in police officers' attitudes toward ethics and integrity. Goetz (2007) analysed cases in South Asia and argued that women's limited involvement in corruption is not due to their higher moral standards, but rather to structural factors that exclude them from opportunities for corrupt behaviour. Similarly, Ahmad (2020) argues that gender is not a useful category for reducing police corruption when considering the socio-political and institutional structures in which the Pakistani police operate, based on interviews with female officers.

According to some scholars, regardless of women's actual behaviour, they are perceived by citizens as more trustworthy and less corrupt. Watson and Moreland's (2014) analysis of 140 countries over time found a correlation between women's representation and lower perceptions of corruption. Barnes et al. (2018) explored why people believe that female officers are more effective at combating police corruption. They suggest that this perception is based on gender stereotypes: the more the public believes that women are bureaucratic outsiders, risk-averse, and cautious, the more they are perceived to be effective in reducing suspicions of corruption.

From a disruption view, several studies have highlighted the positive influence of female officers in transforming traditional practices and male-dominated cultures in police organisations. While some findings suggest that gender diversity can lead to negative outcomes

(e.g. increased citizen complaints), Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2014) argue that agencies with more women are more likely to have institutional rules for collecting and quantifying complaints, countering this claim. Schuck (2014b) argues that female officers are less likely than their male counterparts to assimilate hypermasculine beliefs into their identity and, therefore, may be able to disrupt masculine police cultures. Moreover, increasing the number of female representatives can result in positive changes in internal policies, including options for flexible work arrangements and childcare support (Schuck 2019). Brown et al. (2020) explore the idea of *liminality* among female officers in their study. *Liminality* refers to a state of transition where individuals no longer conform to traditional norms and cannot fully transition to a new status. For police officers, this state of *liminality* presents a unique opportunity to challenge existing organisational structures. The study highlights that British female officers are more inclined towards evidence-based policing and principles of fairness, disrupting the traditional command and career advancement models described by Silvestri (2018).

In this way, the various ways in which female officers contribute to strengthening organisational legitimacy, improving the quality of police services, and fostering cultural change raise the need to understand 'integration' as more than simply a matter of numerical representation. The next section explores what integration actually means and how it has unfolded under certain conditions and constraints, focusing on Brown's (1997) model.

## Women's integration into policing

Brown (1997) presented a model explaining the stages of women's entry into and progress in

policing based on a comparative analysis of European countries. This model has been used in various countries' case studies and has been continuously expanded, while also receiving criticism. More recently, the model has been revisited by Brown and Silvestri (2020b), who critically re-examine its assumptions and the conditions under which women's integration into policing can be realised. This section examines the process of women's integration into policing as presented in this model in stages, and then looks at the applicability and limitations of this model to non-Western regions, in order to understand the diverse forms and meanings of integration.

**Brown's (1997) progress model for women police**

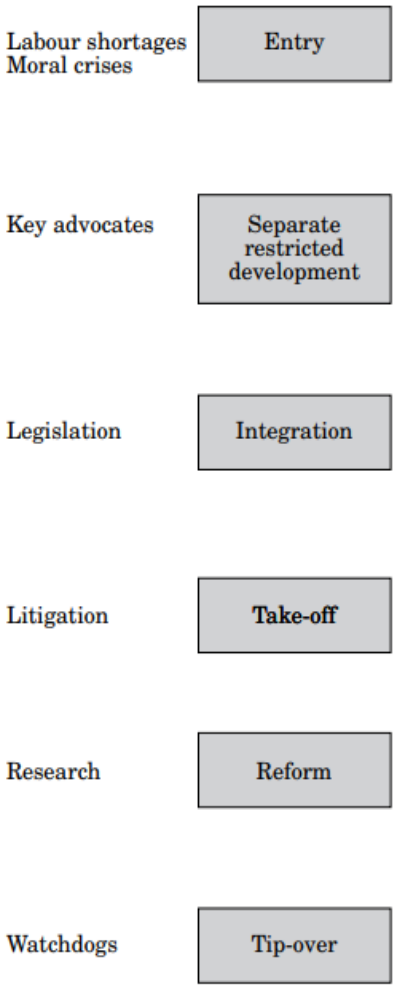
According to Brown's (1997) model, women in policing progress through six stages: *Entry*, *Separate Restricted Development, Integration, Take-off, Reform*, and *Tip-over*. Throughout each stage, there are drivers that propel women forward and inhibitors that hinder their progress. The ultimate goal of the model is to achieve full integration of women into policing, ensuring that they receive equal treatment, opportunities, and outcomes as their male counterparts (Schuck 2019, p.40). Each of these steps is explored in more detail below.

The first stage is *Entry*. According to Brown, women's entry into the police force was triggered as a desperate remedy in the face of political, social and economic crises such as women's entry struggles, labour shortages, and policing needs related to socially disadvantaged groups. Although some members of the public and male officers opposed women's entry into the force, it was tolerated due to practical considerations such as insufficient staffing and male officers' inability to handle tasks involving women and children. In this way, women enter the police force with the assumption that they are innately qualified to work with women and children.

This rationale aligns primarily with the *performance* perspective among the three discussed earlier. The need to crack down on prostitution has also been a rationale for the entry of female officers, and this role is often criticised today as reinforcing traditional gender roles, with early female entrants engaged in controlling women rather than protecting them (Garcia 2021).

The second stage is *Separate restricted development*. At this stage, female officers play a distinct role from their male counterparts and are often a minority group. They may work in administrative and support roles or in women-only units, such as women's police stations, dedicated to working with children, youth and women. While some may be content with their specialised role, others may seek to expand into male-dominated positions. However, as Brown notes, the *crab basket effect* can thwart the latter effort and change. This effect is a phenomenon in which crabs in a bucket try to crawl out of each other, but as each one gets closer to the top, one of the crabs below reaches out and pulls it back down (Fischer and Gleijm 1994). This metaphor describes the damaging behaviour of members of an oppressed group. Some people within a marginalised group engage in behaviour that harms others to

**Figure 2 Model for women's entry into policing (Brown 1997)**



prevent similar others from gaining opportunities for advancement and achievement (Miller 2019). Conversely, advocates such as women's networks who champion the value of female officers and push for their expanded roles can catalyse progress.

The third stage is *Integration*. While societal norms have traditionally limited women's roles in the workplace, laws mandating equal opportunities have enabled the integration of women into traditional police functions. These institutional measures are often grounded in *moral* perspective advocating equal rights and opportunities for women. Nevertheless, this integration has reignited male officers' resistance to their female counterparts, as it did during their initial inclusion. Some agencies have attempted to avoid integration by seeking exemptions from relevant laws or altering recruitment criteria, including physical standards and marriage restrictions. Informal relationships between men and women in the workplace may deteriorate as women advance into areas previously occupied by men.

The fourth stage is *Take-off*. During this stage, women work to establish a solid organisational presence. Brown notes that female officers who bravely litigate against gender discrimination in entry requirements, deployment, and promotion procedures are the driving force behind this stage. As courts override men's formal resistance to women's integration, male pushback may shift to more covert forms of female control, such as subtle discrimination and sexual harassment (Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020). This shift marks a destabilisation of traditional organisational culture and can be interpreted through the lens of *disruption*.

The fifth stage is *Reform*. In this stage, research or investigation may show that individual female officers' complaints reflect broader issues within the force or may uncover new concerns. Police forces may lack the necessary expertise to address male-dominated cultures

and, therefore, may enlist external experts, commission research, and adjust their personnel policies to address gender considerations better. This approach can help document women's experiences within the policing system and develop institutional policies (Strobl 2020). However, backlash can undermine these efforts and erode trust, which may neutralise the impact of research findings.

The sixth and final stage is *Tip-over*. In the last stage, the organisation sees a rise in female officers, leading to a more balanced gender representation. According to Brown, this stage is marked by a 25% female-officer ratio, which is a tipping point. However, achieving numerical representation does not automatically lead to substantive gender equality, and many cases today demonstrate these limitations. This will be discussed in more detail in the final section. Brown points out that even at the *Tip-over* stage, glass ceilings and institutionalised sexism may persist, and emphasises the importance of external 'watchdogs' engaging in remedial interventions to ensure that policies and procedures can influence internal culture.

As examined above, Brown's (1997) model demonstrates that the progression of women in policing is an evolutionary process. It starts with specialisation or segregation and gradually moves towards integration as gender role boundaries break down. Early on, external factors such as political and social change and legislation significantly drove women's progress. However, as the process progresses, the organisation's role becomes crucial. The organisation's stance is influenced by the importance of diversity and equality issues to its legitimacy. The model acknowledges that resistance is consistently present at every stage, albeit to varying degrees and in different ways. In the early stages, individuals deal with resistance, but in the *reform* stage, organisations deal with it. In other words, the model suggests that the organisational level is where resistance to women's integration into policing must be addressed

to achieve *Tip-over*. Of course, the willingness of female officers to integrate is a fundamental prerequisite.

**Criticisms of the model**

However, Brown's model has been criticised for its lack of international applicability, as it does not fully explain the experiences of female officers working in traditional countries with distinct political and sociocultural contexts different from those of the Global North (Natarajan 2008; Shen 2019; Chu 2019; Strobl 2020; Hautzinger 2020; Carrington et al. 2022). Two main questions arise concerning the above model. The first is whether all countries go through the six stages Brown (1997) outlined regarding women's progress in policing and the second, whether women around the world uniformly seek the same role in policing as men.

The first question stems from the fact that the way women are integrated into policing can take different forms in different countries. It is particularly concerning in the case of nations in the Global South. For example, in some Global South countries such as India and Brazil, women tend to be assigned primarily to departments that support victims of sexual violence or deal with women and children (Natarajan and Babu 2020; Carrington et al. 2022). According to Brown's (1997) model, women's progress in these countries is stuck in stage two, *separate restricted development*. Strobl (2020) argues, through a case analysis of Kuwait, that Brown's linear theory is too confining since some conservative and traditional countries present explicit and deeply ingrained cultural obstacles to women's progress in policing. Instead, she suggests that a cyclical model of women's entry, participation, and integration in these countries, in which they move forward and backward, is more plausible than Brown's model. Through a case analysis of Argentina, Carrington et al. (2022) critique Brown's model as based on a

perception of the Global North as the normative reference point for progress. They argue that Global North-centric epistemologies overlook the strengths of the women's police station system, which allows female officers to make distinctive contributions to policing. Through an analysis of the Indian case, Natarajan (2008) also argues that integration policies in specific countries must take into account the unique roles and needs of women in their cultures, and that Western models should not be imposed on traditional cultures. Shen (2019) also points out that Brown's model does not adequately explain the experiences of female officers in China. Shen's analysis reveals that, unlike in Western countries, the elimination of gender distinctions in Chinese policing is primarily enforced by the state rather than being advocated for by female officers. Under an authoritarian political system, Shen predicts that female officers are unlikely to demand reforms to change their gendered position. According to the studies above, Brown's model may not comprehensively explain the occupational experiences of female officers in these nations. In light of this, Hautzinger (2020) suggests that the advancement of female officers does not have to be a zero-sum choice, and that a hybrid model explaining the coexistence of diverse police roles could be a better explanatory framework.

With regard to whether women around the world uniformly seek the same role in policing as men, it is worth considering that female officers' attitudes towards gender integration may vary. In countries such as India, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Taiwan, and Dubai, not all female officers have embraced gender integration, unlike in the US or the UK (Strobl 2008; Natarajan 2008; Chu 2013; Chu and Abdulla 2014; Chu 2018). While some have embraced the concept of men and women performing the same roles, others prefer specialisation or segregation. Rather than integration, inclusion can be seen as the preferred goal (Garcia 2019). Given these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine individual female officers openly

challenging the current gendered policies and practices that drive the *take-off* phase. In Chu's (2013) study, Taiwanese female officers were less likely than their male counterparts to support gender integration, which required both genders to perform the same tasks (See also Chu and Tsao 2014; Chu 2019). In this study, male officers questioned women's ability to perform police work, but they also believed that men and women should perform the same or similar duties, given that they are paid the same wages. Similarly, in the UAE, most female officers believed that women could perform police work as well as men but preferred to focus on specialised tasks such as dealing with female victims, female offenders, and children (Chu and Abdulla 2014; Chu 2018). This differs from Brown's theory, which argues that women aspire to play equal roles with men in pursuing gender equality (Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020).

It is important to note, however, that the preference for specialisation or segregation is based on a hegemonic ideology of gender that asserts that men and women are fundamentally different and each has distinct roles. Within gendered organisations, work classified as 'female tasks' is often seen as less prestigious, marginalised from mainstream policing, and given less weight in promotion considerations, hindering women's upward mobility within the organisation (Morash and Haarr 2012; Murray 2020; Garcia 2021). Garcia (2019) argues that true equality can never be achieved through segregation or specialisation. However, it is necessary to pay more attention to the reasons and contexts behind women's preference for specialisation or segregation. Chan and Ho (2013) found that while women have made significant progress in Hong Kong policing, police organisations have encouraged police officers to conform to existing gendered expectations and promoted the separation of career paths for male and female officers. Under these circumstances, female officers can be good leaders, communicators, and managers, but not the best police officers (Chan and Ho 2013).

Brown and Silvestri (2020b) have expanded upon Brown's (1997) model by addressing previous criticisms. They emphasise that achieving gender equality in the police requires more than just numerical changes and highlight the following conditions for a successful *Tip-over* stage: changes in traditional gender roles, democratically accountable policing, equal opportunities legislation (including for policing), the right to seek legal action for unequal treatment, strong pioneers in the promotion of equal rights, relaxation of women's claims to exclusivity in jobs that deal with women and children, equal proportions of male and female supervisors, gender balance in all areas of policing tasks and roles, relaxed command-and-control hierarchies, and a policing model that prioritises community policing over the war on crime (Brown and Silvestri 2020b, p.104). This perspective reframes the *Tip-over* stage as not being an automatic outcome of numerical growth. It is particularly relevant to the Korean policing context examined in this thesis, where increases in women's representation have not eliminated structural and cultural constraints within police organisations. The following chapters consider the extent to which these conditions are reflected in South Korean policing.

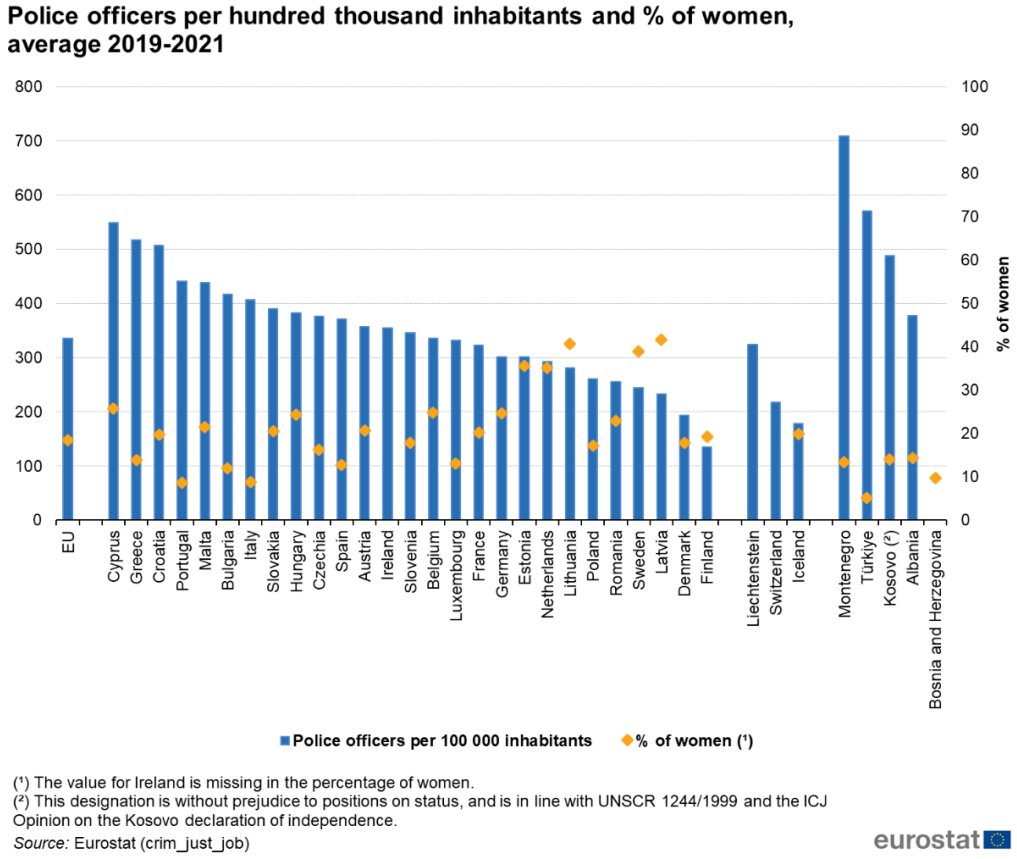
## Women's representation in policing globally

This section examines the current status of women's representation in policing in various countries and discusses global trends. The availability of gender-based police workforce statistics varies across different countries. In this thesis, it is not feasible to collate information on the status of women in police forces for all nations. Instead, this section concentrates on the latest data from countries where the percentage of women in policing is accessible through academic literature, national police agency websites, and annual reports. When publicly

available data could not be found, data identified through international organisation's reports or trustworthy news articles was included in the analysis.

First, in Europe, from 2019 to 2021, women accounted for an average of 18.5% of all police officers in EU countries, slowly increasing with minor fluctuations since 2010, when the figure was 15% (Eurostat 2023). As shown in the figure below, there are significant differences in the proportion of female officers among EU member states.

**Figure 3 Percentage of female police officers in EU countries**




***Source:*** *Eurostat, 'Police, Court and Prison Personnel Statistics', Statistics Explained, accessed 17 July 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Police,_court_and_prison_personnel_statistics#police_officers_per_100_000_inhabitants_in_the_2019-2021_period.2C_18.5_.25_were_females*

The EU country with the highest proportion of women in policing is Latvia (41.7%), followed

by Lithuania (40.8%) and Sweden (38.9%). Considering that no country had a female proportion exceeding 40% in policing as of 2018, the proportions in these countries represent a notable change. On the other hand, the proportion of female officers in Portugal and Italy was 8.7 % and 5 % in Turkiye. Although the situation varies across European countries, gender diversity in policing is generally low and tends to decrease with rank (Silvestri and Tong 2022; Fekjær and Alecu 2023). The UK is a country where female representation has improved significantly compared to 10 years ago. According to The House of Commons Library (2024), in 2023, the proportion of female officers in England and Wales was 35% of the total number of police officers, the highest figure since 2010, when it reached 26%. There has also been slow progress in increasing female representation in senior roles, with women now accounting for 30% of police officers at the rank of Chief Inspector and above in England and Wales, up from 14% in 2010 (The House of Commons Library 2024). These changes have been achieved through policy efforts to strengthen diversity and targeted recruitment efforts, but Laverick and Cunningham (2023) emphasise that gender equality in British police organisations remains constrained by structural and cultural barriers.

In the Oceania region, the percentage of female officers sworn in between 2021 and 2022 in Australia is 27%. There are regional disparities within Australia; for example, the proportion of female officers in Western Australia is 22%, while in Tasmania it is 34% (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2023). The proportion of women in Australian policing in 2017 (26%) was similar to the 2022 proportion (27%), suggesting that Australia is in a period of stagnation. New Zealand has a similar proportion of women in policing to Australia, but the trend is different. In 2022, women made up 25.3% of all police officers in New Zealand, an increase from 17.3% in 2011 and 19.7% in 2017. However, the proportion of women in senior

ranks, from Sergeant to Superintendent, remains at around 10%, indicating that women are underrepresented in senior positions (New Zealand Police 2022).

In North America, the percentage of female officers in Canada was approximately 23% in 2022. The percentage of women in policing in Canada has gradually increased, from 14% in 2000 to 19% in 2010 (Statistics Canada 2023). In the US, however, the percentage of women among law enforcement officers was only 13% in 2021, lower than in Canada.[2] The percentage of female officers in the US has increased only marginally from 10% to 13% in the more than 20 years since 1997, demonstrating that the analysis of Cordner and Cordner (2011), who noted that the US is stuck in a plateau, is still valid today. The underrepresentation of women in US policing stands out in comparison to other developed countries, not least because the US has produced some of the most extensive research and policy engagement on this issue. A similar pattern is observed in supervisory and leadership positions. Schuck (2019) points out that women remain underrepresented in senior and decision-making positions within US police organisations, a trend that is particularly pronounced in smaller agencies.

In South America, Argentina exhibits a relatively high proportion of female officers, with women accounting for 30.1% of the Federal Police in 2021 (Page-Poma and Duarte 2025). In Chile, the proportion of female officers reached 34% (Women in International Security 2020). In contrast, in Brazil, female officers constituted approximately 13% of the total police

[2] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Data Explorer,* accessed 17 July 2025, https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home; Statista, 'Gender Distribution of Full-Time Law Enforcement Employees in the U.S.', accessed 17 July 2025, https://www.statista.com/statistics/195324/gender-distribution-of-full-time-law-enforcement-employees-in-the-us/#statisticContainer

workforce as of 2023,[3] while in Colombia, the figure stood at 16.7% in 2022 (Palomino 2023). Despite this variation, women's representation in senior positions remains consistently low across South American police organisations (Ministerio de Seguridad 2022; Women in International Security 2020; Hernández-González et al. 2021).

There are also significant disparities between countries in African region. In South Africa, the percentage of female officers was about 31% in 2023, and women around 25–28% of senior management positions, which is relatively higher than in some other African countries (South African Police Service 2023). This reflects South Africa's efforts to rebuild the state and transform the public service (van der Spuy and Retief 2023). In Ghana, the proportion of female officers was approximately 28% in 2022. However, women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, with only 19% of all senior officers and only three women on the 21-member Ghana Police Service Board (Twum 2022). Conversely, in Kenya, the proportion of female officers in 2023 was 6.9%, indicating that women are significantly underrepresented compared to the African countries mentioned above. Additionally, the number of female officers in Kenya has decreased by half since 2018, causing concern from UN Women (Obar 2023). Despite efforts to implement various gender-based reforms in Kenya over the past few years, progress has been constrained by the strong influence of a male-dominated police culture (Onyango and Natarajan 2023).

In the Middle East, women's representation in policing is generally lower than in the regions examined earlier. In Saudi Arabia, there were no sworn female police officers until 2020

[3] Statista, 'Share of police workforce in Brazil in 2023, by gender', accessed 8 Jan 2026, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1558397/brazil-police-officers-by-gender/

(Strobl 2020), indicating that women's institutional entry itself was highly restricted. In Jordan, as of 2020, the proportion of female personnel within the Public Security Directorate stood at a mere 5.6% (INTERPOL 2023). In the UAE, women were reported to constitute approximately 10% of Dubai Police personnel as of 2013, and in 2019 Dubai Police set a medium-to-long-term goal of increasing the proportion of female officers to 20% by 2030 (Wessels 2023). Israel had a female officer ratio of approximately 31% as of 2021, demonstrating a relatively high level of female representation within the Middle East region (INTERPOL 2023). While publicly accessible statistical data across the Middle East remain limited, available international sources indicate a common pattern whereby the proportion of women declines sharply as rank increases within police organisations across the region (INTERPOL 2023; UN Women and the Jordanian National Commission for Women 2022).

The East Asian region, where South Korea is located, generally has low representation of women in policing. In China, women accounted for only 14% of all police officers in 2021 (Xinhua 2021), while Hong Kong had a slightly higher rate of 18% as of 2023 (Hong Kong Police Force 2023). In Japan, the proportion of female officers was 10% in 2019, but considering that it was 4% in 2002 and 6.8% in 2012, the proportion of women in Japanese policing has been increasing very slowly (Japan National Police Agency 2020). Female representation in senior positions is also low in Japan, with only 2.9% holding managerial positions in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department in 2020 (Tomomi 2021). In South Korea, as of 2024, the proportion of female officers was approximately 16%, which was similar to the overall trend of underrepresentation in East Asia. Gender diversity dwindles as the rank

escalates, with women occupying only 5.6% of the positions beyond Senior Inspector.[4] These figures for South Korea remain relatively low compared to those reported in several countries across Europe, Oceania, and Africa. In particular, the lack of gender diversity in senior positions can be interpreted as an indicator of the structural constraints within the Korean police organisation.

The proportion of female officers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region varied from country to country. As of 2019, the proportion of female officers was 6% in Indonesia, 8% in Cambodia, 15% in Vietnam, 16% in Thailand, 17% in the Philippines, 18% in Malaysia, and 20% in Laos. Overall, women are underrepresented in policing, with the gender gap widening at higher ranks (UNODC et al. 2020). UNODC et al. (2020) analyse that although official data from ASEAN is limited, the growth in the number of female officers has been slow or stagnant over the past few decades. In India, the proportion of female officers was approximately 12% as of 2022, which is roughly double the figure from 2013. This increase is seen as the result of efforts such as the Federal Home Ministry setting a target in 2009 to raise the proportion of female officers to 33%, but compared to other Asian countries, the representation of women in policing remains relatively low. While some states in India have a female officer ratio of only 3%, others have reached 22%, highlighting regional disparities. Despite the growing number of women in the police force, women remain underrepresented in senior positions in the Indian police force (Bureau of Police Research and Development 2022; Jain 2023). In Pakistan, the proportion of female officers is the lowest among the countries examined above, accounting for less than 3% of all police officers. Although the government

[4] Korean National Police Agency, *Police Statistics*, *Information Disclosure*. Accessed July 17, 2025. https://www.police.go.kr/www/open/publice/publice0201.jsp

has made efforts such as introducing gender quotas in recruitment, these measures do not appear to have had a significant effect (UNOPS Pakistan 2023; Kayani and Siddiqui 2023).

As we have seen, the level of women's representation in policing varies from country to country. Some countries have a female officer ratio of less than 5%, while others have a ratio of over 40%, and even within the same cultural sphere, the degree of women's participation in policing differs. The presence or absence of specific policies or institutional measures alone is insufficient to explain these differences, as it is clear that complex factors such as the organisational culture of each country's police force, socio-political conditions, and gender norms play a role. Of course, some countries have gradually improved women's representation in policing through institutional intervention. However, despite accumulated policies and research, some countries still have low representation or remain stagnant (Prenzler and Sinclair 2013; Silvestri and Tong 2022). For example, the US has not exceeded 15% female officers and has remained stagnant for decades. This illustrates that the production of knowledge and discourse does not necessarily translate into meaningful organisational transformation.

Above all, a common global trend is the sharp decline in the proportion of female officers as rank increases. This suggests that a numerical increase alone does not guarantee substantive gender equality or an equitable distribution of opportunity and power within organisations. In some countries, such as South Africa and the UK, increases in the overall number of female officers have been accompanied by gains in senior representation, but such changes are generally interpreted as possible only when supported by deliberate policy efforts or institutional frameworks. The gap between quantitative expansion and qualitative transformation is deeply connected to the central concerns of this thesis.

However, despite the importance of such international comparative analysis, there are still limitations in accessing gender-sensitive statistics by country. Restrictions on data access, language barriers, and the absence of sex-disaggregated statistics make comparative research difficult. Researchers recommend that governments prioritise accountability and collect sex-disaggregated data to create publicly available annual reports (Prenzler and Sinclair 2013; UNODC et al. 2020)

The statistics presented in this section go beyond simply presenting the current situation and raise the need for a more nuanced understanding of the structural and cultural conditions surrounding the integration of women into policing. The following section examines the complex nature of institutional interventions to increase women's representation and how they work within organisations.

## Reforming representation: institutional approaches and their limits in policing

This section discusses policy interventions aimed at improving women's representation in policing, particularly the effectiveness of affirmative action. Affirmative action implemented in recruitment and promotion processes has brought about visible results, but it has also revealed various issues and limitations. Therefore, it is necessary to critically examine the complexity and dilemmas of institutional approaches.

### Institutional interventions for gender diversity: opportunities and dilemmas

Affirmative action aims to establish an internal labour market that mirrors the organisation's external labour market, provides greater opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups,

and embraces diversity in the workplace (Leck et al. 1996). Gender equity initiatives in the police frequently stress affirmative action, which is believed to benefit women in police careers (Ward et al. 2020). Numerical targets or quotas in recruitment and promotion are policies frequently adopted by police forces as part of affirmative action. Both are driven by either organisations or governments, designed to address imbalances in representation and provide opportunities for underrepresented groups; however, quotas are more fixed, rigid, and binding than numerical targets. These measures are radical in nature and are therefore likely to elicit both support and opposition from members and the general public (Thornton 2003; Thomas and Plaut 2008; van den Brink and Benschop 2018). For example, the gender-based targeted recruitment strongly promoted in Australia faced significant criticism and concerns due to a lack of public explanation regarding the mechanisms for achieving these targets, the lack of transparency in selection criteria, and over-reliance on the personal commitment of the police commissioner (Ward et al. 2020).

It is necessary to discuss the stagnation of women's representation in policing, which was examined in the previous section, in relation to the efficacy of affirmative action as radical interventions. This is because affirmative action may encourage women's participation in policing as intended (Martin 1991; Prenzler et al. 2010), but conversely, it may also produce unintended consequences by hindering such participation or making women's status within the organisation more precarious (Heilman 1997; Drew and Saunders 2020). For example, gender quotas implemented in recruitment may facilitate women's entry into the police force, but conversely, they may restrict women's entry. Many countries in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region, as well as Australia, China, South Korea, and India, have implemented targeted recruitment or gender quotas to increase women's representation in

policing (Jeon 2007; Ward et al. 2020; UNODC et al. 2020; Shen 2022). In most countries in the ASEAN region, formal female recruitment quotas or targets typically range from 10% to 30%. The 10% quota is intended to ensure a minimum number of positions in some countries, while in others, it serves as a maximum for annual female recruitment (UNODC et al. 2020). When it acts as a maximum limit, affirmative action may instead operate as a means of limiting women's entry. A similar occurrence has been noted in South Korea where gender quotas for police recruitment are established as fixed quotas instead of minimum quotas. These quotas are set considerably lower than the number of women applying, which has led to criticism for restricting women's access to police careers (Jeon 2007). In the US, some police departments took affirmative measures such as minority quotas, which led to an increase in the number of female officers. However, gender quotas were abolished due to conflicts with the principle of merit-based hiring, low quotas that fell far short of equality, and debates over tokenism (Prenzler and Sinclair 2013; Ward et al. 2020). Therefore, the effectiveness of affirmative action in recruitment relies on individual country contexts and the system's operation.

Brown et al. (2014) argue that eliminating gender quotas in hiring is a priority for creating a non-discriminatory career process in policing, but Gültekin et al. (2010) propose that gender quotas in hiring are still necessary to alleviate minority status in policing. While one side criticises the same system as gender discriminatory, the other accepts it as an inevitable measure to address structural inequality. Such affirmative action is intervention aimed at correcting inequality, but it also inherently contains a dual nature that can lead to tension and resistance within the organisation.

Affirmative action in promotion can also have contradictory effects. Affirmative action can affect organisational members' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice, which in turn

can affect their attitudes towards minorities and integration in the workplace (Leck et al. 1996). For example, recent work by Drew and Saunders (2020) in Australia during the peak of affirmative action has shown that male officers often held negative views towards female officers, believing that women were promoted solely due to their gender and not their competence. In the US, some female officers were reluctant to apply for promotion because they did not want to be perceived as having been promoted as a result of affirmative action (Archbold and Schulz 2008; Archbold and Hassell 2009; Todak 2023). Ward et al.'s (2020) Australian study also found that some female officers were concerned that affirmative action would make them appear incompetent. These responses reflect the internalisation of male-dominated organisational culture among female officers themselves. In fact, some female officers in this thesis shared similar experiences, providing important clues as to how institutional measures influence individual perceptions and behaviour. Heilman (1997) argues that affirmative action programmes do not remedy gender discrimination but may instead contribute to the problem by stigmatising beneficiaries as incompetent and promoting negative stereotypes of women. Heilman explains that affirmative action programmes have unintended effects: the more the beneficiaries of affirmative action are rare within the organisation, the more vague the performance settings, and the more unstructured the decision-making process.

Meanwhile, van den Brink and Benschop (2018) offer a different perspective and focus on the positive effects of resistance that arise during radical interventions. They view the resistance to a gender quota system implemented in the selection of top managers in Dutch policing as sparking debates about previously unquestioned values and bringing to light implicit stereotypes that exist within organisations (van den Brink and Benschop 2018).

**Beyond numbers: rethinking gender representation and reform in policing**

When considering representation, discussions and policies often centre around numbers. It is important to set goals for each country regarding how much representation women need to achieve to leave their minority status. There are varying views on the tipping point. According to Kanter's tokenism theory, once tokens reach a tipping point of 15% representation in the workplace, issues start to decrease (Stichman et al. 2010). Brown (1997) suggests that minority members are considered normal and receive adequate mutual support to avoid marginalisation when representation reaches 25%. Research by the British Association for Women in Policing suggests that women should make up 35% of organisations to achieve satisfactory career progression and cultural integration within policing (Brown et al 2006; cited in Drew and Archbold 2023). In the US, a national initiative called 'About 30x30' considers 30% to be the threshold at which organisational change actually begins (The 30×30 Initiative 2024). Opinions on the tipping point vary, but studies related to representative bureaucracies suggest that meaningful changes in organisational culture will naturally occur when a certain level of female representation is achieved across various ranks (Yang and Konrad 2011; Hong 2021; Pyo and Lee 2023).

It is necessary to recognise that the results of empirical studies on the impact of women's representation in policing are not entirely consistent. For instance, there is conflicting evidence on the effect of increasing the number of female officers on the arrest rates of GBV perpetrators. Some studies show that an increase in the proportion of female officers within an agency leads to a decrease in GBV and an increase in the arrest rate of perpetrators (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; Miller and Segal 2019). However, other studies have found no significant change in the arrest rate or even a decrease (Alderden and Ullman 2012; Johnston and Houston 2018).

Even when considering various contextual and organisational factors that may influence the results, these conflicting findings reveal the limitation of not taking into account intra-gender differences.

It is also worth noting that while efforts to increase the number of women in policing are essential, they are unlikely to be a sufficient condition for gender equality and justice in organisations. Some scholars highlight the organisational implications of changes in the number of women in policing, noting recent findings of more gender similarities than gender differences in policing performance (Poteyeva and Sun 2009; Archbold and Schulz 2012). However, there are doubts about whether simply increasing the number of women can genuinely alter the gendered nature of policing and improve the status of female officers. Silvestri (2018) cautions that there is a need to go beyond numbers when claiming organisational success, as an overly optimistic discourse around women's representation in policing can both conceal and obscure gendered power dynamics within the police. This is supported by research findings that even in countries where women's representation in policing has improved significantly, female officers continue to experience gender discrimination on a daily basis, just as they did before (Kringen 2014; Haake 2018; Brown et al. 2019; Sanders, Gouweloos and Langan 2022; Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir 2022; Drew and Archbold 2023). For example, the London Metropolitan Police, following external pressure from civil society, made efforts to improve gender diversity in policing, resulting in women accounting for over 30% of the entire organisation and achieving good representation of women at all ranks (Clarke and Smith 2023). However, recent reports have revealed that female officers working in London regularly face gender discrimination and misogyny (Casey 2023; Turner 2024). This supports the idea that simply including more women in police organisations will not bring

about change and that organisational reform must be addressed at both policy and practice levels (Ely and Meyerson 2000).

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the implications and current status of female representation in policing and explores how female officers have progressed with broader social changes and gender initiatives within policing from a global perspective. The distribution of female representation in policing cannot be explained simply through numerical comparisons between the Global North and South. Even in countries in the Global North, where research and policy discourse are well developed, there are cases where substantial improvements in representation remain limited. This highlights the gap between knowledge production and institutional implementation, suggesting that the integration of women into policing is shaped by a complex interplay of national systems, cultural norms, and organisational resistance.

While highlighting gender differences in policing performance can sometimes help understand women's roles in policing, it can also be vulnerable to criticism for its essentialist approach. Nevertheless, gender diversity and equality have become important factors in ensuring the legitimacy of policing. In addition, female officers are considered key actors in disrupting traditional policing models and promoting a new organisational culture. Therefore, more women need to be involved in policing, particularly in decision-making positions. Affirmative action, as a radical intervention, can be helpful here, but it can have different effects depending on the specific programme content and modus operandi. Yet such measures alone cannot ensure full integration of women into policing, which requires organisational reforms beyond

gender diversity.

The upcoming chapter is dedicated to exploring gender and policing within a South Korean context, building upon the international discussions presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Analysing the process of women's integration into Korean policing, along with the social discourse surrounding them, institutional conditions, and cultural constraints, will serve as a foundation for understanding the contradictory position of women in Korean policing today and the lived experiences shared by the research participants.

## [Chapter 4] Gender and Policing in South Korea

### Introduction

The integration of women into South Korean policing has been a gradual process over a long period of time, and cannot be fully explained by institutional improvements or increases in the proportion of women alone. This chapter outlines the institutional and cultural context necessary to understand this complexity and examines how the integration of Korean female officers into the organisation has unfolded under specific structural conditions. This also marks the starting point for exploring the first research question of this thesis—what approach has been adopted by the police in South Korea in its development of gender diversity and equality for its workforce?

This chapter does not merely describe the trajectory of institutional changes, but critically examines the gendered organisational logic and cultural expectations that have influenced the integration of female officers. By using Brown's (1997) model as a framework, it examines how this model can be applied to the South Korean context and what limitations it reveals. Firstly, it provides an overview of the overall system of the Korean police, including its organisational structure, recruitment, and promotion. It then draws on existing domestic studies to examine the gendered experiences of women within the Korean police organisation. Subsequently, using Brown's (1997) model, the entry and role expansion processes of Korean female officers are examined by period. Finally, recent public debates and misogynistic discourses surrounding female officers are reviewed.

## Overview of the Korean police system

### Police operational systems

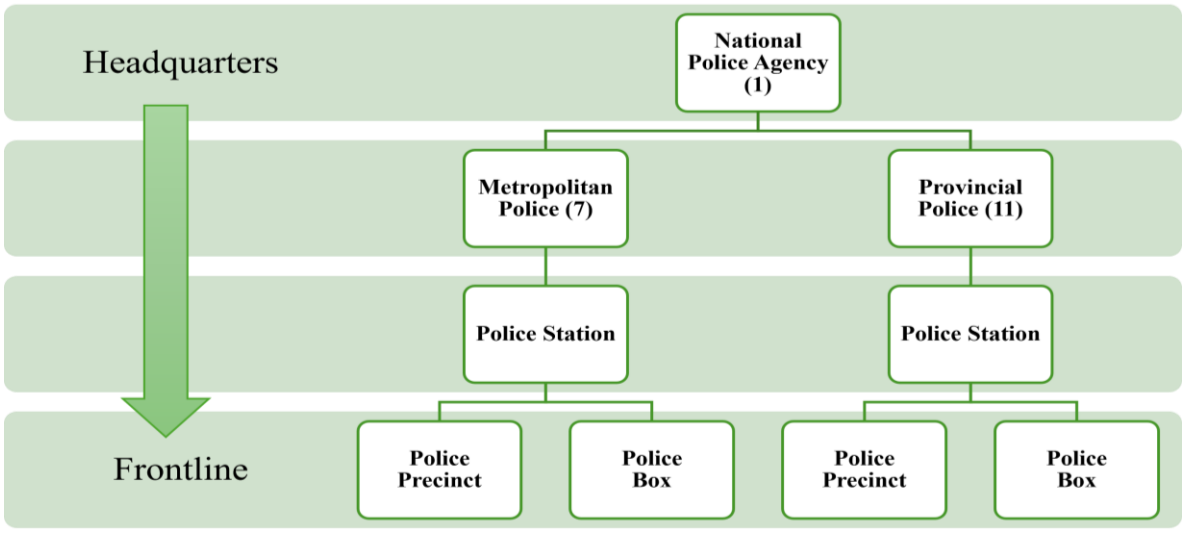
Views vary regarding the commencement of the modern South Korean police system. Some attribute it to the Police Bureau under the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGK) in 1945, following Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule (Korean Police Historiography Committee 1972). However, others trace its origins further back to the establishment of the Police Bureau (Gyeongmucheong) during the 1894 Gabo Reforms (Kim 2012; Korean National Police Agency 2023a). This thesis will centre on the time after the USAMGK era, during which women were integrated into policing.

The South Korean police have faced challenges in maintaining neutrality as a law enforcement agency due to political instability since its inception. Their authority was frequently undermined as they were exploited as a political tool under the quasi-democratic military regime until 1992. However, with the subsequent presidencies of democratic, non-military civilians, the police have managed to distance themselves from the stigma of being the regime's minions (Moon and Morash 2008; Kim et al. 2016). Originally established in 1948 as an auxiliary to the Minister of the Interior, the police became independent as a central administrative agency in 1991, forming the current structure of the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA).

South Korean police have traditionally followed a highly centralised national police system, in which authority over key aspects of policing, such as recruitment, promotions, welfare, and major policy decisions, has been concentrated in the KNPA. However, since 2021, the police have adopted a hybrid system that integrates the centralised national police system with the

newly established local police system. Despite these changes, the organisation remains highly centralised, with a vertical structure that runs from the KNPA down to the frontline, as shown in the figure below. In detail, the structure is as follows: KNPA (1) - Metropolitan (7) and Provincial Police (11) - Police Stations (258) - Police Precincts (630) and Police Boxes (1430). Police stations are categorised into first, second, and third tiers based on the number of people within their jurisdiction. Police station chiefs are generally Senior Superintendents, and in some major police stations, Superintendent Generals are appointed (KNPA 2022, p.5). Public services, such as responding to police calls, are mainly carried out at the Police Precinct/Box level, while professional law enforcement functions, such as criminal investigations, are primarily conducted at the Metropolitan/Provincial Police and Police Station levels (Kim 2019).

**Figure 4 Structure of the Korean police organisation**



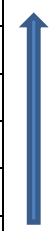

**Personnel and rank structure**

At the end of 2024, South Korea had 131,807 police officers, of whom 21,000 were women,

accounting for only 15.9% of the total.[5] The Korean police rank structure consists of a hierarchical system with a total of eleven ranks: Police Officer → Senior Police Officer → Assistant Inspector → Inspector → Senior Inspector → Superintendent → Senior Superintendent → Superintendent General → Senior Superintendent General → Chief Superintendent General → Commissioner General.

As shown in the table below, approximately 96.8% of Korean police officers hold ranks at or below Senior Inspector, while only 3.2% hold ranks above Superintendent or above. This structure shows that personnel are concentrated in the middle ranks, with a sharp decrease in personnel as one moves up to higher ranks. Women are predominantly concentrated in the lower ranks. While 47.5% of all police officers hold the rank of Assistant Inspector or below, this proportion rises to 67.8% among female officers. Furthermore, only 5.6% of police officers with the rank of Senior Inspector or higher, which can be viewed as managerial positions, are women. This gender imbalance in rank distribution suggests the existence of gender-based structural constraints within the organisation.

**Table 2 Number of Police Officers by Rank in South Korea (2024)**

| Rank | | Total | | Female | | Female Share |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | % | Number | % | |
| Senior Superintendent General ↑ |  | 39 | 0.03 | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| Superintendent General | | 91 | 0.07 | 2 | 0.01 | 2.2% |
| Senior Superintendent | | 746 | 0.57 | 43 | 0.2 | 5.76% |
| Superintendent | | 3274 | 2.48 | 281 | 1.34 | 8.58% |
| Senior Inspector | | 27086 | 20.55 | 1433 | 6.82 | 5.29% |
| Inspector | | 38010 | 28.84 | 5010 | 23.86 | 13.18% |

[5] Korean National Police Agency, *Police Statistics*, *Information Disclosure,* accessed 17 July 2025, https://www.police.go.kr/www/open/publice/publice0201.jsp

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assistant Inspector | | 26818 | 20.35 | 5582 | 26.58 | 20.81% |
| Senior Police Officer | | 20302 | 15.4 | 4828 | 22.99 | 23.78% |
| Police officer | | 15441 | 11.71 | 3821 | 18.2 | 24.75% |
| **Total** | | 131807 | 100 | 21000 | 100 | 15.9% |

***Source**: Korean National Police Agency, Police Statistics, Information Disclosure, accessed 17 July 2025, https://www.police.go.kr/www/open/publice/publice0201.jsp*

## Recruitment system

South Korea has long maintained a multi-track recruitment system that enables individuals to enter the police force at different ranks. The recruitment process is divided into two categories: open competitive and career competitive recruitment. First, open competitive recruitment is a system targeting the general public and is mainly applied to new recruitment for the ranks of Police Officer or Inspector. Every year, thousands of police officers are recruited at the Police Officer rank, while Inspectors are appointed through the police cadet programme (50 cadets annually) and graduates of the Korean National Police University (KNPU) (100 candidates annually).

Second, career competitive recruitment targets personnel with specific professional experience and qualifications. This pathway covers a range of ranks, from Police Officer to Senior Inspector. Lawyers, accountants, pilots, and other professionals with specific expertise are recruited and assigned to specialised roles within the police force. This pathway focuses on qualifications and professional expertise rather than general public examinations.

**Table 3 Police officer recruitment in 2023** (KNPA 2024, p.251)

| Category | Total | Senior Inspector | Inspector | Assistant Inspector | Senior Police Officer | Police officer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 4,485 | 40 | 163 | - | 248 | 4,034 |
| **Open competition** | 3,676 | - | 150 | - | - | 3,526 |
| **Career competition** | 809 | 40 | 13 | - | 248 | 508 |

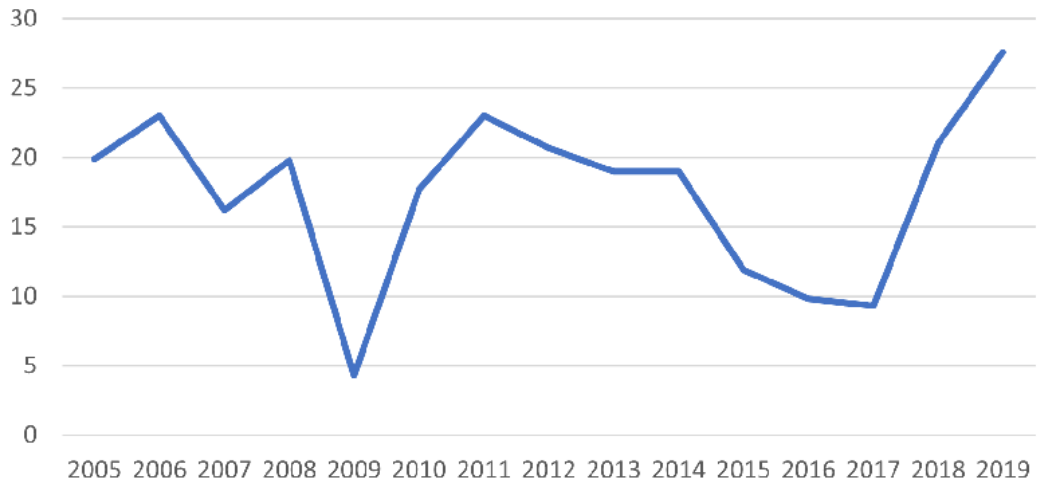
Career competitive recruitment has been implemented for a long time through a gender-integrated process, while open competitive recruitment has followed a gender-segregated approach. In the case of open competitive recruitment, fixed quotas for men and women are set annually under a target system, and the selection procedures are carried out separately by gender. Such gender-segregated recruitment has been the subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding potential violations of the right to equality and concerns over job suitability (Jeon 2007; Kim 2017; Park 2019; Kim 2020; Kim 2021; Hwang and Yeom 2021). The main issues related to this are as follows.

The open competitive recruitment process comprises five components: a physical examination, fitness assessment, written assessment, aptitude test, and interview. The fitness assessment includes a 100m run, 1000m run, sit-ups, grip strength, and push-ups, with varying standards for men and women. The standards required of women are lower than those required of men in all categories, and female applicants are allowed to use the knee push-up method, unlike male applicants. The knee push-up method has been used as a key argument in discourse that disparages the physical capabilities of female officers, leading to various controversies surrounding the improvement of physical fitness standards (Park 2019; Korean Women's Development Institute 2022). Amidst conflicting opinions on whether to set unified standards for both genders or maintain gender-differentiated standards, criticism has also been raised that the existing physical fitness standards were set based on male physical norms (Hwang and Yeom, 2021).

Another major controversy in recruitment concerns the persistent under-allocation of positions

for women under the practice of gender-segregated recruitment. Police organisations have operated a target-based recruitment policy, setting fixed quotas for female candidates to improve female representation within the organisation. Each year, separate recruitment numbers have been allocated for men and women. However, for a long time, women's quotas for open recruitment have been markedly lower than men's, and the percentage of women in the overall recruitment has fluctuated annually. The chart below displays women's quotas in open competitive recruitment for Police Officer rank from 2005 to 2019. It ranges from as low as 4.3% to as high as 27.6%, indicating significant variation. In selecting KNPU students and police cadet candidates, women have been limited to a low fixed percentage of only 12 %.

**Figure 5 Percentage of female quota in open competition to the rank of Police Officer**




*Source: Chart reconstruction of the table in Oh (2020, p.46)*

In some countries, recruiting women for police positions can be challenging due to low application rates (Shelley et al. 2011). In South Korea, there are relatively many female applicants, and the competition rate is also considerably intense. For example, in the 2016 open recruitment for the Police Officer rank, the overall average competition rate was 38.1:1, while

the rate for female applicants soared to 92.8:1. This means that, on average, each successful female candidate had to compete against more than 92 other women. This demonstrates that women must endure far more intense competition than men to enter the police force and highlights an imbalance in opportunities based on gender from the outset of the recruitment process.

**Table 4 Competition rate in open recruitment to the rank of Police Officer by year**

| Year | Overall competition | Women competition | Year | Overall competition | Women competition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2012** | 46.1: 1 | 60.3: 1 | **2016** | 38.1: 1 | 92.8: 1 |
| **2013** | 15.2: 1 | 19.8: 1 | **2017** | 32.2: 1 | 75.1: 1 |
| **2014** | 17.8: 1 | 23.4: 1 | **2018** | 23.4: 1 | 26.1: 1 |
| **2015** | 24.5: 1 | 53.6: 1 | **2019** | 32.7: 1 | 32.9: 1 |

***Source**: 2013–2016 Police White Papers and the Korean National Police Agency's Online Application Portal (accessed 17 July 2025), https://public.jinhakapply.com/PoliceV2/Main.aspx*

As a result, criticism has been consistently raised that the police's practice of gender-segregated recruitment lacks legal and rational grounds. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) has formally recommended three times (in 2005, 2013, and 2014) that the KNPA's recruitment practices violate constitutional equality rights, but these recommendations were not accepted. The rationale for the rejection was based on arguments articulated in the Commissioner General of the KNPA's response to the 2005 NHRCK decision, which stated that police work often involves intense physical contact or force, that it is difficult for women to handle police work involving night shifts and long-distance travel, and that the police's ability to respond to crime would be weakened if women were absent due to childbirth (Jeon 2007; Kim 2017). These arguments reflect stereotypes about police work and women in general and can be seen as a public acknowledgement of the gendered nature of policing by the

KNPA.

However, the Police Gender Initiative has phased out the decades-old practice of recruitment since 2018. The background to this initiative is detailed in the third section. Gender quotas were eliminated from the selection for KNPU students and police cadets in 2021. As a result, the percentage of female passers has more than doubled in both categories (Kim 2021; Jeon 2024). The KNPA has announced that it will implement gender-integrated recruitment in 2026, with the same physical fitness requirements for both men and women (Kim 2022). In this case, applying the same requirements to the existing test events may disadvantage women. The KNPA phased in a more job-relevant circular fitness test from 2023 to address this issue. This test entails completing an obstacle course run, pole hurdle, push and pull, rescue, and trigger pull course within a set time (Kyung Hee University Research Institution, 2019).

This thesis is being written at a time of major change in the recruitment practices of South Korean policing. However, as the primary objective of this thesis is to explore the experiences of female officers already engaged in policing, the validity of the research findings is not anticipated to be impacted by this change. This is because participants' views on organisational justice are largely shaped by their cumulative organisational experiences, which minimises the immediate influence of the new recruitment systems on their perceptions of organisational justice. Nonetheless, given the correlation between views on recruitment methods (from gender segregation to gender integration) and gender-integrated roles, questions on this topic were included in interviews.

**Promotion system**

The South Korean police have as many routes to promotion as they do to entry: exam-based

promotion, screening promotion, special promotion, and seniority-based promotion. [6] Screening promotion applies to all ranks, exam-based and special promotions are available up to the rank of Superintendent. Seniority-based promotion is limited to the rank of Senior Inspector. Which route an officer chooses to take is a personal choice.

In the selection of candidates for promotion through screening and special channels, recommendations from the head of the relevant department or agency play an important role, so informal networks and support from superiors have a significant influence. Due to this structure, some studies have pointed out that there is a low perception of fairness in promotions within the Korean police organisation, and in particular, it has been confirmed that nepotism influences promotions to senior positions (Cho 2013; Shim 2020; Yoo 2020). In contrast, the exam-based promotion system has relatively less room for such informal factors to intervene. Exam-based promotion selects candidates based on a written exam (held annually) that assesses legal knowledge and practical skills required for police work, with promotions granted to those who score the highest. While work performance evaluations are partially reflected, the weight given to written exam scores is significantly higher. For this reason, many female officers tend to prefer the exam-based promotion, which is perceived as more predictable and fair. However, this pathway is only available up to the rank of Superintendent, meaning that to advance to leadership positions at the rank of Senior Superintendent or above, one must ultimately go

[6] Exam-based promotion is held annually and mainly tests the knowledge of criminal and administrative law and police work. Screening promotion is a method of selecting candidates based on a comprehensive assessment of their work attitude and performance. Special promotion is reserved for police officers who have been martyred in the line of duty or have made remarkable achievements. For example, they apprehend an espionage or violent crime perpetrator or save lives in a major disaster. Seniority-based promotion is for police officers who have served a certain number of years in a rank and are promoted to the next rank without being evaluated or tested (Presidential Decree on Promotion of Police Officers, 20 December 2022).

through a screening promotion.

In this context, the KNPA introduced a promotion target system for female officers in 2006, with the intention of increasing the representation of women in management positions by allocating a certain portion of promotion slots for senior ranks to female officers (KNPA 2006, p.484). Under this policy, screening promotion to the Senior Inspector, Superintendent, and Senior Superintendent was segregated by gender. This means that there is a gender quota for screening promotion to these ranks, and women must compete with other women for undisclosed quotas. Since the promotion target system was implemented, the proportion of women in the ranks of Senior Inspector and above increased from 2.7% in 2007 to 6.5% in 2020, and in the ranks of Senior Superintendent and above from 1.1% in 2007 to 3.7% in 2020 (KNPA 2008, p.341; KNPA 2021, p.352). Although it is clear that the proportion of women at the rank of Senior Inspector and above has increased to a certain extent, the pace of change has been slow, and the overall percentage of women in higher ranks remains low. This raises questions about the effectiveness of existing policies in achieving genuine gender balance in senior positions.

Opinions may differ on the effectiveness of this gender-segregated promotion system. While some argue that the system guarantees women a place in male-dominated organisations, others argue that it may create competition among women and hinder equal opportunities for men and women, ultimately weakening women's motivation for self-development (Korean Women's Development Institute 2014). This thesis will examine how the promotion system in Korea, as an organising process, has affected female officers' career navigation and promotion-related choices.

## Women's gendered experiences in South Korean policing

This section examines the gendered experiences of female officers in South Korea as revealed through domestic research. While the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 was mainly based on international work to provide a global perspective, this section focuses on domestic literature. This serves as background knowledge for interpreting interview data with Korean female officers, while also providing an opportunity to compare the findings of this thesis with those of existing domestic research.

According to research conducted by Kim and Merlo (2010), Korean female officers are primarily motivated to enter policing due to intrinsic job characteristics such as enjoyment of the work and the opportunity to help others. Conversely, Korean male officers are mainly motivated by monetary factors such as a stable salary and job security (Moon and Hwang 2004). Korean female officers are confident they can perform tasks equally to male officers (Jaegal et al. 2004; Korean Women's Development Institute 2014; Ryu 2015). However, they were found to have gendered experiences in promotion and work allocation. They had a high perception of a glass ceiling when it came to promotion (Kong and Choi 2014; Kong 2018) and they also felt there was a lack of high-ranking female officers who could serve as their role models (Korean Women's Development Institute 2014). This is related to the gendered aspects of South Korean police culture. Lee (2003) points out that although tasks and experiences deemed as important in the police force appear to be gender-neutral on the surface, they are in fact heavily male-oriented, and gender division of labour within the organisation continues under the pretext of consideration for female officers. This often manifests in the assignment of either less

significant tasks or those considered to be more ‘appropriate’ for women (Lee 2003). While statistics presented in Chapter 1 suggest that female officers are broadly deployed across most departments, a closer look reveals that they are often concentrated in peripheral and repetitive duties rather than in core operational roles (Korean Women’s Development Institute 2014). Lee (2019) focused on the gender division of labour in the process of handling sexual violence cases. Lee argued that the practice of assigning arrest duties, which are considered core tasks, to male officers and other duties, including victim investigation and protection, to female officers reinforces the marginalisation of women within the organisation and negatively affects case outcomes. Choo (2019) points out that the notion that only biological women can understand the experiences of female victims limits gender-sensitive law enforcement.

In this context, there have been studies conducted on the experiences of female officers in Korea regarding gender discrimination and its impact on job satisfaction. (Park and Jang 2019; Kong 2019; Han and Kim 2020; Lee and Park 2020; Lee and Nam 2020). It is important to note that the degree to which female officers experience or perceive gender discrimination may differ. Kang (2017) categorises female officers into three groups based on their experiences with gender discrimination: those who have not experienced it, those who have experienced discrimination in promotion and placement, and those who have experienced discrimination in almost all areas except pay. These findings suggest that female officers may have varying perceptions of organisational justice.

This may not necessarily mean that discrimination against women actually occurred, but rather that individuals were unaware of discrimination. Their level of gender awareness and their preferred role within the police force may influence this. Yun and Jang (2018) found that female officers tend to have higher levels of gender equality awareness if they are younger, unmarried,

and have received education about gender equality. Kim (2023) noted that newly appointed officers tend to favour integrated roles, where both men and women perform the same tasks regardless of risk. In contrast, senior officers are more inclined towards traditional roles, where women take up specialised tasks, or roles where both men and women perform similar tasks, except for those considered risky in this study. This suggests that there may be generational differences in perceptions of organisational justice, reflecting not only differences in the content of these perceptions but also differences in sensitivity to fairness across generations.

However, even within the same generation, officers have different approaches. According to Oh's (2020) research, some young women who joined the police force as civil servants aimed to fit in with the masculine culture, while others who entered with a focus on merit-based recognition sought equality by adopting traditionally masculine traits. However, women with a feminist perspective sought more profound change, challenging the male-dominated structure of the police force and questioning the criteria used to evaluate competence (Oh 2020). The above studies could help interpret the factors that impact participants' varying perceptions of organisational justice in this thesis.

Meanwhile, in South Korea, overt and direct forms of gender discrimination and harassment have been decreasing in line with changes in wider social awareness. However, contemporary forms of gender discrimination often appear as benevolent sexism, excluding women from key roles and promotion opportunities under the guise of 'protecting' them (Kwon 2021b). While this may appear to be considerate toward female officers on the surface, it ultimately restricts their roles. As the forms of gender discrimination evolve, there may also be differences among female officers across generations in how such discrimination is perceived and addressed.

Experiences of inequality discussed earlier may also affect the career sustainability of female officers. Year-specific data on voluntary resignations suggest this possibility. For example, 62% of female officers who voluntarily resigned in 2023 were in the ranks of Police Officer or Senior Police Officer, and the proportion of women resigning from these ranks exceeded their overall representation within them (KNPA 2024b). This indicates that it may be relatively difficult for women to sustain their careers in the early stages of service. However, statistics from 2021 and 2022 show that the proportion of women among all voluntary resignations was similar to, or even lower than, the overall proportion of female officers in those years. Additionally, in the ranks of Police Officer and Senior Police Officer, the percentage of female resignations did not consistently exceed their representation within those ranks (KNPA 2023b; KNPA 2024b). Therefore, the situation in 2023 may be a phenomenon limited to a specific point in time, and caution is needed when generalising it as a long-term trend.

For married female officers who must balance work and domestic responsibilities, an organisation's maternity protection scheme and family-friendly culture are crucial for career retention. Research shows that a work environment that respects work-family balance significantly impacts job satisfaction for Korean female officers (Park and Jang 2019; Yoon 2019; Lee and Nam 2020; Park and Cho 2022). However, Kwon (2017) found that police officers perceive their organisations as lacking family-friendliness. The Korean Women's Development Institute (2014) points out that despite irregular mobilisation and frequent work overload, there are few facilities for female officers within the agency. While female officers in the above study recognised that police organisations are more liberal regarding parental leave than private companies, they identified childcare as the biggest obstacle to their professional advancement. This thesis will analyse how childcare affects the career paths of Korean female

officers but also look at what factors were essential to female officers who successfully managed their careers despite childcare challenges.

## The integration of women into Korean policing: an analysis based on Brown's (1997) model

This section seeks to understand the current position of women in South Korean policing by examining their integration process based on Brown's (1997) model. In this process, it also examines how the police have used gender to gain legitimacy for their organisation.

There is some literature that has considered the history of women police in South Korea (Lee 2003; Jeon 2007; Korean Female Police Veterans Association 2007; Yang 2009). Among these works, Lee (2003) and Jeon (2007) specifically examined the history as a whole, especially from a feminist perspective. Lee (2003) distinguished periods based on evolving expectations and perspectives of female officers, and Jeon (2007) built on this framework to analyse the history using the concepts of equality and difference strategies. Brown (1997) focused on the role and status of women police and categorised stages based on their expansion. As social expectations and the roles of female officers are interconnected, the milestones in Lee's (2003) timeline are useful in this thesis. The periodisation presented under 'This Thesis' in the table below reflects a direct application of Brown's model.

**Table 5 Periodisation Korean women police history: comparison across studies (This thesis categorisation based on Brown's model)**

| Year | Lee (2003) | Jeon (2007) | This thesis |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1946~1961 | Policewomen as women leaders | Women's entry into policing | Entry (1946~1967) |
| 1961~1967 | Unseen among male officers | Deny the need for women police | |
| 1967~1980 | Recruitment of women with college degrees | Restoring the status of women police by highlighting gender differences | Separate restricted development (1967~1991) |
| 1980~1999 | Response to the increasing demand of policing for women | Coexistence of emphasis on gender differences and equality measures | Integration (1991~1999) |
| 1999~ | Efforts to create a citizen-friendly police image | | Take-off (1999~2018) |
| | | | Reform (2018~) |

This study benefits from the analytical framework Brown (1997) developed, which has been widely adopted in international research, to position the South Korean police within the global context. It also addresses a gap in the existing literature by looking at more recent developments since the mid-2000s, a period that existing studies do not consider.

**Entry (1946~1967)**

In 1946, women made their entrance into the South Korean police force. This followed the USAMGK's introduction of American-style systems into Korean politics and administration in the previous year, which significantly expanded the duties of the police compared to the Japanese colonial period (Korean Police Historiography Committee 1972). Around this time, instances of sexual assault against women by American soldiers and male police officers were on the rise, and female protestors were frequently calling on the government to address women's issues. Furthermore, the abolition of the Japanese-era licensed prostitution system led

to a rise in unregulated sex work, prompting state efforts to control and monitor women involved in this sector more tightly (Yang 2009). As a result, the policing of women in the sex trade increased the demand for female officers, who were deemed more suitable for such duties than male officers. Given that male officers were not equipped to handle tasks related to women and other marginalised groups, the authorities concluded that hiring female officers would enhance the overall efficiency of police work (Korean Police Historiography Committee 1972, p.960). However, this was not unique to Korea. Similar strategies were employed in other countries such as the UK, where the principle of 'women policing women' served as a key rationale for introducing female officers (Heidensohn 1992; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020). In other words, the initial recruitment of female officers was not solely about protecting female victims, but also about extending the state's control and surveillance over women, through women. It appears that the authorities did not have plans to integrate women into traditional policing duties fully, but rather to utilise them for tasks deemed unsuitable for men. In 1946, the first 15 female officers at the management level and 64 female officers at the non-management level were recruited. After training, they were assigned to police stations in their respective regions (Korean Female Police Veterans Association 2007, henceforth KFPVA 2007).

After the initial recruitment, the number of female officers gradually increased, reaching 500 in 1947, which accounted for approximately 1.8% of the total police force (KFPVA 2007). Although the numbers increased, most women were limited to assisting male officers in general police stations. As a result, the authorities began looking for ways to better utilise the unique characteristics of female officers (Korea Daily Newspaper 1947). This led to the establishment of women's police stations starting in 1947, with the first station in Seoul comprising 80 female

officers. The initiative later expanded to other major cities such as Busan and Incheon (KNPA 2021). These women's police stations were equipped with an outside work section, an investigation section, a detention management section, and a general affairs section, empowering female officers to carry out their duties independently. Such an organisational arrangement illustrates that female officers were not only functionally but also spatially separated within the policing system.

**Figure 6 A group photo of female officers during the era of women's police stations (KFPVA 2007)**

Seoul Women's Police Station officers

Incheon Women's Police Station officers

The role of female officers in the women's police station was limited to working with juveniles and women, but they played a leading role in that work (Korean Police Historiography Committee 1972, p.960). They were also responsible for monitoring external activities such as women's organisations, female workers, and female students (KFPVA 2007, p.34). Unfortunately, some female officers were criticised for their authoritarian and anti-human rights attitudes, including cutting off the hair of women involved in sex work and using harsh interrogation tactics with female suspects (KFPVA 2007, p.51). Yang (2009) argues that female officers during this period were aligned with the police authorities' repressive and

punitive governing techniques, actively participating in the social control and isolation of the urban poor and the criminalisation of women involved in sex work. This links to Strobl's (2020) view that women's entry into policing, rather than challenging patriarchal notions, as Brown (1997) explains, may actually embody them in some societies.

Women's police stations were abolished a decade later in 1957, which government officials described as a gradual reorganisation in line with the trend in developed countries to integrate women into general police forces (Korea Daily Newspaper 1957). However, this appears to have been motivated more by efficiency than equality. At the time, there was controversy surrounding social prejudice against female officers and their perceived underperformance concerning budget (Park 2001, p.97; KFPVA 2007, p.54; Yang 2009, p.342). Following the abolition of women's police stations, there was no organisational-level policies in place to support the integration of female officers. In addition, the establishment of a military regime in 1961 led to a militarised reorganisation of police work, with tasks related to socially disadvantaged groups considered unnecessary. The tasks that female officers were responsible for were excluded from police work, and the military government forced them to resign or demoted their ranks (KFPVA 2007). This marginalisation of female officers echoed patterns observed in other countries, including England and Wales (Heidensohn 1992). This suggests that policewomen and policemen were not considered equal in the eyes of political leaders at the time. The number of female officers dropped dramatically during this period, with only around 200 remaining from the approximately 500 officers who served since establishing the women's police station in 1947 (KNPA 2021). The remaining female officers were scattered among local police stations, with some working without a position. This period was considered the darkest time in the history of South Korean women police (Lee 2003; Jeon 2007; KFPVA

2007).

Garcia (2021) notes that women-only units or specialised positions, still operating in some countries today, can simultaneously steer women toward so-called ‘women’s work’ while serving to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity within police organisations. Despite this, the women-only units that were established during the *Entry* stage in South Korea positively impacted the status of female officers at the time. Between 1947 and 1957, the operation of women’s police stations led to the creation of high-ranking female officers, including three Superintendent Generals, five Senior Superintendents, and 15 Senior Inspectors. Jeon (2007) argues that this would not have been possible without the gender-segregated organisation. Moreover, female officers during this period had high expectations for expanding women’s police stations and reported high job satisfaction. When the women’s police stations were abolished, some female officers resigned in protest (KFPVA 2007, p.129). Due to the lack of records and research on the activities of early female officers in Korea, it is difficult to determine why female officers preferred the women’s police stations system at the time. However, considering that before the establishment of women’s police stations, these women were scattered across various police stations and limited to supporting male officers, it can be interpreted that women’s police stations served as an important foundation for women to independently carry out their duties within a male-dominated police organisation.

**Separate Restricted Development (1967~1991)**

During the rapid urbanisation of South Korea starting in the 1960s, a significant social issue arose as young people flocked indiscriminately to major cities like Seoul. In response, national policies were established to address youth upbringing and correction, with the police taking on

the responsibility of juvenile protection. As a result, there was a renewed effort to recruit female officers who could handle the unique challenges of working with juvenile offenders. The KFPVA (2007) suggests that the perception that juvenile work was not suitable for male officers under the traditional crime fighter's model of policing may have played a role, as juvenile offenders required guidance rather than violent confrontation. In 1967, the recruitment of female officers, which had been suspended, resumed with the recruitment of university-educated women majoring in education, psychology and sociology. In 1972, 202 female officers were recruited on a large scale without requiring a university degree, and in 1979, 96 female officers were recruited to handle accounting duties, highlighting the integrity of women. As a result, the number of female officers increased to 479 in 1979, returning to previous levels (KNPA 2021).

During this time, female officers were officially restricted to working in youth and women's affairs, civil services centres, and administrative tasks like record-keeping and statistics. These roles emphasised qualities like caring, kindness, and meticulousness that were deemed traditionally feminine. The Ministry of Interior's guidelines for female officers during this time explicitly demanded that they use cheerful and friendly language and strive to create a positive work environment (Jeon 2007). This can be seen as an explicit demand for women to *do gender* at the organisational level.

During this period, female officers received recognition for their valuable contributions as youth specialists. Some women took great pride in this responsibility and even went beyond their police duties by arranging employment for delinquent youth and operating vocational schools for young people (KFPVA 2007, p.156). According to Brown (1997), women who are content with specialised roles co-exist at this stage with those who seek expansion into the

same roles as men. However, the latter group is not mentioned in the existing South Korean literature, likely because female officers who faced setbacks during the *Entry* stage focused on stabilising the women police system within the existing framework rather than pursuing expansion. Nevertheless, this tendency may not be attributable solely to internal organisational factors, but also reflects broader societal constraints on women's rights and expectations at the time.

**Integration (1991~1999)**

The debate on police independence and political neutralisation began in earnest around 1990, following accumulating evidence that the police had acted as servants of political power under authoritarian governments. In response, legislative changes were made in 1991, transforming the police organisation from a subsidiary of the Minister of the Interior to a central administrative body under the same ministry. This enabled the Commissioner General of KNPA to operate independently in personnel matters, policy formulation, and police operations. The reorganisation of the police force, coupled with changes in the policing environment such as an increase in crimes against women, and the growing awareness of women's rights, led to the expansion of the role of female officers (Lee 2003; KFPVA 2007; Jeon 2007). During this period, the growing presence of women in policing also served as a symbolic marker of the transition toward democratic policing. This mirrors the way female officers in England and Wales were used to signal the legitimacy of institutional reform (Heidensohn 1992). As a matter of policy, the KNPA started deploying women in previously male-dominated fields, such as detective work, intelligence, patrol, and traffic.

Specifically, gender-based violence (GBV) became a policing concern in the 1990s. This was

due to some high-profile cases where GBV victims killed their male abusers, leading women's organisations to become more prominent in supporting victims. In 1991, women detective units dedicated to investigating such crimes were established within the Metropolitan Police Agencies of major cities, including Seoul. The establishment of these units was driven by the need to conduct undercover operations and investigations in women-only venues—such as hostess bars—where male detectives were not permitted, as well as to ensure effective intelligence gathering on GBV, the apprehension of related suspects, and the protection and interviewing of female victims (KFPVA 2007). Female intelligence officers also emerged, with the Seoul Metropolitan Police deliberately assigning female officers to intelligence divisions of each police station in 1994. This was done in response to the expanding women's movement and student political activism at the time, where the police were using female personnel to gather intelligence on women's organisations and female university students. Women also entered the field of traffic, with the police hiring female officers as driver's license examiners in 1990 and 1993 to address corruption at examination centres (Park 2001). In 1993, a woman was appointed to the position of police box chief for the first time.

The increase in female recruitment in US policing is more likely to have been driven by legislative pressure, whereas in the UK, concerns about police-public relations played a more significant role (Heidensohn 1992, p.198). South Korea's situation aligns more closely with that of the UK, where the integration of women into policing was driven primarily by police-public relations rather than legislation. Although legislation was not the sole driving force behind the expansion of women's roles in policing, it has played a crucial role in sustaining progress since the mid-1990s. For instance, the 1995 Framework Act on Women's Development mandated affirmative action to support women in the public sector. The 1994 Act

on the Punishment of Sexual Offences and Protection of Victims and the 1997 Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Crimes of Domestic Violence highlighted the GBV issue in policing and the need for more female officers within the organisation. In this way, changes in the police organisation have been largely driven by external pressure from women's groups and civil society, which have continuously raised issues and conducted monitoring efforts.

However, although this period can be seen as the starting point for integration, in practice, the advancement of female officers remained limited. In particular, it was still challenging for many women to enter core policing areas, such as public order management, investigation, and patrol, which had long been predominantly dominated by men, especially in local police forces (Lee 2003; KFPVA 2007). These practical restrictions began to gradually ease in the next stage as the KNPA introduced more active policy interventions.

**Take-off (1999~2018)**

During the 1990s, public protests and anti-government movements were commonplace in South Korea. Unfortunately, these demonstrations often led to violent clashes between protesters and law enforcement officials, which resulted in public scrutiny of the police's impartiality and legitimacy (Moon and Morash 2008). In response to the crisis, the police underwent significant reforms in 1999 when a new Commissioner General was appointed. The reforms introduced a community-policing philosophy into South Korean policing, along with new public management and governance concepts (Park 2001). Following the enactment of the Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Women in Employment and for the Promotion of Employment in 1999 and the government's policy to increase the representation of women in public office in 2000, the KNPA announced a policy to increase female representation in the

police force as one of the measures of the police reform. The decision was based on the belief that female officers could help improve the police's image as a softer and friendlier force (KNPA 2000; Jeon 2007). Considering that one survey found that 80% of respondents had a negative perception of the police, while only 3.6% had a negative perception of female officers (Park 2001), recruiting more women into policing was seen as a positive step to strengthen police legitimacy.

The policies implemented during this stage were to increase the representation of women in the police force, diversify the departments where women work, and establish an organisational system to address GBV. To increase female representation, the KNPA set two recruitment targets in 2000 and 2005 and implemented a promotion target system for female officers to improve their representation in management positions (KNPA 2006, p.484). Under the above target system, the proportion of female officers has gradually increased as follows.

**Table 6 Growth in the number and proportion of women police by year**

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 96,469 | 97,321 | 100,050 | 100,764 | 102,248 | 102,467 | 103,540 | 107,433 |
| **Women** | 5,539 | 6,091 | 6,566 | 6,830 | 7,182 | 7,688 | 8,101 | 9,663 |
| **%** | 5.7% | 6.3% | 6.6% | 6.8% | 7% | 7.5% | 7.8% | 9% |
| **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020** | **2021** | **2022** | **2023** |
| 111,338 | 116,842 | 118,069 | 120,448 | 124,303 | 128,295 | 129,855 | 132,595 | 133,760 |
| 11,047 | 12,346 | 12,904 | 13,582 | 15,092 | 16,787 | 18,004 | 19,688 | 20,572 |
| 9.9% | 10.6% | 10.9% | 11.3% | 12.1% | 13.1% | 13.9% | 14.9% | 15.4% |

***Source**: Korean National Police Agency White Papers, 2008–2024*

At the same time, the KNPA ensured that female officers were evenly distributed across various departments to improve public satisfaction through soft policing. Underlying this policy was

an internal organisational belief that women, compared to men, were more courteous, incorruptible, and attentive, qualities considered especially well-suited to policing as a form of public 'service'. Female officers played a crucial role in public order management, especially during rallies that often turned violent with the use of molotov cocktails and tear gas. The police introduced new measures to convert these rallies into peaceful protests and utilised the softer image of women to encourage non-violent behaviour. A women's mobile police company was established in 1999, and unarmed female officers were deployed to the front lines of protests to create a policing line, earning it the moniker 'lipstick line' (Park 2001). However, as protests became more violent in 2007, concerns about injuries to police officers led to the abandonment of this strategy, which was replaced with female officers dedicated to dealing with female protesters (Lim 2007). In 1999, in order to improve public satisfaction, the KNPA assigned female officers to roles such as 112 emergency call centres and major crime investigation teams, which had previously been male-dominated spaces. In 2000, female officers were also recruited to the Police Special Operations Unit, which focuses on combating terrorism (Joo 2020).

Organisational frameworks for GBV and child protection were put in place, often with female officers assigned to victims. For example, centres to support GBV victims and missing children were established across the country in the mid-2000s, respectively, staffed by female officers. The Women and Juvenile Affairs Division (WJAD) was established as a specialised unit within the KNPA in 2005, and all police stations had these units in 2013. While male and female officers worked in these units, there was a policy of separation of duties, with female officers assisting victims and male officers handling perpetrators (Lee 2019). This division was based on the belief that female victims would feel more comfortable speaking with female officers who possess higher gender sensitivity and caring abilities. Joo (2020) argues that from this

period onwards, there was a perception within the police organisation that addressing GBV was the job of female officers and the WJAD.

As previously discussed, the police employed traditional feminine traits like kindness and warmth as gendered resources when introducing service-oriented role models in the 2000s (Kim 2019). This is evident in the frequent use of the 'friendly female officer' image in police public relations. Since 2010, the police have expanded their PR efforts by telling stories on social media, with female officers' activities being a popular focus (Joo 2020). A recent analysis by the Korean Women's Development Institute (2022) discovered that from 2015 to 2018, news reports about the police portrayed female officers as either 'capable of handling cases no differently from men', 'impressive at protecting citizens with a different sensibility from men', or 'traditional women serving the community'. This study highlights the fact that in police public relations, female officers were portrayed as 'women' before being portrayed as police officers, and some women who received promotions or recognition were often perceived as receiving unfair privileges simply because they were 'women'. Unfortunately, this portrayal of female officers has become the foundation for a misogynistic discourse against policewomen, which will be examined in the next section.

On the other hand, as the number of women in the organisation has increased, issues of sexual harassment and gender discrimination, which have been under the radar, have become visible in South Korean society, largely through media reports on survey findings and individual cases since 2010. 13% of female officers surveyed by the Korean Women's Development Institute (2014) reported experiences of sexual harassment, with those who had shorter tenure being the most affected. In addition, about 30 % of female officers surveyed reported experiences of gender discrimination, primarily in the form of departmental assignment and performance

evaluation disadvantages, as well as exclusion from core tasks. Although the reported figures may appear relatively low, it is difficult to consider them as fully reflecting actual experiences when taking into account organisational cultural constraints surrounding the recognition and reporting of such incidents, as well as the potential for self-censorship among respondents. These results suggest that gender initiatives during this period focused mainly on increasing formal representation, and that gendered perceptions of police work and female officers have persisted even during implementation of the initiatives.

**Reform (2018 to present)**

Since 2018, the KNPA has been promoting new initiatives to enhance gender diversity and equality within the organisation. This was largely triggered by external factors. First, the newly elected president in 2017 made gender equality a key national agenda and pushed for reforms in powerful institutions, including the police and the prosecution. As part of this reform, the Police Reform Committee, an external expert group, proposed several reforms that included gender equality issues. The KNPA embraced these recommendations and became the first central government agency to establish a unit solely focused on gender equality work within the organisation, and has engaged in comprehensive discussions on gender mainstreaming to advance its efforts (KNPA 2019).

The push for police reform in South Korea has been driven not only by the government's gender initiatives but also by a changing social climate. Women across the country have spoken out against male-dominated police organisations and their lukewarm response to digital sex crimes and dating violence. The tipping point came in 2018 when a woman secretly filmed a male nude model and uploaded the footage online. The police swiftly arrested and detained the

female perpetrator. This prompted outrage from women's groups, who accused the police of being passive in their response to numerous cases of illegal filming in which women have been victims. They also criticized the police for having different attitudes depending on the gender of the victim. This incident sparked a wave of mass protests demanding changes to the masculine composition and gendered nature of the police force (Lee 2018).

**Figure 7 Woman-led protest against biased police investigation in 2018 (Sun 2018)**

Since 2018, the KNPA has initiated gender reform efforts. The initiatives implemented during this period have been pursued under two primary objectives: achieving gender equality within the organisation and ensuring gender equality in policing policies (KNPA 2018; KNPA 2019). The second master plan, presented below, outlines a comprehensive approach addressing the organising processes, organisational culture, and job interactions that underpin a gendered organisation.

**Table 7 KNPA's Second Gender Equality Master Plan (2020-2024)**

| Main task | Subtasks |
|---|---|
| Establishing a framework for gender equitable policing | -Creating a foundation for gender-equitable policing<br>-Reducing gender bias in key police policy content<br>-Strengthen partnerships with citizens in promoting police gender equality<br>-Expanding police-citizen gender governance |
| Operating a system where difference does not discriminate | -Recruit gender-sensitive police officers through a gender-equitable recruitment process<br>-Reducing the gender gap from recruitment to retirement<br>-Managing welfare systems from a gender equality perspective |
| Advancing the response to GBV | -Building the foundation for a systemic response to GBV<br>-Enhancing investigative expertise along with a strict response to GBV<br>-Strengthen protection and support for GBV victims, including prevention of secondary victimisation |
| Strengthening systems to prevent sexual harassment and violence within the organisation | -Driving transformation to a sexual harassment and violence-free organisation<br>-Strengthening victim-centred sexual harassment and violence response systems<br>-Improving prevention education |
| Creating a gender-equitable organisational culture | -Building gender equality capacity for gender equitable policing<br>-Promoting policies to improve the status of women in the organisation<br>-Promote a culture of practice for gender equality in the organisation |

As part of a larger initiative, the KNPA announced plans to increase the proportion of female officers from 10.8% to 15% by 2022 while phasing out the controversial gender-segregated recruitment in favour of gender-integrated recruitment.[7] The KNPA explained that this decision was based on the growing value of gender equality in society as a whole, as well as the increasing need for female officers to address the rise in female and juvenile crime (KNPA 2021). While the police authorities are still emphasising the unique role of women, as they did in the *Take-off* stage, the emphasis on gender equality is a step forward. Oh (2020) notes that while the police initiatives in the 2000s sought only quantitative growth in the number of

[7] In fact, as of 2022, women accounted for approximately 14.8% of the police force, coming close to the established goal (KNPA 2023).

female officers, the initiatives during this period could radically shake up the organisation's gender order by including gender-integrated hiring decisions.

Additionally, the KNPA began to allow outsiders into the organisation and commission external research on gender issues. To oversee the organisation's response to GBV, an external expert was appointed as Deputy Director General for Women and Juvenile Safety Planning. The KNPA also contracted external experts to research gender issues in policing, including improving physical fitness test items and standards (2018, 2019), developing standard content for gender equality training (2018), establishing gender-based statistical indicators (2020), developing gender equality guidelines for police station basic facilities (2020), addressing misogynistic discourse surrounding female officers (2021), and improving secondary victimisation by the police (2021). In 2018, a Gender Equality Committee was established within the KNPA and gender governance was implemented for the purpose of receiving advice from external experts on gender equality (Lee et al. 2024).

However, these reforms have sparked a significant backlash from anti-feminist factions, resulting in a widespread negative narrative regarding women's abilities as police officers. The background and dissemination mechanisms of this discourse will be examined in detail in the final section.

**Gendered integration and organisational logic in South Korean policing: revisiting Brown's model**

Drawing on the earlier stage-by-stage review of women's integration, it is essential to examine the organisational logic, embedded in the historical and ongoing integration process, that has guided the expansion of female officers' roles in South Korea. This logic reveals how the

organisation has approached gender diversity and equality among its members. The core logic is that it is more appropriate or advantageous for female citizens to be handled by female officers, and this argument is based on practical and cultural rationales. For instance, matching biological sexes during body searches is a practical reason for using female officers. Assigning female officers to women's organisations is a cultural reason, as women may better understand other women's needs, leading to more effective communication and greater cooperation. The 'female officers–GBV victims' pairing reflects a combination of practical and cultural reasons. This approach considers the victim's reluctance and the need to collect physical evidence (practical) while also assuming that female officers will understand and care for GBV victims better (cultural). This organisational logic has long served as the basic framework for the utilisation of female personnel in the Korean police. At the same time, this logic functions to exempt male officers from tasks considered women's work, such as emotional labour, victim support, and the handling of sexual and domestic violence cases (Loftus 2007; Hautzinger 2020).

Placed alongside Brown's (1997) model, the Korean integration process largely mirrors the patterns described in each stage, highlighting both general parallels and context-specific differences from Western cases and suggesting that the country remains in the *Reform* stage. Many commonalities with the model were found in the facilitating and hindering factors, with external social changes notably serving as a major facilitator. However, there are also aspects that cannot be explained by the above model. In the West, during the integration process, some pioneering female officers actively resisted gender discrimination practices and promoted legislative measures through litigation and networking (Brown 1997). This approach has been vital in advancing female officers in countries like the US and the UK (Brown et al. 2013;

Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020). In contrast, the progress of women police in South Korea has been primarily driven by organisational needs, with female personnel being utilised as a 'desperate remedy' (Heidensohn 1992) whenever the police force faces incompetence or legitimacy crises. While there have been a few exceptions, finding examples of female officers challenging the existing system through litigation or networking is challenging in South Korea. Chu (2019) explains that women entering male-dominated professions, such as the police, may be viewed as progressive, but their deviation from traditional gender norms may depend on the social climate.

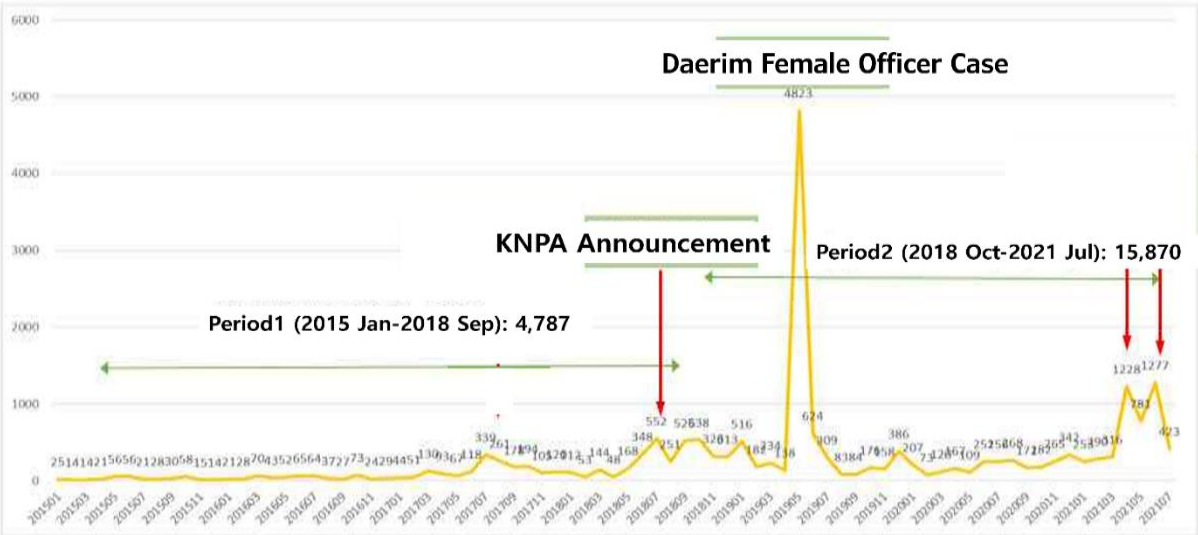
The analysis of women's progress in South Korean policing also reveals that the path is not always straightforward, contrary to Brown's (1997) theory. Strobl (2020) challenges Brown's linear model, which centres on the continual advancement of female officers, and instead proposes a cyclical approach in which progress in entry, participation, and integration can be reversed due to societal, cultural, and political shifts (Strobl 2020, p.60). In the case of South Korea, the 'dark period' experienced by female officers after entering policing shows that the integration did not follow a linear path. Moreover, the persistence of gendered organisational logic has produced a hybrid reality in which gendered and non-gendered role practices coexist, as will be shown in the following data analysis chapters, challenging the applicability of Brown's linear model to the Korean context.

## Social controversy surrounding women police in South Korea: contemporary backlash

Since 2015, the resurgence of feminism within South Korean society has increased gender conflicts, particularly among the younger generation (Oh 2020; Shin 2023). Police gender

initiatives implemented during this period encountered a backlash in line with the above gender conflicts, and a discourse that demeans female officers' job competence spread. Misogynistic discourse against policewomen reproduces the argument that police work requires physical strength, which is ultimately equated with male ability, and that women are therefore unsuitable for police work (Korean Women's Development Institute 2022; Shin 2023). This discourse tends to generalise from isolated incidents to all female officers, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes within the police and broader society. This discourse began to increase in 2018 following the KNPA's announcement of increased recruitment of female officers, as shown in the figure below. The topic became a political issue in 2019, especially after a female officer was involved in a case of obstruction of official duties. This incident was often referred to as the 'Daerim Female Officer Case' by the research participants, so I will examine it in detail.[8]

**Figure 8 Number of posts about policewomen in online communities by period (Korean Women's Development Institute 2022, p.4)**




[8] The incident took place in Guro-dong, a neighbourhood in Seoul. However, the incident was named the 'Daerim female officer case' after an online community posted a video incorrectly stating that it occurred in Daerim-dong.

A video circulated online showing a young female officer handcuffing a drunk assailant who had attacked her male patrol partner with the help of a man, who appeared to be a civilian. The video was edited in a way that falsely portrayed the female officer as incompetent and unable to subdue the attacker on her own. Such editing and dissemination can be seen as an act combined with resentment toward the ongoing expansion of female police recruitment policies (Korean Women's Development Institute 2022; Shin 2023). However, a full review of the footage revealed that the female officer had successfully immobilised and handcuffed the assailant with the help of a fellow officer who had arrived as backup and made the arrest (Citizens Coalition for Democratic Media 2019). As media coverage intensified and the controversy grew, several fellow officers and even the Commissioner General of the KNPA came forward to state that there was nothing wrong with the female officer's response to the scene (Jeon 2019). However, this statement was discredited when unverified and false information spread on YouTube. This led to a political debate involving politicians, conservative groups, and YouTubers.

Male-dominated online communities and media have been identified as playing a central role in the production and dissemination of misogynistic discourse against policewomen (Jeong et al. 2021; Korean Women's Development Institute 2022). For example, Kim (2022) analysed posts on the representative online community 'Ilbe'[9] from 2011 to 2020 and found that posts related to women and families accounted for 28.2% of the total, with criticism of female officers being the most frequent topic. The Korean Women's Development Institution (2022) analysed the typical patterns in the spread of hatred toward female officers as follows: First, an

[9] Ilbe (Daily Best Storage) is a Korean online community known for its extreme right-wing tendencies and misogynistic discourse.

anonymous individual records or captures images of female officers performing routine duties, then maliciously edits the content and uploads it with a title such as ‘Latest News on Female Officers,’ ridiculing them. Such malicious content is ‘discovered’ by media outlets seeking sensational stories and published as news articles with headlines that reflect the language of online communities. Through this process, malicious content packaged as objective facts is shared again in online communities, where it spreads further, temporarily expanding the volume of discourse (Korean Women’s Development Institution 2022).

The emergence of misogynistic discourse against policewomen can be viewed as a backlash against the organisation’s efforts to become more gender-equitable since 2018 (Korean Women’s Development Institute 2022; Shin 2023). A backlash is a rejection of attempts to challenge the status quo, a response by a group that feels disempowered (Faludi 1991; Shin 2023). This resistance has taken different forms both inside and outside the police force. Externally, the focus has been on the recruitment of female officers and the questioning of their competency. Shin (2023) suggests that this stemmed from young men suffering from unemployment in the neoliberal era perceiving the increased recruitment of female officers as a threat to their jobs. Within the police force, male officers have accused female officers of reverse discrimination, claiming that they receive preferential treatment in terms of work assignments, intensity, and environment (Lee 2022). This has been expressed mainly through anonymous postings on the online community ‘Blind’, which requires members to verify their organisations with an official work email before posting. These postings, regardless of their accuracy, have been widely circulated by the media and have fueled misogynistic discourse against policewomen.

Oh (2020) shows cases where female officers are intimidated by misogynistic discourses and avoid patrol duties, or conversely, use excessive physical force to avoid being labelled as incompetent police officers. Additionally, the Korean Women's Development Institute (2022) found that misogynistic discourse that emphasises physical prowess reduces police officers' morale and work commitment, regardless of gender, and undermines human rights-based policing. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the positive effects that the visibility of misogyny and backlash within the organisation has brought. Van den Brink and Benschop (2018) argue that resistance arising during radical interventions can activate organisational discussions and make entrenched stereotypes more visible. In the case of the Korean police organisation, backlash has sparked discussions on the definition of police duties, officer qualifications, and the physical and professional standards required for the role. These debates and subsequent research have led to several policy improvements. For example, the traditional gender-based division of labour was revised, introducing mixed-gender mobile police companies in public order management operations. Additionally, recruitment standards for police officers were adjusted to ensure greater fairness (Choo 2024). As a result, the visibility of backlash may be seen as a catalyst for promoting in-depth discussions on gender issues in policing.

In sum, police gender initiatives in South Korea were implemented during both the *Take-off* and *Reform* stages, but they faced a particularly harsh backlash during the *Reform* stage. It is important to note the nature of the public aspirations that drove the *Reform* stage initiatives. After 2015, the increasing prevalence of digital sex crimes, including several high-profile femicides, led to a strong demand for police reforms, particularly among women whom the male-dominated police force had neglected. This differs in nature from the abstract and

depoliticised goal of 'enhancing public satisfaction' that had underpinned the initiatives in the *Take-off* stage. However, these gendered aspirations were perceived as threatening the existing gender order, and at the same time, they provoked a corresponding level of backlash and resistance. As women's demands for rights became more pronounced in Korean society after 2015, misogynistic sentiments also intensified, spreading in more explicit and aggressive forms. External pressure for police reform thus came from opposing directions simultaneously, and this collision gave rise to the discourse that devalued female officers. This thesis explores how such social controversies and discourse affect Korean female officers' work experiences and their perceptions of interactional justice.

## Conclusion

For almost 80 years, women have been part of South Korean policing. However, unlike in Western countries, their progress has been primarily driven by the organisational need to use female personnel as a solution during times of crisis rather than women's aspirations to play equal roles with men. This process was strongly driven by organisational practices and logic that emphasised gender differences. Gender has functioned as a key criterion in the allocation of opportunities in the Korean police organisation, and female officers have long been expected to engage in *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, outside of the organisation today, male officers remain the standard and female officers are expected to perform in the same capacity as their male counterparts. This discrepancy between gendered expectations within the organisation and external demands for equal capabilities illustrates the contradictory situation faced by female officers.

The explicit and institutional barriers that once hindered the advancement of women in Korean policing have been alleviated, and in their place, visible affirmative actions and gender equality initiatives have been implemented. These developments mirror reform trajectories observed in countries where gender equality efforts within policing have been more active, such as the UK, Sweden, Norway, Australia, and New Zealand (Prenzler and Sinclair 2013; Silvestri 2015; Ward et al. 2020; Jon 2022; Fekjær and Alecu 2023). In South Korea, some younger female officers who self-identify as feminists are entering the organisation (Choo 2019; Oh 2020).

These developments can also be examined in relation to the conditions identified by Brown and Silvestri (2020b) in Chapter 3. Some of these conditions seem to be gradually appearing in Korea, including changes in traditional gender roles, increasing public attention to gender equality, and a growing emphasis on democratically accountable and community-oriented policing. However, other conditions remain only partially realised. In particular, the continued gender imbalance in supervisory positions and the persistence of social backlash against women's expanding roles suggest that important structural and cultural barriers remain for a full transition towards the next stage in South Korean policing.

Despite these organisational developments, important questions remain about how female officers experience these changes. Brown's (1997) model is useful for tracing institutional developments, but it does not fully capture how female officers perceive and interpret their integration within the everyday life of the organisation. Against this backdrop, this thesis explores contemporary female officers' experiences of police work, career navigation, and perceptions of organisational justice, as well as how they experience and respond to injustice in their careers. The following chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design and analytical procedures that support this.

## [Chapter 5] Research Methodology

### Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis explores the extent and nature of women's integration into South Korean policing, guided by the main research question: **To what extent and in what ways have women been integrated into policing in South Korea?** This overarching question is addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. What approach has been adopted by the police in South Korea in its development of gender diversity and equality for its workforce?
2. How do women police officers experience their work as police officers (both in relation to colleagues and to the wider citizenry)?
3. How do female officers navigate and manage their career progression within policing?
4. What are female officers' perceptions and experiences of organisational justice within policing?
5. What are the impacts of experiencing organisational injustice in their careers? How do female officers cope and respond to this?

To answer these questions, this chapter explains the research design and methodological approach of this thesis. In particular, reflecting on how the researcher's position as a female police officer influenced the research process as a whole is an important focus of this chapter.

This chapter proceeds in the following order. First, it introduces the overall framework of qualitative research and explains the rationale for adopting an interpretivist approach to examine how participants make sense of their organisational experiences. Next, it describes the

design and conduct of in-depth interviews and focus group interviews (FGIs) with female officers. It then addresses ethical considerations, including the researcher's positionality, and explains the data analysis strategy centred on Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of this thesis.

## Theoretical and methodological foundations

This thesis adopted a qualitative research approach to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of female officers, using a feminist perspective within an interpretivist framework. Qualitative research explores how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences within their lives and social contexts, and it excels at revealing complex and subtle realities (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Particularly when studying groups that are often overlooked or marginalised, a qualitative approach is considered an effective method as it places their voices and experiences at the centre. Ragin and Amoroso (2019) explain that while quantitative research *condenses* data to reveal the big picture, qualitative research *enhances* the data itself, thereby better revealing meaning within context. They argue that key aspects of a case can be seen more clearly when researchers enhance data by looking for hidden meanings, unclear features, multiple interpretations, implications, and unheard voices. Given that this thesis aims to develop a contextual understanding of female officers' career experiences and aspirations, as well as their perceptions of organisational justice within an organisation in which they continued to occupy a marginal position, a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and FGIs was considered the most appropriate method.

Furthermore, this thesis is conducted based on feminist perspectives and beliefs. Feminist research points out that women's experiences have often been rendered invisible or distorted, and seeks to correct this in order to change women's unequal social status (Lather 1991). In this context, standpoint theory posits that experiences and perspectives derived from specific social positions provide unique insights and knowledge, and that women's experiences can serve as an important analytical lens for critically interpreting society (Smith 1987; Hartsock 2017). However, given the diverse positions among women that resist reduction to a single category, recognising intersectionality, or the interplay of race, class, sexual orientation, and other forms of oppression, is essential for feminist knowledge production (Harding 1987; Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2022). This thesis interprets the police work experiences and perceptions of organisational justice among female officers in a gendered police organisation through a feminist lens. This approach allows for an analysis of the inequitable structures within the organisation that affect the career paths of female officers and consideration of strategies to dismantle these barriers.

Consistent with these feminist assumptions, this thesis is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology. Interpretivism understands social reality not as something objectively given, but as constructed through individuals' experiences and interpretations of organisational and social life (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998). From this perspective, the researcher is understood not as a passive collector of meaning, but as an interpreter who is actively involved in understanding and contextualising participants' interpretations (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 2000; Denzin and Lincoln 2018). The overarching focus of this study is on how female officers understand and make sense of justice and injustice in their organisational lives, and how such perceptions and interpretations influence their career trajectories and strategic choices. Given this research

focus, an interpretivist epistemology aligns closely with the aims of the study. This is because interpretivism focuses on how participants make sense of their experiences within the contexts in which they are situated, enabling an understanding of how organisational conditions shape individuals' perceptions and actions (Schwandt 2000; Crotty 1998). An interpretivist epistemology resonates closely with feminist scholarship, which recognises knowledge as situated and shaped by power relations. From this perspective, the researcher is understood not as a neutral observer who remains detached from the research process, but as someone who reflexively examines how their positionality and experience shape the research process and interpretation (Finlay 2009; Dörfler and Stierand 2021). A more detailed discussion of my positionality as a researcher and reflexivity is provided in a later section.

## Data collection methods

This thesis conducted in-depth interviews (face-to-face and online) and online FGIs with female officers in South Korea to collect data. By combining these two methods, it has achieved an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, while also obtaining collective insights into gender issues and policy alternatives.

### In-depth interviews

This thesis conducted in-depth interviews with female officers working in South Korea to gather qualitative data regarding the officers' experiences and perceptions of daily duties, career advancement, promotions, interactions with colleagues and the public, as well as their encounters with workplace harassment and discrimination. An in-depth interview is a

knowledge-producing conversation grounded in mutual interest, respect, and empathy between the interviewer and the interviewee. It allows for the exploration of individuals' lived experiences and perspectives (Hesse-Biber 2017).

In this thesis, participants are all currently serving *female* officers. Gathering perspectives from both male and female officers may be advantageous in providing a more comprehensive and holistic analysis. However, much research on policing has long been shaped by male-centric perspectives and experiences, and the voices of female officers have received relatively little attention. This thesis focuses on the experiences of female officers to explore the challenges and barriers women face in male-dominated organisations, as well as the various responses and survival strategies they employ. This is an attempt to complement existing male-centric approaches to understanding police organisations and their cultures, as well as gender-blind perspectives that have tended to decontextualise gender altogether. Knowledge constructed through women's experiences and their interpretations contributes to revealing gendered structures and power relations within policing, aligning with the feminist philosophical assumptions discussed earlier. While retired female officers could offer valuable historical and longitudinal perspectives, they were not included to maintain an analytic focus on present-day institutional conditions and practices.

I designed the in-depth interviews with an expected number of 25 to 30 participants, balancing the need for analytic depth with feasibility, and as a result, 29 female officers participated in the in-depth interviews. This range was used as a flexible target rather than a fixed sample size, and interviews continued until analytic saturation was reached, at which no substantially new themes were emerging from the data. When recruiting participants, I used purposive sampling, taking into account factors of work tenure, region, and rank.

First, I specifically targeted female officers with at least five years of experience to ensure the relevance and richness of the data. This was set to ensure that participants have extensive experience with the opportunities and challenges within police organisations. According to the regulations of the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA), officers entering with the rank of Police Officer must serve a minimum of four years before being eligible for promotion to the next rank through seniority-based promotion. Regarding geographical distribution, I tried to include officers working in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Here, the metropolitan area refers to Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Incheon, where demand for policing is particularly high. Previous studies have highlighted substantial differences in police culture between urban and non-urban (rural) areas (Christensen and Crank 2001; Dick 2005; Cain 2015). Notably, the underrepresentation of women in small and medium-sized cities compared to larger cities may result in distinct experiences for female officers (Belknap and Shelley 1993; Krimmel and Gormley 2003). I sought to recruit participants from various regions to examine subtle differences based on regional characteristics. Lastly, I balanced managers (Senior Inspector and above) and practitioners (Inspector and below) among the recruited participants. This balance allowed for the coverage of experiences from both managerial and non-managerial roles within the police force.

While this sampling strategy aimed to ensure diversity in terms of experience, rank, and region, it is also important to note some limitations. All participants were female officers who participated voluntarily, which suggests that they likely had more interest in gender equality issues and thus held relatively critical perspectives on the organisation. This may have led to an overrepresentation of dissatisfaction with the organisation and negative experience, whereas the perspectives of female officers who have internalised the organisation's gender norms may

have been comparatively underrepresented.

The demographic characteristics of the final in-depth interview participants are shown in the table below. Out of 29 interviewees, two were in their 20s, eleven in their 30s, eleven in their 40s, and five in their 50s. In terms of rank, 19 officers held the rank of Inspector and below, while 10 held the rank of Senior Inspector and above. As for work location, 13 officers were in the metropolitan area and 11 were in non-metropolitan areas.

**Table 8 Demographic characteristics of in-depth interview participants**

| No | Age | Rank | Length of service | Region | Methods |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Non-metropolitan | Online |
| P2 | 40s | Inspector and below | 15-20 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P3 | 40s | Inspector and below | 20-25 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P4 | 50s | Senior Inspector and above | 25-30 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P5 | 30s | Senior Inspector and above | 10-15 years | Metropolitan | |
| P6 | 20s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | |
| P7 | 50s | Senior Inspector and above | 30-35 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P8 | 30s | Inspector and below | 10-15 years | Metropolitan | |
| P9 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P10 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | |
| P11 | 50s | Senior Inspector and above | 30-35 years | Metropolitan | |
| P12 | 20s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | |
| P13 | 40s | Inspector and below | 10-15 years | Metropolitan | |
| P14 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | |
| P15 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P16 | 40s | Inspector and below | 10-15 years | Metropolitan | |
| P17 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years | Metropolitan | |
| P18 | 50s | Senior Inspector and above | 35-40 years | Metropolitan | |
| P19 | 40s | Inspector and below | 15-20 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P20 | 40s | Inspector and below | 20-25 years | Metropolitan | |
| P21 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P22 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P23 | 40s | Inspector and below | 15-20 years | Non-metropolitan | |
| P24 | 30s | Senior Inspector and above | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | |
| P25 | 30s | Inspector and below | 10-15 years | Metropolitan | Face-to face |
| P26 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years | Metropolitan | Online |
| P27 | 40s | Inspector and below | 20-25 years | Metropolitan | Face-to face |
| P28 | 50s | Senior Inspector and above | 35-40 years | Non-metropolitan | Online |
| P29 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years | Non-metropolitan | Online |

Although it will be discussed in more detail in the section on ethical considerations, this study adopted an indirect recruitment strategy to address potential concerns about participants' voluntariness arising from rank differences between the researcher and participants. I shared the participant information sheet (PIS, see Appendix A and B) with female officers with whom I had a personal relationship and asked them to help recruit other female officers who might be interested in participating in the study. Upon receiving the contact information of potential participants who showed interest in the study from a trusted source, I sent the PIS via email or messaging app, outlining the purpose of the thesis, interview details, recording arrangements, and participant rights. To maintain an appropriate researcher-participant relationship, individuals who were familiar with me or had previously worked with me were excluded from the participant pool. Additionally, I ensured that no more than three participants were referred to me through any single acquaintance or previous participant to prevent a narrow network bias. No incentives were provided to participants. While most participants were recruited indirectly, Participants 8 and 15 were recruited directly. They are members of the Police Gender Studies Network, which was involved in the FGIs, but I do not have a personal relationship with them. Based on their group involvement and shared book reviews, I believed they would be interested in discussing their experiences as female officers. I asked them if they would be interested in participating in the study, which they readily accepted.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 participants via online video interviews and two participants via face-to-face interviews. Due to physical distancing and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, online interviews were the primary method used. Online interviews may have limitations such as restrictions on non-verbal cues, difficulties in establishing rapport, and sample limitations due to technical accessibility (Hesse-Biber 2017). However, they may offer

participants a greater sense of psychological safety and distance, which can be beneficial when dealing with sensitive topics, and can also facilitate interviews with individuals across different geographical locations and time zones while reducing the time and cost associated with organising interviews (Tracy 2019). Marhefka et al. (2020) argue that specific online platforms can closely simulate face-to-face interactions and, at times, lead to more significant engagement than in-person interviews. In contrast, Newman et al. (2021) stress the need for researchers to approach online methods thoughtfully, reflexively, and deliberately, as they do not equate to in-person interactions.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, FGIs were included to capture collective discussion and shared perspectives on gendered organisational experiences. Data collection was conducted sequentially, with FGIs carried out after the completion of the in-depth interviews, and the two datasets were analysed together.

**Focus group interview**

FGIs are group interviews with three to twelve participants that involve group discussion, question and answer, interactive dialogue, and other activities (Tracy 2019). FGIs are characterised by a dynamic process based on interaction between interviewees and can inductively capture the key issues, ideas, and concerns of multiple participants at once (Morgan 1996). However, there are also concerns that certain types of participants may dominate the research process in FGI settings and that group dynamics may obscure some controversial perspectives, resulting in only certain types of socially acceptable opinions emerging (Smithson 2000). Therefore, the role of the moderator is emphasised, who guides the discussion while maintaining a neutral stance, allowing participants to express their opinions freely

(Hollander 2004; Côté-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy 2005; Krueger 2014). Hesse-Biber (2017) explains that FGIs can be a valuable tool for accessing the experiences and attitudes of marginalised groups, such as racial or ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, women, children, and people with mental and physical disabilities.

In this thesis, FGIs were carried out with members of the Police Gender Studies Network (PGSN), which comprises current female officers. This group was established in 2018 under the initiative of several feminist female officers and is now composed of approximately 90 female officers who share an interest in gender issues. It is officially registered as a study group with the KNPA. The group maintains its solidarity network by engaging in activities such as regularly reading feminist books together and organising an annual academic seminar. FGI with participants with these characteristics is different from interviewing general female officers, and through them, it is possible to gain insights related to female support and solidarity, as well as activism.

I had access to this group because I had been a member since its inception. However, since the members are scattered across the country and mainly communicate through an online group chat, only a few officers were personally acquainted with me. I used an existing group chat to share an overview of the thesis with the members and to recruit volunteers. Meanwhile, there was some hesitation regarding the participation of several leading members who had played a key role in the formation and operation of the PGSN in the FGI. Initially, I considered excluding them due to concerns that my close relationship with them could influence data collection and interpretation. However, I came to realise that their experience and insights were invaluable assets to the research topic, and that excluding them solely due to our close relationship could result in missing out on important information. As a result, I requested their

participation in the interviews, and they gladly accepted. This process illustrates the ethical dilemmas researchers face when selecting research participants. I judged that their participation would contribute to the validity and richness of the research, so I conducted the interviews while maintaining a reflexive attitude and clearly stating the nature of our relationship.

A total of 12 participants took part in the FGIs, and their demographic characteristics are presented in the table below. Among them, one participant was in her 20s, four in their 30s, and seven in their 40s. In terms of rank, five officers held the rank of Inspector or below, while seven held the rank of Senior Inspector or above. Unlike the in-depth interviews, the FGIs did not require a minimum of five years of service, as the focus was not on a deep exploration of individual career trajectories. One participant in the in-depth interviews for this study (P15) expressed interest in the research topic and voluntarily asked to join the FGI. Since the main interview content did not overlap, additional participation was accepted (F6 in the table below). This allowed me to understand not only her personal experiences but also her views and interactions within a group setting.

**Table 9 Demographic characteristics of FGIs participants**

| No | Age | Rank | Length of service |
|---|---|---|---|
| F1 | 30s | Senior Inspector and above | 10-15 years |
| F2 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years |
| F3 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years |
| F4 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 15-20 years |
| F5 | 30s | Inspector and below | Less than 5 years |
| F6 (=P15) | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years |
| F7 | 20s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years |
| F8 | 40s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years |
| F9 | 30s | Inspector and below | 5-10 years |
| F10 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 25-30 years |
| F11 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years |
| F12 | 40s | Senior Inspector and above | 20-25 years |

As with the in-depth interview participants, it is important to note that the FGIs participants also have certain limitations in terms of sampling. Participants in the FGIs were members who may have been more engaged in the network's activities and more interested in the topic of this study compared to other members. As a result, the findings may disproportionately reflect positive experiences of solidarity and activism. Conversely, the experiences of members who were less active or felt emotionally distant from the group may have been relatively underrepresented. Such limitations are, to some extent, inevitable given the reliance on participants' voluntary engagement in the study.

The FGIs in this study were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Online FGIs have become more widely used in recent years due to technological advances and the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is preferred for their ability to mitigate geographical constraints and their efficiency in terms of time and cost (Tuttas 2014). However, online FGIs have been criticised for their difficulty in fully capturing non-verbal cues, reduced participant attention, limited participant interaction, and technical issues compared to face-to-face (Stewart and Williams 2005; Abrams et al. 2014). Nevertheless, considering the diverse work patterns and locations of the participants, I prioritised the practical reality that it would be difficult to gather everyone in one place, and therefore conducted the interviews online.

To compensate for the limitations of online FGIs and to facilitate in-depth discussions, I formed small groups of 3-5 participants. Smaller groups are recommended when discussing topics that require in-depth discussion, sensitive topics, or involve well-acquainted participants (Morgan 1996; Krueger and Casey 2014). Moreover, when conducting FGIs online, limiting the number of participants is necessary, as too many participants can make in-group interactions too fast and superficial (Flick 2021). To reduce any emotional discomfort related to hierarchical

differences and to encourage open participation, the FGIs were divided into three small groups based on rank and role. The first group consisted of officers at the rank of Inspector and below; the second included those at the rank of Senior Inspector and above; and the third comprised key members who had played a central role in the formation and operation of the PGSN. This structure was intended to minimise potential hierarchical dynamics shaped by different levels of authority or organisational roles and to promote open, in-depth discussion within each group (Côté-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy 2005).

## Date collection procedure

### Interview preparation and ethical safeguards

In-depth interviews were conducted for approximately one year from September 2023 to September 2024, and FGIs were conducted three times from August to September 2024. Before beginning the formal interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with a female officer with whom I had a personal connection. While the content of the questions remained unchanged, I revised the Korean phrasing and sequencing based on reflections from the pilot interview to facilitate participant understanding. As the pilot interview involved a personal acquaintance, it was not included in the analysis for this thesis.

The interviews were conducted after the participants had finished work. Before each interview began, I obtained consent from the participants for audio and video recording and reiterated the confidentiality of the interview. Given that the interviews involved discussions of discrimination and harassment, the potential for emotional distress was recognised as an ethical

consideration. In response, participants were reminded of their right to pause or withdraw from the interview at any time. Relevant support services and their contact details were prepared in advance in case participants needed them.

Some participants expressed concerns before the interview, stating that they were unsure whether their experiences would be useful for the study. This appeared to reflect a broader reluctance within the police organisation to discuss gender issues, as well as a perception that one's own career and experiences are not significant enough to be analytically meaningful. In particular, the tendency to view one's career as the outcome of individual choices seemed to contribute to the belief that one's experiences are not meaningful or analysable from a structural perspective. In response, I emphasised that any experience could make a meaningful contribution to the study and endeavoured to create a comfortable atmosphere in which participants could speak freely.

**Conducting interviews**

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allows individual participants the freedom to talk about what interests or is important to them while staying focused on the research questions (Hesse-Biber 2017). This thesis constructed different sets of questions for the in-depth interviews and FGIs, tailored to their specific characteristics (see Appendix C and D for each interview schedule). The in-depth interviews were designed to encourage participants to reflect on their working lives more personally. At the beginning of the interview, I asked participants about their motivation for taking part and their journey from joining the police to reaching their current position. The conversation then expanded to explore the environments that influenced this journey and their interactions with colleagues. The latter

part of the interview focused on their perspectives regarding gender discrimination and sexual harassment within the organisation, as well as their expectations for gender equality initiatives.

In contrast, the FGI questionnaire was designed to explore opinions on gender-related issues within the organisation rather than personal career experiences, providing participants with a platform for open discussion, free from privacy concerns. Two groups of general members, consisting of practitioners and managers, were asked questions focusing on their motivations for participating in the PGSN, the impact of their involvement, their perceptions of gender discrimination and harassment within the organisation, and their experiences of engaging with gender issues through action. Meanwhile, another FGI group composed of female officers who played a key role in the PGSN was asked questions about the motivations for founding the group and its development process, memorable experiences and challenges encountered in leadership, the forms of activism pursued within the organisation and the responses they received, and strategies for promoting gender equality.

The in-depth interviews lasted between one and two hours, depending on the participant. The limitations often associated with online interviews, as mentioned earlier, did not pose significant issues in this study. Participants were already familiar with online training and meetings within the police organisation during the COVID-19 period, and many preferred the online format for its flexibility in scheduling. From the researcher's perspective, online interviews were effective for transcription and analysis, as the video recordings allowed repeated review of verbal content alongside visible non-verbal cues that would not have been accessible in audio-only interviews. No participants expressed discomfort or reluctance about being video recorded during the interviews. Interviews conducted later in the fieldwork generally took longer as I developed more ideas and asked more probing and follow-up

questions. I made a conscious effort to avoid overwhelming participants with probing or follow-up questions, as I was concerned that my experience with investigative interviewing as a police officer might influence the interview process for this thesis. Investigative interviews for victims and qualitative research interviews both emphasise open-ended questions, rapport building, and active listening (Milne and Bull 1999; Shepherd and Griffiths 2021). However, investigative interviews clearly aim to discover the truth and emphasise a more structured methodology, with the interviewer taking the lead (Griffiths and Milne 2013; Wadie 2013). In contrast, qualitative research interviews explore individuals' experiences, perspectives, and meanings attached to a particular phenomenon, with the level of structuring varying depending on the nature of the research and the interviewer's role being more of a facilitator (Rubin and Rubin 2011). When conducting the interviews for this thesis, I made a concerted effort to act as a facilitator and to respect the participants' agency.

In the case of FGIs, the duration varied from 1 hour and 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the group. During the interviews, to help establish anonymity and equal relationships among participants, participant-designated nicknames were displayed on the screen and used as names. Considering the concern that a specific participant might dominate the discussion flow in the FGI environment, I ensured that participants took turns speaking and directly provided opportunities for less active participants to speak. As mentioned earlier, there are concerns that online FGI may limit interaction between participants and make it difficult to maintain concentration compared to face-to-face formats (Stewart and Williams 2005; Abrams et al. 2014). In this study as well, there were occasional instances in which some participants briefly stepped away during others' speaking turns or appeared distracted. Nevertheless, various forms of interaction among participants—such as expressions of agreement, empathy, dissent, and

the sequential development of ideas—occurred actively, suggesting that the collective dynamics and interactive nature of the FGI format continued to function effectively, even in an online setting.

Meanwhile, since the FGIs in this study consisted of female officers belonging to a specific group, their impact on the interview process was also considered in advance. Traditional views on FGIs suggest that groups composed of strangers are more likely to freely express sensitive topics (Morgan 1996), while groups with pre-existing relationships may distort actual opinions due to social pressure or conformity tendencies (Kitzinger 1994; Hollander 2004). However, these effects may vary depending on various contextual factors, such as the type of relationship between participants, the nature of the experience to be disclosed, and the level of rapport between the moderator and participants, rather than occurring uniformly (Hollander 2004). In this study, some participants were familiar with each other, while others had no prior relationship. No signs were observed that familiarity among participants inhibited open expression or led to discomfort. On the contrary, a certain level of trust may have facilitated more candid discussions, even on sensitive topics.

**Post-interview processing**

Following the interview conducted in Korean, I promptly reviewed the video recording on Microsoft Teams and transcribed it into Korean. I paid close attention to the participants' facial expressions and mouth movements to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. After transcribing, I cross-checked the transcripts with the video to verify the faithfulness of the content and then deleted the recording. Each Korean transcript was then summarised in English and shared with the supervisory team along with the interview notes for a debriefing session. Any

methodological feedback from the supervisory team was integrated into subsequent interviews to enhance the quality of the data collection.

## Ethical considerations

### Researcher positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is as much a product of society, structures, and institutions as the object of study, so it is important to recognise how the researcher's own social background, philosophical assumptions, and values can influence the research project (Band-Winterstein et al. 2014; Hesse-Biber 2017). The values and beliefs of the researcher are bound to influence the entire process of formulating research questions, data collection and analysis (Campbell and Wasco 2000). Therefore, in qualitative research, the researcher's reflection is emphasised before and during the research process as a way to provide context and understanding for the reader (Sutton and Austin 2015).

Considering this, it is important to reflect on how my positionality as a female officer may have influenced various aspects of this study and to reveal this. I joined the police force in 2006 with the rank of Inspector and currently hold the rank of Superintendent. I was aware that my position within the organisation may influence the recruitment and interaction of participants, as well as the interpretation of interview data. In police research, when the researcher is an insider, there is a significant advantage in accessing the police organisation (Brown 1996; Skinns 2022). Police officers tend to be wary or suspicious of outsiders due to the nature of their profession, which often leads them to hesitate to participate in research, making it difficult

for external researchers to gain access. Additionally, concerns that participating in research could result in adverse consequences within the organisation may further deter participation (Corsianos 2009; Helfers et al. 2020). Tracy (2019) refers to researchers who study contexts in which they are already members or are fully integrated as 'full participants'. Tracy explains that full participation is an effective approach for studying closed or distrustful groups, allowing researchers to elicit more open and honest attitudes from participants. My position as a female officer significantly aided in the recruitment of participants and the establishment of rapport. My experience as a female officer helped me actively listen and show empathy during interviews. I also possessed an intimate understanding of the organisational structure, culture, and terminology of the police force, which might be challenging for outsiders to grasp. This familiarity enabled me to comprehend participants' accounts effectively and ask more incisive questions.

On the other hand, it is important to consider that insider research may lead to oversight as the researcher becomes well-acquainted with the culture under study and may overlook certain aspects (Tracy 2019). Throughout the three-year duration of this study, I was on academic leave from the police organisation. In South Korea, such leave for graduate study is institutionalised, and obtaining permission was relatively straightforward. This enabled me to sustain a researcher's mindset rather than that of a police officer and to maintain a certain degree of distance from the organisation. In particular, spending two of those years physically away from the research setting—residing in the UK—further reinforced my ability to focus on my identity as a researcher. While my identity as a female officer enhanced this study's feasibility and helped build rapport with participants, my international student status allowed me to approach the interviews from an outsider's viewpoint.

However, in addition to the commonality of being female officers, my participants and I have many differences, including rank, how we entered the force, and where we work. When engaging reflexively, it is important to recognise all the dynamics affecting knowledge creation, including differences between the researcher and the participants (Hesse-Biber 2017). As a senior-ranking officer, I gave careful thought to how my position and the perceived authority associated with it could shape the interview atmosphere and influence participants' responses. Specifically, my rank may raise concerns about participants' voluntariness in the recruitment process. It might also lead to participants feeling hesitant to express themselves openly or reluctant to share negative experiences or criticisms of the organisation during interviews.

To address these concerns, I incorporated feminist interviewing methods that emphasise building intimacy and friendship to mitigate potential power imbalances during the interview process. In qualitative research, the unequal power dynamics between the interviewer and the participant are often a point of discussion, as interviews are one-sided dialogues based on the researcher's agenda, lead to the researcher's interpretation, and involve an element of 'control' over the interviewee (Nunkoosing 2005; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Creswell 2013). As a result, feminist researchers have highlighted the value of cultivating sisterhood-based friendships in interviews with women (Oakley 1981). This idea of friendship as a method has often been discussed in terms of fieldwork in qualitative research, with an emphasis on reducing hierarchical separations between the researcher and the participant, fostering dialogical relationships, and embracing an ethic of care (Tillmann-Healy 2003; Smith et al. 2009; Owton and Allen-Collinson 2013).

While I had no close personal relationship with participants, the shared professional identity as female police officers and the research focus on women's integration into policing helped build

rapport and a sense of solidarity. In this context, ‘friendship’ was not personal but methodological, reflecting feminist approaches that emphasise relational interviewing and ethical engagement. During interviews, I endeavoured to listen actively and express empathy, treating the participants as equal partners. Bondi (2003) describes empathy as a way of understanding the experiences of others by oscillating between observation and participation, taking into account both similarities and differences between the researcher and the researched. As a result, most participants actively engaged during the interview process, and some even introduced other participants after their interviews. Through the interview process, I also experienced a gradual shift in my relationship with them, developing a sense of sisterhood. My immersion in their narrative sometimes led to moments that affected my emotions, but I constantly tried to strike a balance between maintaining distance as a researcher and expressing empathy toward the participants.

Despite these experiences, feminist interviewing has also been criticised for overlooking power dynamics and social divisions among women, and for presenting an overly idealistic view of the researcher–participant relationship (Oakley 2015). Duncombe and Jessop (2002) point out the risk of ‘fake friendships’ in feminist interviews, which can lead to potential exploitation. I kept these criticisms in mind throughout this study.

Meanwhile, as a researcher of Korean nationality, I study the Korean police organisation. There are various discussions about the advantages and disadvantages that can arise when a researcher studies their own country or culture. For example, Jardine (2020) suggests that studying the police force in one’s own country can limit the ability to question established norms. Jardine notes that when conducting qualitative research on the Vietnamese police, being a ‘foreigner’ can allow for naïve questions to be asked. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that

when researchers study their own communities in a postcolonial context, their insider experience and knowledge can provide unique insights (Merton 1972; Kovach 2021; Smith 2021; Collins 2022).

In this study, the primary advantage of researching the Korean police as a Korean national lies in the language. Being fluent in Korean enabled a more effective and in-depth research process, particularly in conducting interviews and analysing documents. Additionally, cultural sensitivity contributed to capturing and explaining meanings that an external researcher might overlook during the analysis and interpretation process. Nevertheless, when researching one's own country, there is still a risk that one's critical perspective as a researcher may be weakened by taking the practices and culture of one's society for granted. To compensate for this, I endeavoured to maintain an international perspective throughout the research process by comparing and contrasting various international literature. In addition, I received continuous feedback from a supervisory team, who are scholars from outside Korea, to identify aspects that might seem unfamiliar from an outsider's perspective and to supplement the necessary cultural context explanations.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

Given that both the researcher and participants are active police officers, anonymity and confidentiality were considered particularly important throughout the research process. As a police officer on academic leave, I am required to report to my agency about the topic and outline of the thesis, but anything about the participants is kept confidential. The participants in this thesis are also not required to report to their agencies, as they participated in the research outside of working hours. However, confidentiality issues may arise in the FGIs because

participants inevitably become aware of each other's participation. Therefore, I included a statement in the FGI participation consent form that they will not disclose the information discussed in the interview. I reiterated the importance of confidentiality to all participants at the beginning of the interview.

To protect participants' anonymity, in-depth interview participants were labelled as P1, P2, P3, etc., and FGI participants as F1, F2, F3, etc. I chose to use numerical identifiers rather than pseudonyms for the following reasons. Assigning pseudonyms in Korean and then translating them into English could complicate the presentation, and generating names for approximately 40 participants was not practically feasible. I judged that using pseudonyms in this thesis could potentially confuse readers. P15 participated in the in-depth interviews and later voluntarily joined a focus group. In subsequent chapters, I consistently refer to her as P15 when citing her statements. When excerpts are drawn from the focus group, I indicate this to clarify the context. In line with these anonymisation practices, and given the small size and visibility of gender-based networks within the organisation, references to individuals involved in the formation and leadership of the PGSN were deliberately generalised to further protect participants' anonymity.

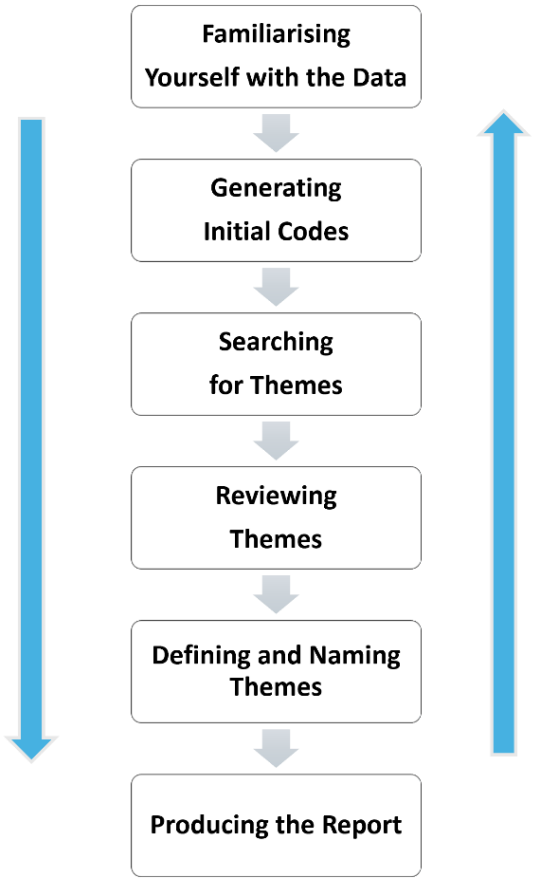
## Data analysis procedure

In qualitative analysis, methods can be broadly categorised into two groups, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The first group consists of methods tied to specific theoretical or epistemological positions, such as Conversation Analysis, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, and Discourse Analysis. The second group consists of thematic analysis, which is theoretically flexible rather than tied to a single epistemological position and can therefore be

applied across a range of qualitative research designs. On this basis, this thesis adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis (TA) as its analytic approach, which falls within the second group. Braun and Clarke's TA is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This approach acknowledges the possibility of both inductive and deductive directions in coding and provides a clear and structured data analysis process, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts while also supporting theoretical interpretation (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose a six-phase framework for thematic analysis. In this study, data analysis followed this framework and was conducted in a reflexive and interpretive manner rather than as a purely procedural exercise, with themes actively constructed through iterative engagement between the data, existing theory, and the researcher's analytical judgement (Braun and Clarke 2021). The figure below summarises the entire analysis process.

**Figure 9 Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis process**




Before outlining the specific analytic steps, it is important to clarify what was included and excluded from the analytical scope. While various aspects of participants' professional experiences were discussed in the interviews, some topics were excluded from analysis due to scope and methodological constraints. For example, while data on participants' pre-employment police training experiences was collected, their training periods varied significantly, and changes in the curriculum over time, as well as the fragmentary nature of their memories, made it difficult to establish a coherent analytical focus. Moreover, this topic would require additional methodological approaches such as curriculum analysis or participant observation for an in-depth exploration, so it was excluded from the final analysis.

- The first step was *familiarising oneself with the data*. I immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading it and noting initial ideas.
- The second step was *generating initial codes*. I systematically coded interesting features of data items across the entire dataset.
- The third step was *searching for themes*. I sorted the codes into potential themes and collected all the data related to each potential theme. Themes capture what is essential in the data in relation to the research question and represent some degree of patterned responses or meaning within the dataset. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that the description of themes as 'emerging' or 'discovered' is a passive description of the analytical process, emphasising the active role of the researcher in identifying patterns/themes, selecting those of interest and reporting them to the reader.
- The fourth step was *reviewing themes*. I checked to ensure the themes work well with the coded extracts and the overall dataset.
- The fifth step was *defining and naming themes*. Through ongoing analysis, I fleshed out the details of each theme and the overall story that the analysis told.
- The final step was *producing the report*. I wrote an academic report linking the analysis findings, including vivid examples from the data, to the research questions and literature.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the above is not a linear process but a recursive process that moves back and forth between the different stages as needed. In the above process, the coding and theme generation process may vary slightly depending on whether the theme is data-driven or theory-driven (Braun and Clarke 2006). The former can be understood as an inductive approach, and the latter as a deductive approach. In this thesis, both approaches were

flexibly combined. In the second step, where initial codes were generated, I immersed myself in the data through an inductive approach and coded broadly, focusing on points that seemed interesting or meaningful. In the third step, once potential themes were formed, they were structured using theoretical concepts such as the three dimensions of organisational justice. In the fourth step, I reviewed whether the generated themes matched the data well and confirmed consistency with the theoretical framework. This analytical strategy can be understood as an effort to ensure both analytical depth and theoretical contribution, in line with previous studies (e.g. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; Swain 2018).

In this thesis, the researcher and participants are ‘female police officers’ in ‘South Korea’, a relatively homogeneous group. Therefore, this thesis has fewer concerns about cultural diversity, such as gender, language, and race. However, age, rank, and geographic location variations among the participants may influence their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the world. As such, I approached the data analysis with an open mind.

The analysis was conducted using NVivo software, a tool designed to systematically and efficiently analyse complex qualitative data. It not only facilitates data management and organisation, coding and theme development, querying and data exploration, data visualisation, and documentation but also ensures research transparency by recording each analysis step clearly (Jackson et al. 2019). I uploaded the anonymised Korean transcript files to this software for analysis. In the coding phase, I used the original Korean data to ensure in-depth coding. After identifying important themes or codes from the Korean data, I translated necessary excerpts into English.

## Ensuring trustworthiness

Qualitative research analysis is often criticised concerning researcher bias and subjectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have developed a widely used criterion for assessing qualitative research analyses, focusing on trustworthiness. They emphasise that credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability are crucial for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. Credibility assesses the consistency of research findings with participants' experiences, while dependability examines the consistency and stability of the research process. Confirmability is the evaluation of whether research findings are based on research data rather than the researcher's bias. Transferability is the concept of evaluating whether research findings apply to other situations or groups, rather than being limited to specific research situations (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Braun and Clarke 2006; Patton 2014). Creswell and Miller (2000) identify nine commonly used strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research, such as triangulation, finding disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement, collaboration, audit trail, thick and rich description, and peer review. Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers undertake at least two strategies in a given qualitative study. This thesis sought to ensure trustworthiness through peer review, researcher reflexivity, and thick and rich description.

First, given that this study was conducted as insider research, I sought to incorporate external perspectives through *peer review*. Peer review involves a knowledgeable individual assessing the research process and data related to the explored research or phenomenon (Creswell and Miller 2000). Throughout the research process, I consistently present my methodology, findings, and interpretations to my supervisory team and receive constructive feedback. The diverse perspectives of the three supervisors helped me greatly in reflecting on aspects of

Korean institutions, organisational culture, and gender norms that I had taken for granted. The methodological advice I received during the interview process improved the quality of subsequent interviews, and the questions raised from an outsider's perspective had a positive impact on ensuring depth of analysis and balance of description.

Second, this thesis sought to ensure confirmability through *reflexivity*, where the researcher disclosed their assumptions and beliefs, and biases. In this chapter, I detail the specific measures I took to ensure transparency regarding any biases that could have influenced my findings or interpretations, and to minimise their effects on the research process. These reflections are integrated with interpretive commentary in the chapters where the findings are presented.

Finally, this thesis aimed to increase the transferability of the findings through *rich and thick description*, which refers to a detailed description of a qualitative study's setting, participants, and themes. By contextualising the people or site of the study through thick descriptions, a reader can gain a deeper understanding of the research environment, thus establishing the credibility of the description.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological foundation of the thesis. In summary, this thesis adopted a feminist interpretivist approach to explore the gendered experiences of female officers within the Korean police organisation. To this end, both in-depth interviews and FGIs were conducted, and the collected data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006)

Thematic Analysis. Throughout the research process, I made a conscious effort to remain reflexive and to acknowledge the influence of my positionality as a researcher.

Building on this methodological approach, Chapters 6, 7, and 8 present the key findings of this study, organised around the main themes that emerged from the data. The structure was intentionally designed to reflect an analytic progression. Chapter 6 examines gendered organisational pressures shaping female officers' work experiences. Chapter 7 explores how these conditions are interpreted and navigated through organisational justice perceptions and career strategies. Chapter 8 considers how relational dynamics among female officers can both reproduce and, in some cases, reconfigure these conditions through solidarity and collective practice.

## [Chapter 6] Negotiating Gendered Work: Challenges and Responses of Female Officers

### Introduction

This chapter analyses the gendered experiences of female officers in the course of their work (research question 2) and how they respond to the discrimination and unfair treatment they encounter in the process (research question 5). It aims to reveal how structural and cultural conditions shape their everyday work experiences and practices, situating these experiences within a deeply embedded occupational culture characterised by masculine norms, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The chapter is organised around key aspects of female officers' work experiences, including gendered role expectations and task allocation, experiences of exclusion and harassment, and practices of adaptation and resistance in relation to male-centric norms. It concludes by examining the limits of institutional reform and cultural change. Table 10 provides an overview of the chapter's thematic structure and also indicates the analytic level at which each section is examined. These analytic levels refer to three dimensions of analysis: macro (structural and institutional conditions), meso (occupational culture and organisational practices), and micro (individual experiences and strategies). These levels are used as analytic lenses rather than discrete categories, and are intended to make visible how gendered inequalities operate across different dimensions of policing.

**Table 10 Overview of sections and analytic levels in chapter 6**

| Section | Sub-section | Analytic level |
|---|---|---|
| **Gendered roles and expectations of female officers** | Assigning women and vulnerable groups to female officers | Meso |
| | Women in the office, men in the field | Meso |
| | Gendered allocation of informal and auxiliary tasks | Meso |
| **Navigating discrimination in male-centric work environments** | Gendered exclusion and isolation | Meso |
| | Survival strategy in male-centric work environments | Micro |
| | Holding and maintaining authority | Meso–Micro |
| **Gender-based harassment and coping mechanisms** | Types and characteristics of gender-based harassment | Meso–Micro |
| | Response to gender-based harassment | Micro |
| **Navigating male-centric norms** | Adapting to male-centric norms | Micro |
| | Challenging male-centric norms | Micro |
| **Institutional reform and the limits of cultural change** | Changes in systems and culture | Macro |
| | Superficial changes and the limits of gender sensitivity | Macro |

## Gendered roles and expectations of female officers

The workplace experiences of the participants revealed that gender-based segregation of roles within the Korean police organisation remains prevalent. While comparisons among participants of various ages indicated some progress compared to the past, but in many areas, these practices were still entrenched or limited the role of women covertly.

### Assigning women and vulnerable groups to female officers

In Korean policing, tasks related to women tended to be assigned to female officers. These

assignments were often made by managers or male superiors, revealing an organisational practice that reflects implicit gender-based role expectations. For instance, female officers are prioritised not only for cases involving female victims, protesters, suspects, and individuals under the influence of alcohol but also for access to women-only facilities like women's saunas and restrooms. Female officers are also assigned to work with socially vulnerable people, such as children and adolescents. P9 recalled that she was not preferred as a patrol partner, but other teams and police boxes would actively seek her assistance during gender-based violence (GBV) incidents or cases involving the socially vulnerable.

> *It is mainly women who do not want to talk to male officers in cases of sexual crimes or domestic violence or in cases where teenagers do not speak. They tell me, 'I guess they don't want to talk to me because I'm a man, so please see them' (P9, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Female officers were required to perform the same duties as their male counterparts while also taking on additional women-related responsibilities. With women comprising less than 16% of the police force, they were frequently called upon to assist other departments or teams whenever cases involving women arose, sometimes even on their days off. Such work support was not limited to emergency situations, but also occurred in the handling of routine incidents. For instance, P16, who worked as a detective in the major crimes unit, had to handle not only her own cases but also those involving female suspects from her colleagues' caseloads. P12, the only female patrol officer at her police box, was asked to come to work on her day off to handle women-related cases. When she refused, she was criticised by her superior. She noted that the task was not urgent, and there was no legal requirement for a female officer to be present, yet she felt it was unfair to be called in on her day off simply because she was a woman.

In addition, many female officers in this study have experience in the women and juvenile affairs unit, which handles crimes involving children, adolescents, and women. For example, after being promoted to a managerial position, F3 was assigned to a GBV unit, regardless of her prior experience or personal preference. Although she found the role emotionally exhausting and did not want it, the organisation justified the placement by saying, 'We kept this position vacant because we heard a female manager was being transferred here'.

This practice can be understood as reflecting both organisational efforts to manage potential complaints or legal risks and broader gendered assumptions about women's perceived suitability for victim-centred work. This, combined with the stereotype that women possess greater gender sensitivity and better caregiving abilities and communication skills than men, is a significant factor that leads to female officers being assigned to specific tasks (Angehrn et al. 2021). However, this results in female officers being forced into *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman 1987) and emotional labour while male officers are relatively protected and allowed to focus on their preferred duties.

While this structure can enhance the support provided to victims, it also places significant emotional and physical strain on female officers, potentially leading to burnout (Hautzinger 2020). Participants explained that when dealing with child abuse, GBV, and youth cases, the work is psychologically demanding due to the vulnerability and dependency of the victims. One participant noted that because these cases heavily rely on victim testimony, complaints frequently arise when outcomes fall short of the expectations of victims or their guardians. These repeated complaints contribute significantly to officers' emotional strain. In addition, securing the safety of victims and providing support for them is a vast and sensitive task, which has created additional burdens. Some participants have faced emotional and physical burnout,

prompting them to consider leaving the position. This suggests that emotional labour is not merely an individual burden but is structurally embedded within organisational practices, where its costs are absorbed by individual officers rather than institutionally recognised or redistributed (Lumsden and Black 2018). Such dynamics also help to explain why such work is often marginalised among male officers, who frequently perceive it as the 'kitchen' (Hautzinger 2020, p.152) or 'crock of shit' (Loftus 2007, p.244) within the police organisation.

> *The work involving women and youth is actually too extensive. Dealing with victims is complex and requires great care. There are always complaints, and the responsibility is entirely on the person in charge... Next year, I'm planning to escape from this department (P10, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

In addition to the emotional intensity of the work, some female officers described experiencing additional emotional strain during the handling of sexual violence cases, stemming from gendered expectations of empathy. Several participants explained that they experienced tension between the professional neutrality required in the investigative process and the obligation to demonstrate empathy expected of women. This can be understood through Hochschild's (1983) concepts of *surface acting* and *deep acting*. Female officers engage in *surface acting* by expressing empathic responses regardless of their actual feelings, or they may engage in *deep acting* by internalising these expectations and attempting to feel the 'appropriate' emotions. In this process, the tension between the professional neutrality and gendered norms of empathy is heightened, resulting in emotional dissonance.

> *When a victim comes to the police saying that she has been (sexually) assaulted, I find it difficult to understand when there are many things that I cannot understand in the environment in which I have lived. She wants me to empathise with her because we are*

*both women, but I sometimes find it challenging to know what to do when I cannot (P21, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

Despite the emotional and professional complexity of this work, tasks assigned to female officers tended to be treated as low-skilled labour. In this study, work related to victim protection tended to be transferred to the youngest female officers in the unit. In the past, in the absence of female officers in investigative departments, those with no investigative background were assigned to conduct investigations involving victims of sexual violence on a rotational basis. This situation underscores the perception that victim protection work was regarded as a low-skill, gendered responsibility within the organisation. This is linked to a broader tendency to undervalue emotional and care work traditionally assigned to women, as such work has often been viewed as rooted in innate femininity rather than recognised expertise (Heidensohn and Brown 2000; England 2005; Hochschild 2012). This attitude reflects a broader cultural hierarchy within policing, whereby duties relating to care, communication and emotional engagement are positioned as less central than those focused on physicality and enforcement (Westmarland 2001).

Contrary to this framing, participants who had engaged in women and youth-related work over an extended period emphasised that counselling and protecting victims was far from simple, requiring not only considerable patience but also high levels of experience and expertise. They further noted that the quality of the initial investigation could shape both victims' recovery and judicial outcomes, as illustrated below.

*I think this job really requires expertise. I believe the initial investigation is critical. How the investigation is conducted at the beginning can impact the case when it goes to court later. This job is very professional (P25, 30s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

*Investigating and referring a case is something that everyone does in any investigative department. However, in the field of women and youth, the victim's recovery and whether the offender is severely punished depends on how deeply I look into the case (P28, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35-40yr).*

**Women in the office, men in the field**

Police work is divided into fieldwork and desk work. Fieldwork includes on-site activities such as patrols, traffic enforcement, dealing with rallies and demonstrations, responding to calls, intelligence gathering, and door-to-door investigations, while desk work involves administrative tasks like handling complaints, writing documents, and analysing investigative data (Shin 2016).

As noted in Chapter 4, until the 1990s, female officers in South Korea were more often assigned to desk work than to fieldwork. This pattern reflected the institutional legacy of the pre-integration period, during which women's roles in policing were formally limited to desk-based work. In particular, patrol duties have been open to female officers since the 2000s, but before that, there was a strong perception that women were unsuitable. Reasons given for not assigning female officers to patrol units included perceptions that 'fieldwork is dangerous for women', 'there are no facilities for female officers at police precincts/police boxes', and 'male officers may feel uncomfortable working overnight with a female colleague'. This reflects a view of women as subjects to be protected and an organisational culture that prioritises not causing discomfort to male colleagues.

*I came to the police precinct for patrol work, but the chief told me to handle administrative tasks instead. He said, 'If you ride the patrol car at night, the wives of male officers can't sleep because they're anxious. Imagine if their husbands were spending the night with a*

*single female officer. Wouldn't it be difficult to maintain the family?' (P9, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

However, opportunities for female officers to engage in fieldwork gradually expanded over time. This was due to the policy of assigning female officers to each department and the increasing demand for public safety related to women. However, the perception that women are still more suitable for desk work remain within the organisation. Some younger participants shared that although they wished to work in patrol, they were encouraged by their supervisors to take on administrative tasks instead. Rather than clearly expressing or insisting on their preferences, they often accepted these suggestions in line with the organisational atmosphere and expectations.

*I actually wanted to be on the patrol team. But the police station and box chief said a new person should do the administrative work. They told me I would be better off in the administrative team since I am a female officer (P25, 30s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

Even female officers fortunate enough to be assigned patrol duties were soon encouraged to transition to desk work. Some moved to desk work after experiencing a decline in their sense of efficacy in patrol work. Meanwhile, some male officers, without considering these underlying factors, developed a negative perception that female officers were seeking more manageable tasks.

*When I was doing patrol work, most of my senior officers told me, 'You don't have to work so hard. You'll end up in a desk job anyway, so there's no need to push yourself'. And another thing I frequently heard was, 'You look like a desk job type' (P15, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

Today, the division of fieldwork and desk work by gender is particularly evident in the investigative field. The Korean police investigative units are classified into the detective division and the investigation division. The detective division focuses on violent crimes that cause physical harm, with field operations at its core. Conversely, the investigation division handles economic and white-collar crimes, primarily involving document analysis and interviews. In Korean policing, the field of criminal investigation was long considered an exclusive domain of males, but as discussed in Chapter 4, women began to gain entry into this area during the *Take-off* stage of Brown's (1997) model. However, this period primarily opened up opportunities for women in the investigation division, leading to continued male dominance in the detective division. Although female officers have recently been given more opportunities to engage in detective work, they still tend to be assigned to office work within their units. For example, P16, who had worked in the detective division for several years, explained that when conducting operations to apprehend criminals, she mainly stayed in the office doing paperwork such as drafting warrants, while her male colleagues were assigned to on-site responsibilities. This illustrates how the internal–external division of labour along gender lines continues to persist in subtle ways, functioning as a constraint on the roles available to female officers.

> *When I worked in the major crime investigation team, someone had to run around the scene to arrest the criminal, and someone had to create documents in the office and quickly submit them to the court. I was mainly in the office. (...) My partner often had to stay in the office because of me, so I felt sorry for him (P16, 40s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

**Gendered allocation of informal and auxiliary tasks**

In addition, some participants shared experiences of frequently being assigned informal and auxiliary duties within the police station due to their gender, in addition to their official duties.

For example, P8 recalled that while working as a patrol officer, she was asked to dance at a police public relations event because she was a female officer. This forced her to spend time practising dancing in a separate office instead of patrolling for a while. She explained that she felt low self-esteem at the time because her gender was being used as a PR tool for the police, which led to a diminished sense of professional identity.

> *When I went to an event and danced in a uniform, I was hit by reality. (...) From that moment on, I started to feel smaller. I thought, 'This is my role in this organisation, and women are only used for PR and things like that' (P8, 30s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

Other participants also shared their experiences of being naturally given the roles of guides and event assistants during police station events. They described preparing refreshments for guests visiting the office, preparing meals for team members, and handling clerical tasks, often simply because they were women. Although this practice has shown some improvement due to shifts in social perceptions, they noted that such expectations were still prevalent, particularly when working with older managers.

> *My team leader had very old-fashioned ideas about women. When guests come to the office, as I'm the youngest, I serve them tea. But my team leader always told me to bring a tray and cup saucer even when I make just one cup of tea. He says it's a matter of etiquette. I asked another male senior about this, and he said that the team leader never asks him to do that (P26, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10 yr).*

This practice of allocating informal and auxiliary tasks to women reflects the attitude of organisations that expect women to deliver a friendly and soft image rather than perform professional duties and faithfully fulfil traditional gender roles. This served as a form of psychological hierarchisation that subtly lowered women's status and often created an

environment in which they found it difficult to refuse such roles. The following section examines how, within an organisational culture shaped by these gendered role expectations, female officers experienced exclusion, the undermining of their job authority, and the strategies they employed in response.

## Navigating discrimination in male-centric work environments

### Gendered exclusion and isolation

Female officers who entered male-dominated departments faced difficulties due to the male-centric culture and discriminatory treatment rather than the work itself. Many participants in this study reported facing resistance from their male colleagues, which often took the form of a lack of on-the-job training. These forms of resistance can be understood not simply as interpersonal discrimination, but as manifestations of a masculine occupational culture in which access to core knowledge and belonging is informally regulated. Krantz and Trainor (2019) explain such resistance as a fear of organisational change and a defensive response to perceived threats to established occupational identities. This dynamic is illustrated by the experience of P29, who, after being assigned to the investigation department, was treated as invisible by colleagues for approximately a year and was unable to acquire essential investigative techniques.

> *I wasn't even treated like a person for the first year in that department. It was like, 'How dare you?' (...) Later, I heard that the senior investigators had told the younger ones in the smoking room that if they ever tried to teach me the job, they wouldn't let it slide (P29, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Female officers also experienced discrimination as fieldwork partners. Male officers were reluctant to partner with women due to discomfort during waiting periods between calls, the physical burden of responding to incidents, and the perceived burden of acting as a protector. This aligns with Martin (1980) and Hunt (1990), who discussed the possibility of emotional entanglement and instability in situations requiring backup.

> *In areas with few incident reports, inevitably, two people of different genders spending the night in the same space would feel uncomfortable. On top of that, male officers often say they have to 'help' female officers. The job is much harder if your partner becomes someone you must protect (P23, 40s, Inspector↓, 15-20yr).*

This made female officers feel intimidated or cautious around their male partners. Patrol officer P15 felt that civilians were uncooperative during law enforcement situations because she was a woman. Believing that her male partner would not have faced the same challenges if paired with another male officer, she developed a sense of guilt for placing an unnecessary burden on the team. Detective P8, the only woman in her team, constantly felt the need to gauge her teammates' reactions, which caused significant stress and eventually affected her health. These accounts demonstrate that female officers engaged in emotional labour, going beyond simply managing their feelings within the team, by constantly regulating their words and actions to maintain team atmosphere and reduce potential tensions. This can be understood in relation to the nature of police culture, which has been shown to be neither monolithic nor fixed, but instead varies across teams and situations (Chan 1997; Waddington 1999; Loftus 2008). As a result, female officers were required to continually adjust their emotional expressions and interactions to what was considered appropriate in each context. In particular, because female officers are not fully accepted within the organisation but instead occupy a precarious position

at the boundary of acceptance, they are required to continually negotiate their fit within the organisation (Rabe-Hemp 2009), which in turn intensifies the demand for emotional labour. While these efforts contribute to the smooth functioning of the team, they tend to remain largely invisible and are often taken for granted (Hochschild 1983; Angehrn et al. 2021).

On the field, female officers experienced exclusion from core responsibilities. Participants shared experiences of being assigned only to station-based duties rather than patrol, being told to stay behind at the scene of an important incident, or being excluded from key suspect arrests and interrogations. P19, who worked in a rural area, recalled being assigned as a junior officer while a less-experienced male colleague was given the lead role. Similarly, P18, who had worked in the national security investigation unit for 15 years, stated that she had never been assigned to interrogate a suspect. This represents an extreme example of the exclusion of women from core policing duties, which appears to have been carried out routinely, without any clear justification within the organisation. These routine exclusions illustrate how 'core police work' is culturally defined and protected as a masculine domain, reinforcing boundaries around who is seen as a legitimate police actor.

Exclusion from informal networks was also identified as an important issue. Rabe-Hemp (2008) emphasised that such exclusion leads to the loss of important information and opportunities for collaboration. P16, who had worked as a detective for many years, shared her experience of being marginalised from men's informal communication networks, regardless of her efforts.

> *Most conversations happened in the smoking area, but since I'm a female officer, I often found myself unable to join in. I was supposed to be the one to communicate with other teams, but because of this barrier, it sometimes caused issues for the junior officer on my team. I felt that when others looked at me, their first thought was, 'Oh, she's a woman'*

*(P16, 40s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

Smoking areas within police organisations served as important informal networking spaces where information about cases was shared and relationships were formed, going beyond mere rest areas. However, female officers, especially non-smokers, found it difficult to access these spaces and experienced alienation in an atmosphere where they were implicitly unwelcome. As a non-smoker, P16 tried to communicate with her fellow detectives while staying in the smoking room, but it proved ineffective. This form of spatial and relational exclusion reflects the persistence of the so-called 'old boys' club' culture within policing (Rabe-Hemp 2008; Shelley et al. 2011; Sanders et al. 2022), which is often reinforced through informal, male-dominated spaces like smoking rooms. This can be interpreted as a result of structural exclusion based on gender rather than a lack of individual capacity. Her inability to fulfil her role of facilitating communication between teams not only affected her personally but also had a negative impact on her team members. Ultimately, she had no choice but to transfer to another department. This highlights the structural issues that make it difficult for women to take on a responsible role within the organisation.

The experience of female officers being repeatedly excluded and marginalised in the workplace can lead to structural isolation. This isolation cuts off emotional and professional support from colleagues and can cause female officers to try to deal with and solve problems on their own. For example, P20 chose to solve problems independently without relying on her colleagues after being excluded by her male colleagues in the early stages of her career.

*Because I once experienced that kind of treatment from others, I realised I had to rely on myself and not depend on anyone else. When I first joined the investigative unit, I didn't*

*learn from case files written by senior officers—I studied on my own, reading books and figuring things out myself. (...) During Chuseok holiday, a wanted suspect was apprehended, but I didn't want to ask my senior for a favour, so I took my husband with me to take custody of the suspect (P20, 40s, Inspector↓, 20-25yr).*

The P20 experience highlights the duality of the self-reliant attitude that female officers have developed to overcome feelings of isolation. She has shown independence, but excessive self-reliance can sometimes lead to dangerous situations. Instances, where she pursued an arrest alone or opted to seek her husband's assistance instead of her partner, could negatively impact her safety and work efficiency because she missed opportunities to leverage the cooperation and support available within her organisation.

The tokenistic practice of assigning one woman to each department has deepened the sense of isolation. Lavender and Todak (2022) criticise the 'check the box' practice of assigning one woman to each department or leadership position to showcase a superficial commitment to gender diversity in American policing. Such practices also exist in South Korea and one participant described female officers as 'islands' within their units. This environment makes it difficult for female officers to build a support network and weakens the foundation for cooperation.

*Back in 2008, when I was on a patrol team, I was the only female officer on the team. Even now, it's rare to see more than two women in a patrol unit. (...) Female officers stationed at police precincts or police boxes really feel like isolated islands (F4, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 15-20yr).*

**Survival strategy in male-centric work environments**

Murray (2020) pointed out that female officers in Canada, unlike male officers, deploy everyday coping strategies to resist gender inequality. Female officers in South Korea are also implementing survival strategies in a male-dominated work environment throughout their careers. The survival strategies of the participants can be categorised into three main types.

The first type of survival strategy is **challenging gender biases**. This strategy appears in various forms, including *undoing gender* (Deutsch 2007). This can be seen as an attempt to show that the stereotypes commonly assigned to female officers are incorrect. They rejected gender-based labels and responded by working more actively and taking the lead in the field to refute these stereotypes. For example, P14, who works in the patrol team while raising a child, try to avoid the stereotype of being labelled 'the baby's mother' by rarely taking leave and always being the first to respond to any incident. P26, while working in a patrol team, intentionally acted aggressively at crime scenes or approached suspects wielding knives before anyone else. She recalled that she did this to gain recognition from her male colleagues, but ultimately exposed herself to danger. This shows how social expectations based on gender and the pressure they create affect the work performance and personal safety of female officers.

> *When responding to a scene, I deliberately said, 'I don't want to stay in the back just because I'm a woman. I want to go up front'. For example, when a domestic violence report came in with a suspect holding a knife, I went out with my team of four. I told my senior, who was carrying a handgun, 'Since I have the taser, I'll take the lead', and opened the door to go in first (P26, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

The second type is **strategic adaptation**. This refers to a tactical approach where female officers seek to survive by blending into the existing male-dominated culture or minimising potential disadvantages. Women in this category recognised gendered expectations and, rather

than rejecting them outright from their position as organisational minorities, they tended to endure them by adjusting and negotiating according to the situation. For example, some participants believed that accepting orders from their superiors or colleagues to 'step back' during the emergency response was the best action. P16, who worked as a detective, never refused requests to assist with cases involving female suspects. She feared that declining such tasks might cost her opportunities to establish herself as a detective. She even endured situations without complaint where her boss threw his used socks at her, as she believed he was giving her a chance to grow in the field.

> *At that time, that was the only way for me to survive there. The moment I said, 'No, I don't want to,' I would have had to give up the detective work I wanted so badly. I was just so grateful to be working as a detective… To be honest, it was tiring for me too. I wanted to rest on my days off, but if they told me to come in, I just went (P16, 40s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

Such practices may appear to conform to gender norms on the surface, but in reality, they can be seen as a way of strategically managing and utilising those norms. In other words, rather than simply *doing gender*, this can be interpreted as strategic *doing gender*, which involves conditionally accepting and adjusting norms to survive and secure opportunities. This strategy is also linked to other cases where individuals seek to maintain their position within an organisation by coordinating relationships. P23, who worked in a rural area with a low number of female officers, adhered to the principle of 'not making enemies' and prioritised maintaining positive workplace relationships. When she had concerns, she expressed them in writing rather than confronting others directly. While this may resemble Martin's (1979) concept of *policeWOMEN*, it is distinct in that it involves active efforts to negotiate relationships and seek

survival and growth while avoiding direct conflict.

The third is **reconfiguring the conditions**. This involves actively reshaping one's circumstances rather than passively accepting exclusion. Participants in this type seek better working conditions or a stronger sense of self-efficacy through job transfers to other agencies or departments. P21, after experiencing a sense of powerlessness as a patrol officer, obtained an investigative officer certification and moved to the investigations unit. P25, who was assigned to administrative duties at a police box against her preference, transferred to the women and juvenile affairs division at the police station, where she had been offered a position. Research by Martin (1989) and Haarr and Morash (2013) shows that female officers often transfer to less hostile work environments in response to hostile working environments for women. However, their male colleagues may not recognise that these transfers are usually reactive rather than driven purely by personal aspirations. There are also cases where some participants have attempted to get promoted to escape from unfair treatment. This strategy is difficult to fully explain within the framework of *doing/undoing gender*. This is because it is not so much about directly enacting or resisting gender norms, but rather about practices that seek to avoid or reconfigure unfavourable environments. For example, promotion to escape an unfair environment may disrupt existing gender hierarchies, while a transfer to the women and juvenile affairs division may be more in line with gendered role expectations. Therefore, this strategy requires interpretation beyond the framework of *doing/undoing gender*, as it reflects a more complex strategy.

The survival strategies discussed above reflect varied responses to gender discrimination, from acts of resistance to strategic adaptation and repositioning within structural constraints. These illustrate how female officers navigate and accommodate a deeply masculine occupational

culture in which recognition, belonging, and legitimacy are unevenly distributed. However, these efforts are mainly carried out on an individual level and are limited in addressing underlying organisational culture or structural issues.

**Holding and maintaining authority**

The female officers in this study frequently encountered obstacles in exercising authority and gaining recognition due to their gender. This is because various social and structural barriers hinder female officers' exercise of authority and power. As discussed in Chapter 2, effective authority is exercised when there is a balance between organisational approval (authority from 'above'), collaboration with colleagues (authority from 'below'), and individual confidence (authority from 'within') (Obholzer 2019b). Despite the formal authority granted to them, female officers often faced challenges from male colleagues, superiors, and the public. These difficulties were particularly pronounced for those who were younger or held lower ranks. This can be understood as a result of the clash between traditional social constructs of authority and the intersection of youth, lower rank, and female identity in Korean society.

Many participants reported frequently experiencing gender discrimination in their interactions with citizens. Female officers were more often ignored or subjected to hostile attitudes by citizens or drunk people compared to their male counterparts. For instance, P13 stated, 'Some citizens look down on female officers for no reason. If you're young, female, and of low rank, you receive the worst treatment'. In addition, some participants frequently received requests from citizens to 'call a male officer instead of a female officer'. This reflects the bias that men are physically stronger and more authoritative and effective in handling conflict situations.

The authority of female officers was undermined not only by citizens but also by male

colleagues and supervisors. Patrol officer P14 was scolded by her team leader in front of a domestic violence victim and perpetrator, saying, 'How can you call yourself a police officer if you can't even verify these people's identities?' This can be seen as an example of the team leader, who was not on good terms with her, showing off his power while diminishing her authority. The case of P28 below clearly shows how gender stereotypes undermine the authority of a female officer and how those stereotypes shape the behaviours of both the male suspect and the male officer.

> *A male officer had a prostitution suspect in front of him while I was sitting at the desk across from them. Then he asked the suspect, 'Do you want to confess to me and get it over with, or would you rather be questioned by the female officer over there?' I believe he was implying, 'Do you want to be embarrassed by having to admit to soliciting prostitution in front of a woman?' The even more ridiculous part? The suspect confessed. I couldn't believe that kind of remark actually worked (P28, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35-40yr).*

In this case, the male officer's remark prioritises the female officer's gender over her professional identity. In doing so, he uses her presence to reinforce his authority. The undermining of job authority also occurred between a male employee and his female supervisor. When P17 was appointed as the team leader in a new department—a role unfamiliar to her—a male team member showed a lack of respect for her supervisory role, citing his greater experience in the department as the basis for his dismissive attitude.

> *There was a more experienced male officer on the team who had been handling traffic accident investigations for five years. I was younger than him and had no experience in traffic accident investigations, so you can imagine how much he looked down on me. I ended up treating him almost like the team leader. (...) I kept working while being overly conscious of his reactions. After six months, I just wanted to take a leave of absence (P17,*

*40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Despite having authority from 'above', her authority was weakened due to her gender and lack of experience. This, in turn, undermined her confidence (authority from 'within') and caused job-related stress.

As such, even if female officers have the authority to perform their duties, they are often not recognised by citizens or colleagues. This shows how formal authority does not translate into substantial authority. In particular, the narratives of misogyny and the anti-policewomen discourse that emerged after gender reform in policing had a negative impact on the authority of female officers in law enforcement. On the police internal network bulletin board and Blind, an anonymous online community for office workers, posts mocking female officers or claiming reverse discrimination within the organisation frequently appeared. As a result, some participants felt intimidated, fearing that their actions or work performance would be unfairly criticised simply because they were women, and experienced anxiety over potential online attacks. This fear appears to have been reinforced by repeated instances where images or videos of female officers performing their duties—such as the 'Daerim Female Officer Case' discussed in Chapter 4—became controversial topics in male-dominated online communities.[10]

*I once did a media interview regarding a case I investigated, and after the interview, I became worried. I was afraid that, because I'm a female officer, the clip from the interview might be edited and circulated in online communities and used negatively. It scared me*

[10] The case occurred in 2019 when a female officer was criticised for her allegedly inadequate response during an arrest, becoming the target of ridicule and condemnation online.

*(P6, 20s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

Participants expressed shock at the blatant misogyny that has surfaced online in recent years. Choo (2024), in a research project commissioned by the national police agency, noted that the most frequently asked question by female officers was about how their colleagues think about gender issues, including the discourse on the uselessness of female officers. As such, anti-policewomen discourse circulating both within and outside the organisation not only undermined the authority of female officers in law enforcement settings, but more importantly, weakened their confidence and disrupted their 'authority from within'.

> *It could be written by a few extreme individuals, but I was shocked by the expressions being poured out anonymously. That person must be a colleague who works with female officers... I wonder if others among my colleagues think this way, and it really gave me chills (P5, 30s, Senior Inspector↑, 10-15yr).*

Female officers have employed various coping strategies to respond to these challenges. Some have used strong tones and attitudes to avoid being disregarded by citizens. Detective P8 and investigator P26 explained that they deliberately act tough or adopt a firm attitude to prevent the other party from belittling them. On the other hand, some have tried to use their communication skills to gain an advantage in relationships with citizens. Patrol officers P1 and P17 actively listened to the parties at the scene of the incident and encouraged them to open up and resolve the issue on their own. These response strategies show that it is working as a way for female officers to secure their authority within the police organisation. This can also be understood as a complex practice in which female officers strategically perform or adjust gender norms depending on the situation, navigating between *doing and undoing gender* (West and Zimmerman 1987; Deutsch 2007).

## Gender-based harassment and coping mechanisms

Beyond the challenges faced in performing their duties, female officers also encountered gendered challenges in interpersonal relationships within their organisations. Most participants reported experiencing gender-based harassment at some point in their careers, with variations in its nature depending on career stage and work environment. While participants employed a range of coping strategies in response to such harassment, it was not easy to raise the issue officially. This highlights the need to understand why victims often endure or respond passively to these situations and to examine the factors that could lead to a shift toward more active responses. This section explores gender-based harassment in interpersonal interactions and how female officers navigate these challenges.

### Types and characteristics of gender-based harassment

Participants shared their experiences of gender-based harassment, both directly and indirectly, which were categorised into four main types:

- Verbal harassment: Unwelcome sexual jokes, rude remarks based on gender stereotypes, comments about physical appearance, and unwanted sexual advances.
- Physical harassment: Inappropriate physical contact.
- Non-verbal harassment: Watching inappropriate videos during work hours, sexual objectification, and sharing videos that demean female officers.
- Social/power-based harassment: Being forced to sit next to a superior at work

gatherings, being summoned to meals with influential local figures, abuse of authority, and workplace bullying.

Significantly, the abuse of authority and workplace bullying had severe and lasting impacts on the participants. For example, P24, who entered the force as an Inspector, experienced persistent harassment from a middle-aged male colleague of the same rank in the investigative department early in her career. While the perpetrator appeared friendly to other colleagues, he consistently displayed a hostile attitude toward her, repeatedly making derogatory remarks.

> *He had a high school or middle school education and a deep sense of inferiority. The fact that he acted crazy only toward me made it incredibly difficult. I knew no one would believe me if I told this to someone else. (...) He once told me, 'I've worked my whole life and am about to retire without even making it to the rank of Senior Inspector… I'm going to bully you because I'm miserable' (P24, 30s, Senior Inspector↑, 5-10yr).*

The perpetrator's behaviour can be interpreted as jealousy from frustration and feelings of inferiority regarding his career. This aligns with Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir's (2018) concept of *the result of unfulfilled masculine entitlement*. Notably, the fact that the perpetrator, who is of the same rank as the victim, used his network power within the organisation to harass her shows that the power dynamics within the police organisation do not simply depend on rank. The majority of participants experienced gender-based harassment mostly early in their careers, and this experience tended to decrease as they gained experience and rose in rank.

The work environment was a significant factor in the frequency and nature of harassment. Participants who primarily worked in departments with a high proportion of women reported relatively fewer experiences of gender-based harassment. Participants working in rural areas experienced harassment more frequently due to a closed organisational culture with low gender

sensitivity. Most importantly, they found it difficult to formally raise issues, a situation influenced by the geographical isolation and tight-knit social structure of rural police stations (Prokos and Padavic 2002; Weisheit et al. 2005; Rabe-Hemp 2008). For example, P20 felt insulted and ashamed by the treatment of senior officers at a rural police station early in her career, and eventually chose to transfer to an urban police station. F5 also compared her work experience at a rural police station and a provincial police headquarters, criticising the lack of gender sensitivity and inefficient problem-solving procedures at the rural police station.

> *After the office dinner, we went to the second and third rounds, and the senior officers, who were drunk, mistook me for a hostess. One of them handed me a 50,000 won bill and said, 'Stay a little longer,' while grabbing my arm. (...) At small, rural police stations, many officers are nearing retirement, so it is impossible to clean up the situation. They know each other even if they only cross one or two bridges. So, even if I experience harm, there's nowhere to report it, and even if I do, nothing gets resolved (F5, 30s, Inspector↓, <5yr).*

P29, who was in charge of gender equality training at a police training institution, said that there are significant differences in gender sensitivity depending on the region. She has given lectures to police officers from across the country and said that she has noticed that gender awareness is changing more slowly in rural areas than in the metropolitan region, and that gender stereotypes are still deeply rooted.

> *I'm not trying to disparage any specific region, but there are some regions where the situation is quite serious. (...) Even if I enter a class without knowing where the attendees are from, I can immediately tell which provincial headquarters they belong to or whether they are from the metropolitan area just by observing their words and behaviour (P29, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

The hierarchical structure within the organisation and the characteristics of the workplace also influenced experiences of sexual harassment. According to some participants, sexual harassment was relatively less common at provincial headquarters or the national police agency than at frontline stations, as more colleagues and superiors there were aiming for promotion. P12 recalled the changes she felt when she transferred from a local police precinct to the national police agency, explaining that the atmosphere at the higher-level institutions was more conscious of the eyes of those around them, so cases of overt sexual harassment decreased. Similarly, P11, who had extensive experience in national and provincial headquarters, shared a similar perspective based on her career history.

> *If I had worked at a frontline police station, I think I would have experienced more sexual harassment. But since I mainly worked at the national or provincial headquarters, I hardly encountered it. In those workplaces, many people focused on promotions, so a more cautious atmosphere existed (P11, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 30-35yr).*

**Response to gender-based harassment**

Participants in this study employed a range of strategies to respond to gender-based harassment, using them in combination depending on the situation. According to Haarr and Morash (2013), female officers in the US employed various behavioural strategies to respond to discrimination and harassment, including *Straight Talk*, *Hard Work and Good Work to Prove Abilities to Do the Job*, *Putting Up With the Stressful Work Environment*, *Mentor*, *Avoid and Disengage*, and *Formal Action*. Similar types of behaviour were observed in this study. The behaviour observed in this study includes formally reporting the issue, cooperating with other victimised colleagues, seeking support from peers and supervisors, collecting evidence, straight talk, enduring the situation, and avoiding it. Among these, enduring and avoidance are classified as passive

responses, while the others are considered active strategies.

Straight talk involves conveying one's stance on a problematic situation, pointing out injustice, or encouraging a change in the other person's behaviour. Participants employed various forms of straight talks, such as highlighting wrongdoings with a firm tone to raise awareness (P3), using humour and analogies to make the other person reflect on their actions (P21), and conveying emotions calmly through messages or emails, which is a more indirect form of straight talk (P23). These were strategically chosen according to the situation and the characteristics of the other party, and they show the results of the efforts made by the female officers to deal with injustice within the organisation while protecting themselves and increasing the likelihood of resolving the issue.

Two participants reported choosing marriage as a strategy to avoid or mitigate sexual harassment. This is a new type that was not mentioned by Haarr and Morash (2013). For example, F1 and F2 described marriage as a way to escape harassment and objectification in the workplace. For F1, who was at the rank of Inspector, marriage acted as a psychological comfort and a social shield. However, for F2, who was at the rank of Police Officer, the situation was different. Even after marriage, she was not free from sexual harassment at work. It wasn't until she was promoted to the rank of Inspector that she was able to speak up and issue warnings, which led to a reduction in her harassment experiences. In other words, for her, the marriage did not serve as a practical solution; instead, her advancement in rank and improvement in self-defence abilities played a more significant role in addressing the issue. The above case illustrates how female officers are influenced by power and rank when dealing with gender-based harassment.

*I strongly felt that if getting married could prevent such experiences, I might as well just do it. So, I got married at a very young age, but I soon realised that marriage didn't change the situation. But, after I was promoted to the rank of Inspector, I could avoid those situations in advance, and more importantly, I could speak up and warn the other party myself. Since then, I haven't experienced sexual harassment (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Meanwhile, many participants endured gender-based harassment in silence. Some attempted to brush off uncomfortable situations with laughter, but this could leave room for male officers to perceive organisational sexism or misogyny as unproblematic. Previous research suggests that fear of retaliation, concerns over career advancement, and distrust in the system are key reasons why female officers hesitate to formally report such issues (Steinþórsdóttir and Pétursdóttir 2018; Brown et al. 2019; Angehrn et al. 2021). In this study, the reasons behind female officers' silence were more complicated, including not only fear of being disadvantaged and distrust of internal response systems, but also lack of supporters, emotional burden, and difficulty proving the case.

First, the lack of supporters isolates victims and makes it difficult for them to raise complaints. For example, F12 attempted to file criminal charges after experiencing workplace sexual violence, but due to discouragement from those around her, she missed the filing deadline and had to settle for an internal disciplinary request instead. She later reflected on her attempt to seek legal redress as a form of activism.

*I was a victim of sexual violence, but everyone around me told me not to file a criminal complaint, and I ended up missing the deadline. In the end, all I could do was request a disciplinary investigation and submit a petition. As a victim, I should have been able to seek redress and file charges as a matter of course, but at the time, even pursuing legal*

*action felt like activism (F12, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Secondly, concerns about the disadvantages and deteriorating relationships were another significant factor. In particular, those who had directly or indirectly witnessed secondary victimisation were even more reluctant to raise issues.

*Sexual harassment victims are almost always women. But before any action is taken, more negative rumours are circulating about the victim. (...) There is no confidentiality for victims, so the stigma follows them like a label (P26, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

For example, P19 experienced sexual harassment but was too afraid of potential repercussions to report it. She even hesitated to answer honestly in an anonymous survey. P14 faced verbal harassment from a superior but felt compelled to endure it, fearing retaliation due to his notoriously persistent nature. Some other participants explained that they were reluctant to raise the issue because they were concerned that it would make their relationships with other colleagues, as well as with the perpetrator, uncomfortable. For them, the fear of relational conflict from speaking up seems heavier than the discomfort of the harassment.

Third, a lack of trust in the internal inspection system was also a significant issue. Some participants felt the internal inspection department was biased or connected to the perpetrators. P14 reported a team leader who publicly viewed explicit material, but after discovering that confidentiality was not ensured and the report was ineffective, she stopped filing complaints, even if such incidents occurred. F5 explained that she had witnessed internal inspection officers downplaying victims' experiences or even becoming perpetrators of sexual harassment themselves. This deepened victims' scepticism about the effectiveness of internal response mechanisms.

Fourth, due to the nature of gender-based harassment, it was often difficult for victims to prove the discomfort and inappropriateness they felt. For example, P6 wrote about the uncomfortable situation in her diary but had difficulty expressing non-verbal cues and context in the text. P24 explained that when the perpetrator repeatedly engaged in ambiguous behaviour and gradually increased its intensity without leaving apparent evidence, she hesitated to report the issue, fearing she would be treated as problematic. For these reasons, gender-based harassment often remains unreported or invisible, and it may in fact be a far more serious issue within the organisation than what is outwardly acknowledged.

On the other hand, some participants were initially passive in their response, but later changed to a more active attitude. Examining the context of these changes can provide insight into developing strategies to improve responses to gender-based harassment within the organisation. For instance, P24, who suffered from harassment by a male partner, initially hesitated to report due to the lack of supportive colleagues, distrust in the internal inspection department, and fear of the negative impact on her career. However, as the pain peaked, she sought advice from senior female colleagues at a higher level and, following their guidance, gathered evidence and was able to report it to the headquarters. This shows that solidarity with trusted allies can be an important driving force in solving problems. In addition, changes in an individual's status also influenced their response strategy. P28 noted that as her age, career, and rank increased, her voice became stronger, and her opinions had a more significant influence among colleagues. She explained that these changes helped make the perpetrator apologise and made her words more trusted among colleagues. This shows that power dynamics within an organisation affect how individuals respond. Lastly, changes in organisational culture and atmosphere, discussed in the final section, also played a significant role. P11 recalled that in the past, sexual

harassment comments were widespread, and expressing concerns or complaints would label an individual as a problem employee, leaving them with no choice but to endure. However, she explained that the organisational culture has recently changed, and now there is an atmosphere where raising issues is more acceptable. This suggests that organisational-level efforts to improve gender equality can facilitate individuals' coping abilities and behavioural changes. The specific forms and limitations of such cultural change will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter.

## Navigating male-centric norms

The gendered experiences of female officers discussed earlier have had a significant impact on their attitudes and positions regarding male-centric norms. Gender stereotypes and biases about female officers form the core of male-centric norms. The image of the 'ideal' police worker is predominantly male (Loftus 2008; Silvestri 2017; Silvestri 2018), and female officers are continuously exposed to these norms. As a result, female officers may come to accept these norms as natural and inevitable. This phenomenon can be explained as a process whereby members of minority groups internalise the beliefs and behaviours of the dominant group, a concept known as *internalised oppression* (Hooks 2000). The female officers who participated in this study did not all respond identically to these male-centric norms; some adapted or accepted them, while others explored them by challenging or raising issues.

### Adapting to male-centric norms

The internalisation of male-centric norms was evident among some participants in their emphasis on physicality in police work, the suppression of expressing opinions, a preference

for gender role segregation, and a negative view towards female colleagues or superiors. For example, P25 emphasised the importance of physical strength in police work and believed that the profession was more suited to men. She mentioned that one female officer per team was sufficient.

> *I think there are more efficient jobs for men in the police. I would prefer to patrol with a close female colleague. But, the physical strength required to subdue someone significantly differs between men and women. So, I think it's better for men to handle those aspects, and instead, there should be one female officer per team (P25, 30s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

This view is linked to anxiety about the increase in the number of female officers. P5 expressed concerns that if more female officers were deployed in the field, it would weaken policing capacity, citing the disadvantages she faced due to her smaller physique. Similarly, P10, who majored in physical education at university, also expressed a sceptical view of the increasing number of female officers, emphasising the unique demands of police work. This perspective reflects an internalisation of male-centric norms in policing, where physical strength and masculinity are seen as essential to the role (Silvestri 2017). It also reveals a concern that the growing presence of women in the police force may negatively affect organisational performance (Lott 2000; Smith 2003).

> *Currently, female officers are oversaturated in the field. There are many instances where male officers are requested, but with the increasing trend of more female officers, the system may need to be reconsidered and changed (P10, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

Moreover, authority and expression of opinion in police organisations are traditionally linked to masculine characteristics, making female officers' expression of opinions potentially

perceived as inappropriate. Some participants hesitated to speak up for fear of being considered an abnormal member and practised self-censorship. For example, F2, who worked in a traditionally male-dominated policing function, initially advocated for improved working conditions for female officers. However, she became cautious about such actions after encountering negative reactions within the organisation.

> *When I say something, they think I'm complaining just because I'm a woman, so I can't speak up actively. The male officers here say things like, 'There she goes again, whining on behalf of women' (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

P28, who has had a long career, experienced internal conflict as she adapted to the male-centric norms within the organisation. While recognising the importance of solidarity, she hesitated to participate, fearing that her actions might be negatively perceived.

> *I guess I've spent so much time being mindful of how the organisation perceives me that it has become ingrained in me. Women are trained to believe that expressing anger is inappropriate and that handling things with a smile is the key to getting by in the workplace (P28, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35-40yr).*

Some participants who spoke up about unfair treatment at the beginning of their careers also chose resignation and silence as they clashed with the organisation's reality. For example, P12 and P27, who had actively voiced their concerns early in their careers, changed to a compromise stance after experiencing repeated setbacks. This can be seen as a return to *doing gender* over time, with the initial attempts at *undoing gender* gradually weakened by resistance from the organisational culture.

> *In the beginning, I couldn't stand injustice. (...) But as I got older, I let go of a lot. I don't*

*speak up anymore. If something feels truly unfair, I'll say something, but if it's bearable, I just endure it. Now, I think it's better to keep the peace (P27, 40s, Inspector↓, 20-25yr).*

Some participants strongly endorsed the necessity of gender-based role segregation. They justified this division by emphasising biological differences between men and women and the efficiency of task performance.

*I actually think gender is very important when it comes to work. From my experience at the police precinct, there are situations where a female officer is needed and others where a male officer is needed. So, I believe the best approach is to have both working together. Male and female officers each have their own strengths in different areas (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Such perspectives can be understood not merely as individual viewpoints but as the result of continuous learning and internalisation shaped by gendered work experiences within the organisation. P29 recalled an experience where she shrank from the male-dominated organisational atmosphere and avoided new challenges, focusing only on what she was good at. This can be seen as a typical example of *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman 1987).

*At the time, my low self-esteem made me reluctant to take on anything I wasn't already good at or familiar with. I felt completely trapped in my own shell, wanting to stay safe inside and only do what I was confident in (P29, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

In this study, many participants described a process in which, after experiencing exclusion and discrimination in frontline patrol units early in their careers, they regained confidence by being recognised for their performance in roles where female officers were seen as particularly necessary. Such experiences can lead to the formation of a belief that certain roles are inherently

suited to them, which may significantly influence their later preference for gendered roles. Particularly when implicit gendered expectations exist within the organisation, female officers may perceive their assigned roles as personally chosen, rather than structurally imposed. This analysis within the Korean context may provide insights into why some female officers in countries such as India, Kuwait, China, Taiwan, and Dubai prefer gendered roles, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Chu 2019; Shen 2019; Natarajan and Babu 2020; Strobl 2020; Carrington et al. 2022). In these countries, some female officers also showed a tendency to prefer or accept roles deemed appropriate for women, such as handling GBV cases. This can be interpreted as an outcome of male-dominated organisational culture and norms rather than being understood solely as a matter of personal preferences or cultural specificity. Therefore, the analysis derived from South Korea can be extended to interpret cases in other countries with similar gender structures.

Meanwhile, the acceptance of male-centric norms also manifested in the uncritical acceptance of negative perceptions of fellow female officers. Some participants described female officers as ‘complaining a lot’, ‘overly jealous’, and ‘trying to do only the easy tasks’. Because of this, they preferred to interact with male colleagues rather than women. For example, P10 explained that she found it easier to work with male colleagues than female colleagues because she had seen many female colleagues who avoided difficult tasks on the job site. P18, who had been in competitive relationships with female officers from the beginning of her career, also felt more comfortable in relationships with male colleagues. While such distancing among women often stems from gendered work assignments or competitive structures within the organisation, gender stereotypes and male-dominated organisational culture tend to obscure these conditions by framing such tensions as personal issues or as natural characteristics of women.

*I felt more comfortable working with male colleagues. They tended to take things lightly, no matter what happened, which made working with them easier. But when working with female officers, there seemed to be more talk and more issues (P10, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

**Challenging male-centric norms**

In contrast, some female officers have challenged and resisted male-centric norms. Emphasising the complexity and diversity of police work, they questioned the overemphasis on physical strength. For example, P2 pointed out that the media overly emphasises the physical aspects of police work. Similarly, F7, despite being confident in her physical abilities, stressed that quick decision-making and situational judgment are often more critical in real-life policing. This perspective was linked to a positive attitude towards the shift toward gender-integrated recruitment described in Chapter 4. These officers expressed optimism that reforming discriminatory hiring practices would increase women's presence in the organisation.

*What matters more is whether an officer can effectively use equipment, agility, and ability to make quick decisions in the field. If physical strength were the top priority, then all police recruits should be selected from those with a background in sports (F7, 20s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

They were critical of gender-based role divisions in police work and emphasised that individual motivation and ability are more important than gender in performing police duties. They also questioned the practice of assigning victim support work to specific genders.

*These days, strength is not the only thing that matters in the field. There is no need for gender-based role division. (...) There isn't a difference between male and female roles in our duties anymore. (Even if there is a lack of physical strength), It can be compensated.*

*The equipment has advanced a lot as well (P9, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Some participants who resisted male-centric norms tended to express their opinions actively when confronted with unfair situations. For example, P17, with over 20 years of experience, consistently questioned unjust circumstances, which led to difficulties in relationships with superiors.

*I kept asking why things had to be done this way, so I was always scolded by my superiors. They would say, 'You talk back', or 'I've never met someone like you'. As a result, I became completely disliked (P17, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Some participants, although initially intimidated early in their careers, gradually began to express their opinions more assertively over time. For example, P9 mentioned that in the early stages of her career, she would 'tremble alone or bury it in her heart' when facing unfair situations, but as time went on, she became more confident in expressing her views. This shift can be attributed to factors such as promotion, accumulated experience, and, as will be discussed later, changes in organisational culture.

However, not all participants experienced changes in the same way as their careers progressed. As seen in the cases of P12 and P27 discussed earlier, some became more passive. Reviewing existing studies, in a study conducted in Australia by Chan et al. (2010), female officers showed a shift from *undoing gender* to *doing gender* as their career and rank increased. On the other hand, Morash and Haarr (2012) found that resistance to externally imposed negative occupational identities was more prevalent among white female officers and those in higher ranks in their American study. These two studies show contrasting patterns in how gender is done or challenged as officers advance in their careers and ranks.

This thesis found that the changes in rank, status, or career progression, as noted in previous research, were insufficient to explain shifts in the participants' attitudes. Individual levels of gender sensitivity and the development of gender consciousness based on it were observed to play a significant role. Gender sensitivity allows individuals to recognise unfair situations, while gender consciousness prompts critical reflection. This is not simply an emotion or attitude but is a complex concept shaped through education, experience, and social relationships (West and Zimmerman 1987; Ridgeway 2011). Participants with high gender consciousness recognised the discrimination they faced as a structural issue rather than a personal problem and consciously rejected the process of honorary masculinisation. For example, P26 described her shift in perception through her own experience. Initially, she felt proud when her male colleagues told her, 'You're different from other female officers'. However, after reading a book by female officers in the Police Gender Studies Network, she realised that this mindset was a way of internalising gender inequality within the organisation. Nevertheless, among the participants in this study, heightened gender consciousness did not always translate into action. Structural constraints and organisational culture continued to influence the gap between consciousness and action. This gap, and how it can be addressed through empowerment, will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

In conclusion, female officers' attitudes toward male-centric norms varied depending on their career stage, level of gender sensitivity and consciousness, and work environment. Their responses are not confined to a binary framework of adaptation and challenge. They consisted of practices that moved along the spectrum between *doing gender* and *undoing gender*. A single female officer could adapt and/or challenge depending on the situation or the passage of time. This fluidity in their attitudes highlight that female officers cannot be defined by a singular

identity but rather as complex and multifaceted. This suggests that their perception of and responses to organisational inequality are not fixed but are continuously reshaped over time.

## Institutional reform and the limits of cultural change

The gendered roles and exclusion, survival strategies, and experiences of harassment discussed earlier have all arisen within the structural and cultural conditions of the police organisation. This section examines how these conditions are changing and what limitations remain, focusing on both institutional and cultural dimensions.

### Changes in systems and culture

Participants with long careers recalled that structures and practices that did not take into account the presence of women within the organisation in the past created a working environment that was extremely unfavourable to women. Inadequate maternity protection and parental support systems, widespread sexual harassment and discrimination, and irregular and excessive work schedules have reinforced a male-dominated culture. However, through the perspectives and experiences shared by participants from diverse generations, signs of institutional and cultural change within the organisation are gradually emerging.

First, the maternity protection and parental support system for balancing work and childcare has been enhanced compared to the past. Various policies have been introduced, including 90 days of paid maternity leave, 10 days of paid paternity leave, up to three years of parental leave, allocated childcare time during work hours, and flexible working hours (State Public Officials Service Regulations). While the initial utilisation rate of these policies was low, it has gradually

increased in response to shifts in social and organisational perceptions. For instance, the number of police officers taking parental leave rose from 171 in 2007 to 2,493 in 2019, and the parental leave utilisation rate increased from 26.8% in 2019 to 40.8% in 2023 (Lee 2024).

These institutional changes promoted a culture that values work-life balance, and the changed culture has led to increased utilisation of the system. Participants explained that there is a growing desire for work-life balance, especially among younger officers, and an increasing tendency to avoid excessive workloads. This shift has resulted in a decline in male employees' preference for labour-intensive tasks and a positive increase in their participation in shared parenting.

> *In the past, the workplace was always the top priority. Wives often couldn't say much about their husbands being away for work. But now, male employees have to share parenting responsibilities with their wives, so they are much more conscious of their wives' opinions (P4, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 25-30yr).*

With over 30 years of experience, P18 said that she has witnessed the development of the system and cultural changes, citing as an example that male officers are now actively utilising parental support policies. P14, raising a preschool-aged child, experienced part-time work twice, in 2019 and 2022, and shared that by 2022, the workplace culture had become more accepting of the policy utilisation. These cases illustrate how institutional policies and organisational culture interact to drive positive change. This aligns with the argument made by Newton and Huppatz (2020) in Chapter 2, that institutional reforms alone may lack effectiveness if not accompanied by cultural change. Some cases in this thesis demonstrate that such policies can function effectively when supported by shifts in organisational culture.

*When I worked part-time in 2019 and again in 2022, the overall atmosphere was completely different. (...) By 2022, the mindset was more like, 'This is a police welfare benefit—you'd be foolish not to use it', and 'There's a childcare hours policy, so why wouldn't you take advantage of it?' (P14, 30s, Inspector↓, 5-10yr).*

In particular, improvements in the institutional response to sexual harassment have brought significant changes to a culture in which such behaviour was previously tacitly tolerated. In 2018, as part of its gender reform initiative, the KNPA significantly overhauled its reporting and response system for sexual harassment. Disciplinary cases resulting from harassment were disclosed to internal members, and all cases nationwide were centralised and handled through a dedicated reporting centre directly under the KNPA. Most notably, a new policy was introduced to prevent secondary victimisation by ensuring that, for a period of ten years, victims and perpetrators do not work at the same location (Lee 2024). Participants noted that these institutional improvements have shifted the perception of sexual harassment from an individual matter to an organisational issue that requires systemic solutions. They also highlighted that these changes have fostered a cultural environment where younger generations of police officers feel more empowered to speak up and take action against misconduct.

*Now, more employees can speak up, and with clear reporting channels, they can confidently report incidents. The fact that there is a clear separation between the perpetrator and the victim also seems to be a positive development (F3, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

**Superficial changes and the limits of gender sensitivity**

However, while many participants acknowledged that the overt form of sexual harassment had decreased compared to the past, they did not attribute this change to an improvement in gender

sensitivity. They assessed that the organisation's strict stance and the implementation of a consistent response system had led members to be more cautious, but this shift was driven by fear of sanctions rather than a fundamental change in attitudes or awareness.

> *Now, they are just being cautious on the surface. In places without female officers, you never know what kind of things might be said. In those situations, there would be many people who would speak negatively about female officers (P8, 30s, Inspector↓, 10-15yr).*

This analysis also connects with Loftus's (2007) study. Loftus explained that the decrease in the use of racist language in the British police force was due to fear of discipline rather than a change in perception. Similarly, the changes related to sexual harassment within the South Korean police organisation are likely to remain at a superficial level.

Participants recognised the issue of low gender sensitivity within the organisation not as an individual attitude but as a structural problem. For example, P20 mentioned an incident where a fellow officer shared a video in a police precinct group chat, mocking Swedish female officers for failing to subdue a suspect properly. Although this did not directly target a specific individual like traditional sexual harassment or bullying, it clearly caused humiliation to her and revealed how insensitive the organisation's members were to gender issues. P5 also pointed out that the term 'feminist' is still perceived as uncomfortable within the organisation, and that discussions about gender equality or feminism are viewed as distant and sensitive issues. Such reactions reflect not just individual attitudes but a broader organisational culture where in-depth discussions on gender issues are lacking.

> *During a meal, I said, 'I am a feminist,' and my colleagues didn't know how to respond—their facial expressions became awkward (laughs). From their faces, I could tell how they*

*really felt about feminism (P5, 30s, Senior Inspector↑, 10-15yr).*

The lack of gender sensitivity is not limited to language or attitudes but is also evident in structural issues such as facility design and spatial arrangements. P7 criticised the persistent gender inequality embedded in the spatial design of police organisations, noting that this issue has remained unresolved from the past to the present. She recalled that when she was assigned to oversee the remodelling of an aging police station, she attempted to address these inequalities but faced resistance from within the organisation. Similarly, P29 mentioned that when a female officer tried to use the gym, which male officers mainly used in the police station, male officers wanted to restrict her from entering the gym because it was inconvenient for them to work out with their shirts off. As such, spatial design and usage inequality go beyond a simple physical problem and show that the low gender sensitivity of organisational members is contributing to the strengthening of exclusion and discrimination.

This low level of gender sensitivity was also expressed in the form of backlash during gender equality training courses promoted by the police organisation. P29, who gave a gender equality lecture at a police training institution, shared the difficulties she experienced during the training and recalled that the training environment felt highly hostile toward her.

*The classroom felt like a place where everyone, regardless of age or gender, was hostile toward me… Every day, I was criticised and trampled on. (…) Police officers dislike human rights training, but they despise gender equality training even more. It was a lonely battle with no one on my side (P29, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Such reactions were also observed in the leadership group. When the Korean National Police University first implemented a gender equality training program for police officers at the

leadership level in 2019, cases of trainees displaying disrespectful attitudes toward instructors or strongly opposing the training content were reported in the media (Jung et al. 2019).

In summary, institutional reforms have created some cracks in the gendered culture within the Korean police organisation, but members' gender sensitivity remains low, and the reforms have not been able to take root throughout the organisation in a stable and sustained way. This highlights that reforms must be accompanied by shifts in individual perceptions and an organisational environment that enables emotional acceptance.

## Conclusion

This chapter analyses how female officers in South Korea experience gendered dynamics in their work and how they respond to them. They faced various constraints, including gender-based role assignment, the unequal distribution of emotional labour, undermining of job authority, exclusion, and gender-based harassment. Female officers responded to these through fluid practices that moved between *doing gender* and *undoing gender*. Some of these practices went beyond mere survival strategies and took on the meaning of resistance against a male-dominated organisational culture.

These findings demonstrate that, despite the gender equality initiatives reviewed in Chapter 4, structural and cultural constraints continue to undermine the practical impact of institutional reforms. They can also be understood in relation to the conditions identified by Brown and Silvestri (2020b), outlined in Chapter 3. Gender-based task allocation indicates that gender balance across policing tasks and roles remains only partially realised. At the same time, some participants' critiques of assigning victim support work to specific genders resonate with

Brown and Silvestri's observation that progress towards the *Tip-over* stage requires a relaxation of women's claims to exclusivity in jobs dealing with women and children. In addition, generational shifts and institutional reforms point to gradual changes in organisational culture that may contribute to a less hierarchical and more accountable working environment.

Meaningful change can only begin when such reforms address the deep-rooted power relations and cultural norms that shape everyday organisational life. To achieve this, the experiences and voices of female officers must be meaningfully reflected in policy and organisational change, and institutional conditions must be in place that allow them to speak and act safely. The next chapter outlines participants' perceptions of organisational justice and career strategies, analysing the challenges they face as they build their careers.

# [Chapter 7] Organisational Justice and Career Navigation: Gendered Strategies in Policing

## Introduction

This chapter analyses how female officers manage and navigate their careers (research question 3) and how they perceive and experience organisational justice (research question 4). From a neoliberal perspective, women's career advancement is viewed as a matter of individual choice, ability, and effort (Rose 1999; Harris and Giuffre 2015; Seron et al. 2018). However, this approach leads women to internalise responsibility for their career success, obscuring the institutional and cultural constraints they face (Rottenberg 2018). Building on this critique, this chapter examines how masculine occupational norms shape access to recognition, opportunity, and belonging, and how these dynamics inform perceptions of organisational justice and, in turn, their career navigation among female officers.

The chapter begins by examining perceptions of unfairness in job assignments, evaluations, and promotion processes, before analysing their psychological and behavioural impacts. It then explores the range of career strategies adopted by female officers in relation to their justice perceptions and life stage, and finally considers how caregiving responsibilities and organisational and individual conditions constrain or enable career advancement. Table 11 summarises the thematic structure of the chapter.

**Table 11 Overview of sections and analytic levels in chapter 7**

| Section | Sub-section | Analytic level |
|---|---|---|
| **Perception of organisational justice by female officers** | Perception of unfairness in job assignments | Meso |
| | Perception of unfairness in promotion | Meso |
| | Perception of affirmative action in promotion | Meso |
| | Variations in organisational justice perception among female officers | Meso–Micro |
| **Perceptions of organisational justice and career navigation** | Psychological and behavioural impacts of perceived injustice | Micro |
| | Turning injustice into leadership growth | Micro |
| | Organisational justice perceptions and career orientations | Meso–Micro |
| | Career strategies of female officers | Micro |
| **Balancing constraints and opportunities in career progression** | The impact of care responsibilities on career trajectories | Micro |
| | Enablers of career advancement | Meso–Micro |

## Perception of organisational justice by female officers

The female officers who participated in this study experienced a reality in which opportunities for job assignments, promotions, and career development were perceived as not being equally guaranteed compared to their male counterparts. This section examines how the participants perceived fairness in terms of opportunities and outcomes within the organisation.

### Perception of unfairness in job assignments

The majority of participants experienced restrictions on job assignment opportunities, highlighting concerns about fairness and transparency in the process. As discussed in Chapter

1, restrictions on opportunities for certain groups are likely to generate negative perceptions in terms of *procedural justice* (Colquitt 2001).

First, female officers encountered a prevailing practice in which male officers were given priority in personnel selection across most departments. This preference was expressed both explicitly and implicitly within the organisation. Some departments officially declared that they would not recruit female officers, while discriminatory remarks such as 'We don't accept female officers of childbearing age' were informally shared within the organisation. Many participants felt that male officers were typically prioritised in job assignments, with female officers being considered only when there was a shortage of male applicants.

> *Whenever a position opens up, the default is to recruit a male officer first. Only if there are no male applicants does the opportunity trickle down to female officers. This practice is so widespread that it feels almost ingrained (F9, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in departments such as detectives and public order management, where male officers were regarded as the ideal workers. Although no official regulations restricted female officers from applying, department representatives and staff often explained the lack of female presence by claiming that 'female officers are not interested'. However, in reality, the prevailing perception that these departments do not hire female officers created a barrier that discouraged women from applying in the first place. Such exclusion can be seen as a clear example of a glass wall that prevents women from accessing specific departments or work areas (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000; Wellington et al. 2003).

> *When we ask, 'Why don't you hire women?' the response is always, 'Female officers just don't apply'. While that might be true to some extent, I think it's actually because there's a*

*widespread perception that this department doesn't hire female officers in the first place, which discourages them from applying at all (P13, 40s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

Female officers also experienced additional restrictions on career opportunities related to life-cycle factors such as pregnancy and childbirth. For instance, P17 stated that she naturally gave up applying to certain departments due to the psychological burden associated with taking maternity leave. Similarly, P22 recalled being asked about her pregnancy plans rather than her job qualifications when she applied to a specific department after getting married.

Moreover, female officers faced fewer opportunities within the organisation as they aged. While previous studies have identified childbirth and childcare as major obstacles to career advancement for female officers (Archbold and Hassell 2009; Ellis 2017), my findings further reveal that even after women's childcare responsibilities diminished, women continued to be pushed out of job opportunities. In particular, middle-aged and older female officers have been observed to become 'unwelcome' within the organisation. Although age and tenure are typically regarded as indicators of accumulated experience and are expected to command respect in the workplace, several participants reported experiencing the opposite. This was particularly evident among female officers in lower-ranking operational roles who did not have expertise in specific fields. They were not sufficiently recognised for their work skills within the organisation and were easily considered replaceable. For example, P20 applied to various departments after reducing her childcare burden, but she was repeatedly unsuccessful, losing out to younger colleagues in the competition. She said, 'As I've gotten older, no matter how hard I knock on the door, it doesn't open', and seemed to be considering leaving the organisation. This type of exclusion is consistent with earlier findings related to the marginalisation of women of childbearing age and further reveals that the window of

opportunity for female officers is narrowly confined. Young women are often avoided due to the assumption that they may leave at any time for maternity reasons, while older women are perceived as lacking competitiveness, leaving them with few viable prospects. P3 and P27, both in their mid-to late-forties, said that even if they wanted to change departments, there was nowhere for them to go, and that they were being marginalised within the organisation simply because they were older. These cases show that female officers are not only restricted in their career choices due to childbirth and childcare, but are also facing the double hardship of having fewer and fewer opportunities as they age.

> *When I considered transferring to a police station, I realised there was no place for me to go. (…) I feel like there's nowhere that would accept someone my age (P27, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

These experiences are closely linked to the social structure within the organisation. Participants noted that male officers tend to strengthen their sense of camaraderie with each other, which often excludes female officers. This is related to the role of *homosociality* noted in Chapter 2 (Silvestri and Tong 2022). Participants observed that male officers formed close networks not only in their work but also in private relationships, and they actively used this to their advantage in the process of personnel and job assignment. Key opportunities for building connections often take place through after-work drinking gatherings, golf outings, and private hobby groups. Female officers are either naturally excluded from these interactions or treated as exceptions when they do participate. This pattern reflects a broader organisational culture structured around an internal *us versus them* distinction, through which access to opportunity, recognition, and mobility is unevenly distributed along gendered lines.

*Men, especially, get along really well with each other. They go out drinking, calling each other 'hyungnim, hyungnim' (older brother), and especially during the personnel reshuffle season, they seem to help each other find positions a lot. (...) Compared to female employees, male employees are much more likely to look out for one another, considering personal connections, school ties, and regional ties (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Some participants pointed out that women inhabit a structure that makes it difficult for them to build a mutual support network among women within the organisation. In addition to the lack of high-ranking female officers to lead their juniors, the reality that women prioritise personal survival strategies to remain in the organisation contributes to the absence of a culture of supporting juniors. One participant described this as an 'every woman for herself' structure, emphasising the difficulty female officers face in establishing personnel support networks that go beyond simple social connections.

Additionally, female officers were often assigned to roles previously held by other women, rather than obtaining positions through open competition for their desired departments. For instance, P20 had to transfer to another team to make room for a returning officer after maternity leave. This practice reflects a system in which women are confined to circulate within a limited set of roles, revealing how organisational power and opportunity flows are constrained by gender (Clegg 2023). P15 often heard advice from her female seniors that 'There are no positions available when you want one, and you have to push someone else out to get one'. This reflects a reality in which female officers sometimes have to wait for others to vacate roles to access new opportunities, clearly demonstrating the structural conditions of competition among women for limited opportunities. The tensions and isolation that arise from this competition will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

*When a new female officer was assigned to our department, the senior female officers would say, 'Ah, another female officer is coming'. I innocently asked, 'Why is that a problem?' and they replied, 'Hey, there aren't enough positions. There just aren't enough spots!' (P15, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

An informal practice was also observed in which the selection of additional female personnel was restricted once their numbers in a department or team exceeded a certain threshold. Female officers were often reduced to a mere number issue, with statements like 'We already have too many female officers in this department, so we can't take more' or 'Since we don't have any female officers, let's assign one here'. For example, P12 applied for a specific department but was denied placement because there are already too many women in the unit. She pointed out that she had never heard a similar justification regarding male officers in departments where men made up 100% of the workforce. This issue reflects a deeper structural perception that treats female officers as second-tier personnel. F1 explained that department managers have an informal cap on the number of female officers. Similarly, F9 cited an incident where a female officer was denied a managerial position despite her qualifications, solely because 'There shouldn't be more than three women on a team'. Ultimately, this reflects a structural limitation in which female officers are expected to exist in the organisation only as much as needed.

These cases demonstrate how the opportunity structure within the organisation operates differently based on gender. Many participants expressed frustration over their inability to freely choose desired positions, which led to doubts about the fairness of the organisation as a whole, beyond individual experiences.

**Perception of unfairness in promotion**

The issue of female officers being excluded from promotion can be examined from two perspectives: *distributive justice* and *procedural justice*. When female achieve the same performance as their male counterparts but are denied promotion or the promotion process is operated in a non-transparent manner, this reveals a lack of fairness in both outcomes and procedures (Folger and Konovsky 1989; Colquitt 2001).

Many female officers who participated in this study stated that they had experienced gender-based unfairness in the promotion process. They pointed out that although performance evaluation scores have a significant impact on promotion, male managers tend to give higher scores to male employees. For example, P9's supervisor gave her a lower evaluation score than her male colleagues, arguing that male officers had a responsibility to support their families and therefore needed higher scores. This highlights how promotion-related evaluations may be influenced more by implicit gender norms than by actual performance.

Participants perceived that factors such as personal connections, relationships with superiors, and seniority played a more significant role in promotions than actual job performance. P4 noted, 'How you appeal to your superiors matters more than your achievements, but women aren't as skilled at that'. Similarly, P7, despite consistently ranking among the top in performance evaluations, explained, 'I kept failing to get promoted simply because I lacked the right connections'. This also can be understood within the context of the male-dominated network structure shaped by homosociality, previously discussed.

Some participants recognised that forming close relationships with their superiors (mainly male) was essential for promotion and put this into practice, but experienced psychological stress in the process. For instance, P14 recalled that while preparing for promotion, she tried to

strengthen her relationship with her superior by writing handwritten letters and preparing gifts. However, she later reflected on this as a deeply stressful experience. Such efforts can be seen as part of the practice of expressing loyalty and attention to superiors in Korean organisational culture, but for the participant, it was an experience that caused conflict between authenticity and self-respect. Similarly, P18 felt anxious when she saw a female colleague who was competing with her for promotion actively trying to build a close relationship with her supervisor. She also participated in weekend hiking activities to align with her supervisor's interests, but she felt burdened by having to do activities that did not suit her and experienced physical difficulties.

> *At the time, our director was really into hiking, and my (female) colleague followed him everywhere. I was never good at hiking and didn't really see the point of it. But everyone kept telling me to go along and make an impression. So, I went… but climbing up that rocky mountain was exhausting (P18, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35–40yr).*

Meanwhile, in the Korean police organisation, it is a common practice for factors such as the length of service in a particular department or tenure at the current rank to be considered important in promotion and evaluation processes. However, when men and women compete, these criteria are not consistently applied, and unofficial factors that favour men, such as age, have been reported to play a role. For instance, P11 explained that no matter how well she performed, she could never receive a higher evaluation than a male officer who had been assigned to the department before her. By contrast, P12 recalled that despite having served in the department for a longer period, she was evaluated lower than senior male officers who had transferred in later, solely because of their age. P19 also mentioned that she was advised that, compared to male officers with shorter tenure at their current rank, she was more likely to be

disadvantaged in performance evaluations simply because she was younger. These examples demonstrate how a seniority-based organisational culture works differently for men and women. For male officers, age and seniority are the basis for authority and promotion opportunities, whereas, as seen above, age is a factor that leads to career interruptions and exclusion for female officers. This contradiction clearly reveals the imbalance in gender power relations within the organisation.

Additionally, female officers who wish to be promoted after pregnancy and childbirth must actively counter the stereotype that they lack promotion aspirations, often having to put in more effort than their male counterparts. This phenomenon is related to the concept of the *Motherhood Penalty* (Correll et al. 2007). This means that women are restricted from job opportunities or given lower salaries and positions at work because of childbirth and childcare. The case shared by P15 illustrates this reality well. Her female colleague was preparing for a promotion after giving birth, but a male junior colleague concluded that she would not be willing to be promoted and asked her boss to give him a higher score. Upon hearing this, the female officer actively asserted that childbirth had no bearing on her promotion aspirations. She ultimately passed the promotional exam after preparing intensively, sleeping only two to three hours a day. This case is not just a simple personal overcoming narrative, but rather shows the structural reality of female officers having to confront existing prejudices and make additional efforts to get promoted.

Some participants experienced implicit discrimination in the promotion candidate selection process, even when they received high-performance evaluation scores. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Korean police promotion system includes four pathways: exam-based promotion, screening promotion, special promotion, and seniority-based promotion. Except for exam-

based promotion, the other pathways involve a selection committee that evaluates candidates. Since this process allows for subjective judgments by the committee members, some participants reported being excluded due to their gender. For example, P16 recalled facing the stereotype that 'Women cannot receive a special promotion in the major crime investigation unit' when she applied for promotion. Similarly, P23 stated that despite achieving outstanding results in traffic safety promotion work, she was repeatedly overlooked in the selection of special promotion candidates, losing out to male officers due to a lack of regional ties or internal organisational networks.

These experiences illustrate that female officers are not simply competing based on performance in the promotion process; rather, they must overcome dual barriers—the existing male-dominated organisational culture and informal networks—to achieve career advancement.

**Perception of affirmative action in promotion**

In this structural reality, the KNPA introduced the female officer promotion target system to guarantee women's promotion opportunities and increase women's representation in management positions (Korean National Police Agency 2006). As discussed in Chapter 3, this is a scheme that allocates a separate number of promotions to female officers in the screening promotion.[11] Such affirmative action can expand opportunities for women in an organisation, but depending on how it is implemented, it also carries the risk of reinforcing discrimination against women (Heilman 1997; Drew and Saunders 2020). The target system in the Korean

[11] For example, In 2023, a total of 23,630 officers were promoted, with 5,279 through screening promotion, 5,030 through promotional examination, 2,170 through special promotion, and 11,151 through seniority-based promotion. The female officer promotion target system applies specifically to screening promotion (Korean National Police Agency 2024a).

police organisation is a key example of these complex effects. Under this system, female and male officers compete within the promotion rate set for each gender, which in turn creates a gender-segregated competition structure. In addition, the quota allocation for female officers in screening promotion fluctuates annually based on KNPA guidelines, which lowered the predictability of promotion opportunities and increased instability.

Even among the female officers who participated in this study, there were varying opinions on the effectiveness of the target system. Some evaluated the system as providing favourable opportunities for women, while others saw it as causing structural disadvantages. In particular, these contrasting perceptions were more prominent in the FGI of managers. For example, F2 perceived that female officers receive explicit or implicit benefits in promotions.

> *I don't think promotions are disadvantageous for women; in fact, I believe they might even be favorable. (...) when I serve as a selection committee member, there is an implicit understanding that a certain proportion of promotion slots should be allocated to female officers. That's why I believe that, in terms of promotion opportunities, women are by no means at a disadvantage (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr)*

In contrast, F1 and F4 pointed out the structural limitation that female officers must compete only within the predetermined female promotion quota. F4 explained that she personally experienced structural disadvantages due to the gender-segregated promotion system in the screening promotion process for the Superintendent rank.

> *Compared to my male colleague, I was promoted to Senior Inspector two years earlier and received better performance evaluations, yet he was selected as one of the top five candidates for promotion, while I didn't make the cut (F4, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 15–20yr)*

In this regard, F3 emphasised that the target system can have different impacts depending on the rank. In other words, while female officers may benefit at certain ranks, they may face disadvantages at others, making it difficult to assess the system as purely positive or negative. This discussion highlights that affirmative action not only provides promotion opportunities but can also have diverse effects depending on how it is implemented.

Another issue with the target system is the formation of a gender-discriminatory perception that women are promoted just because they are female. This perception undermines the authority and respect of female officers within the organisation (Heilman 1997). F4 pointed out that she frequently heard remarks such as, 'Female officers can get promoted to Senior Superintendent just by breathing'. Similarly, P9 often heard from her senior male officers that 'Women can get promoted just by waiting their turn without making any extra effort'. Such statements reflect and reinforce the wider anti-policewomen discourse discussed earlier in this thesis.

> *Male colleagues would often say things like, 'For us to get promoted, we not only have to perform well at work but also be good at golf in the evening and take care of our superiors at night. But female officers get promoted just by breathing once it's their turn, so what's there to worry about?' I heard those remarks so many times. Because of this, I never even felt motivated to attempt screening promotion (P9, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

According to Archbold and Schulz (2008) and Archbold and Hassell (2009), female officers in the US tended to hesitate in pursuing promotions to avoid the stigma of having been promoted just because they are women. However, in South Korea, this phenomenon of avoiding promotions to steer clear of using the 'gender card' was not as evident. Nevertheless, some female officers employed strategic agency by deliberately opting for alternative promotion

routes to avoid gender-discriminatory scrutiny. Since exam-based promotions and special promotions do not have gender-based quotas, some female officers preferred these routes. For instance, P28 stated, ‘In local areas, women’s promotions through the screening process often depend on age and years of service rather than competence, so I wanted to attempt an exam-based promotion. However, I gave up due to childcare responsibilities’. Similarly, P4 mentioned, ‘In local areas, female officers are naturally considered candidates for screening promotion once they reach a certain tenure, and I disliked that. I wanted to be recognised for my abilities, so I attempted a special promotion but failed’. These examples illustrate that female officers’ promotion strategies are determined through a complex consideration of how the promotion system operates and the organisational perceptions surrounding it. Since the specific route through which an officer is promoted is officially recorded, such strategic decisions are relatively visible and recognisable within the organisation.

As a result, the Korean police’s target system had a dual impact, providing opportunities for female officers while also causing structural disadvantages. This reflects the paradox of simultaneous progression and regression (Silvestri 2015), where a system intended to facilitate the advancement of female officers can also reproduce other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, when evaluating this system, it is necessary to fully consider not only the intention to create a fairer environment for women who have long been restricted from opportunities in a male-dominated organisation, but also the structural and cultural realities that the actual operation of the system poses for female officers.

**Variations in organisational justice perception among female officers**

In this study, participants' perceptions of organisational justice varied depending on their career length, position and role within the organisation, and level of gender consciousness.

Participants with shorter careers and those at the junior level tended to clearly perceive gender-based disadvantages in job assignments and promotions. They commonly viewed existing systems and organisational culture as still discriminatory and expressed a strong sense of unfairness within the organisation.

> *I have come to realise just how disadvantageous it can be to be a woman in this organisation. (…) I feel that this organisation creates a truly difficult working environment for women, which is why I think it is unfair (F7, 20s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

On the other hand, participants with longer careers or who have entered managerial positions recognised that systems and culture have gradually improved compared to the past. They evaluated that they are currently working in a relatively more equitable environment. For example, P19 evaluated that opportunities for women have expanded thanks to a policy that aims to assign a certain percentage of female officers to a specific department. P7, P17, and P23, who are in their 40s or older, also positively evaluated increased promotion opportunities for women and reduced sexism compared to the past.

> *It has become much more equal now. As long as I work hard, there is no discrimination. In fact, if I make the most of my strengths and put in the effort, I have more opportunities to work in a favorable position (even compared to men). So, I don't think it is unequal anymore (P7, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 30–35yr).*

These differences appear to stem from the gradual accumulation of experience and adaptation within the organisation. Senior officers, who have witnessed and compared the gradual

progress of gender policies within the organisation, tend to view them positively. In contrast, younger officers, who have no basis for comparison, tend to be more aware of the current structure of inequality. This is also connected to the process of members becoming 'internalised' within the organisation, suggesting that sensitivity to inequality may be mitigated as individuals adapt to the organisational culture. Furthermore, these differences in perception may be deeply related to rank and role, in addition to length of career. Managerial-level officers are closer to the policy-making process and can more directly perceive the direction and effects of institutional changes, while lower-ranking officers, who are directly affected by personnel decisions and job assignments, may perceive the ongoing constraints more acutely than the benefits of recent policy changes. Similar patterns were also observed during the focus group interviews.

Meanwhile, how fairness within an organisation is evaluated is closely related to individuals' gender consciousness and critical attitudes toward organisational culture. Participants who tend to challenge male-centric norms demonstrated a more critical perception of organisational justice. This can be attributed to their high expectations for fairness, as well as their direct experience of negative reactions and structural barriers from the organisation while resisting such norms. In particular, participants who maintained high gender sensitivity through Police Gender Studies Network (PGSN) activities, even at the managerial level, consistently recognised the structural inequalities within the organisation and were accustomed to raising them as issues, regardless of their promotion status.

Ultimately, female officers' perceptions of organisational justice are complexly shaped by a combination of factors such as career length, rank, role within the organisation, and gender consciousness. This suggests that, to understand perceptions of fairness within police

organisations, it is necessary to consider a variety of experiences and contexts rather than a single criterion.

## Perceptions of organisational justice and career navigation

How female officers perceive fairness within their organisation is not just a matter of attitude, but has been shown to have a significant impact throughout their careers. Female officers' experiences of unfair treatment, opportunities, and outcomes based on gender affected the psychological well-being and organisational commitment of female officers, and played an important role in their promotion and job assignment strategies and long-term career paths.

### Psychological and behavioural impacts of perceived injustice

According to the theory of organisational justice, perceptions of fairness have a significant impact on the behaviour, attitudes, and motivation of members. When organisational justice is not guaranteed, trust in the organisation tends to weaken, job dissatisfaction and psychological burnout increase, and organisational commitment decreases (Colquitt et al. 2001). This thesis observed many such negative effects. Some participants who perceived unfairness in opportunities, treatment, and outcomes within the organisation viewed the police as merely a means of livelihood and gradually withdrew their emotional commitment to the organisation.

> *(Researcher: Among the tasks you have handled, which ones did you find most rewarding or fulfilling?) Rewarding? Hmm... Honestly, I'm just sick of it, so there's nothing I find rewarding. (Laughs) When I look at how things work around here, all I can think about is quitting. (...) It's just a job—this place holds no real meaning for me (P20, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

This attitude went beyond mere personal frustration and led to resignation from the persistent sexism and structural problems within the organisation. P3 pointed out that the organisation has no intention of improving the sexism problem and that the process of collecting opinions to solve the problem is conducted formally.

> *I have nothing to expect from the organisation. Wishing for something doesn't make it happen anyway. (...) What we always hope for is fairness and justice, right? Honestly, that's the only thing I want. Whether it's personnel decisions, promotions, or job assignments, I just want them to be handled fairly and equitably. But that's something that never really happens (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Some participants were also experiencing burnout. They perceived their police career as simply a process of enduring day by day. P25 talked about her experience of taking a leave of absence due to psychological fatigue accumulated in a negative organisational culture. P26 was contemplating taking leave, feeling increasingly burdened by the constant need to navigate survival strategies in a male-dominated organisational environment.

Most notably, accumulated experiences of unfairness led some participants to internalise a learned helplessness, believing that 'Nothing will work anyway'. As a result, participants became less likely to pursue new roles or departmental transfers, which in turn limited the diversity of their career paths and hindered the development of expertise.

> *(In the detective division), I know there's a general atmosphere of not accepting female officers at all. So, there's no need for me to challenge that and disrupt the atmosphere, nor do I want to be labelled in a certain way. (...) If I were certain that my attempt would lead to a positive outcome, I might give it a try. But since that's not the case, I started wondering—do I really need to challenge this at all? (P2, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

In particular, participants over the age of 40 who remained in non-managerial positions responded that their fear of new tasks grew with age, rather than their curiosity. This shows a tendency within the organisation for female officers to become stuck in their existing roles and limit their own potential for change.

> *I've been working for about 18 years, so now I feel more fear than curiosity when it comes to trying something new. In the past, my curiosity outweighed the fear, so I tried this and that. But now, the fear holds me back—I don't really feel the desire to take on something new anymore (P23, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

Decreased motivation surrounding promotion is also one of the important results. Some participants perceived that promotion opportunities were determined by luck or internal organisational dynamics rather than individual performance and effort, and gradually withdrew their expectations and commitment to promotion. Others expressed doubts about their own managerial capabilities and therefore did not actively pursue promotion. P6 was hesitant to be promoted, thinking that she was not qualified enough to lead investigative cases as a team leader. P8 also felt that the responsibility and burden of being a manager was very heavy, and doubted her ability to supervise team members effectively, especially given her relatively young age. This is linked to the fact that female officers have had relatively few opportunities to take on leadership roles and have lacked systematic support at the organisational level.

In summary, the perceived lack of organisational justice not only led to personal burnout and dissatisfaction but also constrained the agency and career trajectories of female officers. This has the potential to reinforce gender discrimination within the organisation in the long term, creating a vicious cycle that requires institutional intervention.

**Turning injustice into leadership growth**

However, through the narratives of some participants, it was confirmed that the injustice experienced by female officers does not necessarily lead to negative consequences. Some participants used the unfair experiences they had in the past as a driving force for organisational improvement and actively intervened to prevent junior female officers from experiencing similar difficulties.

This pattern was particularly evident among participants in managerial or supervisory roles, who described taking on informal advocacy roles to support junior female officers. They acted as intermediaries by conveying concerns about working conditions and gender-based difficulties to senior management or relevant organisational units, and by seeking to promote greater awareness of sexual harassment and gender inequality within their organisations.

> *I held meetings with newly appointed female junior officers once a month and had meals with them. For those who couldn't attend, I visited their precincts and boxes to talk with them. (...) I think going through various challenges and experiences broadened my understanding and enhanced my ability to empathise, which allowed me to take on this role (P7, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 30–35yr).*

For others, unfair experiences became a catalyst for leadership growth, leading them to adopt more empathetic and horizontal leadership. For example, P17 decided to avoid authoritarian control as a manager, having experienced the reality that female officers in lower ranks are particularly subject to unfair treatment in the early stages of their careers. The difficulties she encountered while balancing childcare and work made her keenly aware of gender inequality within the organisation, and these experiences led her to become more sensitive to and

supportive of junior female officers. This can be interpreted as going beyond horizontal leadership to include caring leadership that involves emotional labour.

> *I also struggled to balance work while raising two sons—rushing around, feeling pressured just to leave an hour early… (…) Since I've experienced those difficulties myself, I told myself, 'I should never be unreasonable. I should try to be more understanding' (P17, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

P9 also reflected on the sense of distance she had felt in relationships with her female seniors in the past, and described how she actively reached out to her juniors, empathising with their difficulties and playing a supportive role. This pattern was also observed among several participants who took on informal leadership roles within the PGSN. They turned their unfair experiences as women into an important asset in their leadership, serving as a practical protective net for junior officers, and working to help them grow and improve fairness within the organisation. Such practices incorporate elements of feminist leadership aimed at promoting gender equality within the organisation, and can also be interpreted as a form of gender activism that drives organisational change.

Previous research on organisational justice has emphasised that a lack of fairness within organisations is highly likely to lead to negative outcomes (Colquitt 2001; Greenberg 2004; Judge and Colquitt 2004; Carr and Maxwell 2018; Charman and Tyson 2024). However, this thesis observed cases where the injustice experienced by female officers was transformed into a driving force for leadership growth, mentoring, and organisational improvement in some instances. This highlights the potential for resilience and transformative practices, which have been relatively overlooked in the previous literature.

**Organisational justice perceptions and career orientations**

Perceptions of organisational justice have been an important factor in shaping the career paths of female officers. Female officers who have experienced unfairness within the organisation have sought career strategies based on this. Their strategies were divided into passive and active approaches, depending on how they set their career goals and how they sought to achieve them. A negative perception of organisational justice did not necessarily lead individuals to adopt passive responses; rather, how they reacted varied depending on their circumstances and choices. Even the same individual could shift their approach or response depending on the situation.

Some participants who recognised the limitations of the organisational structure tended to make practical choices within the given conditions. For them, stable job performance and survival were considered more important than promotion or job expansion. For example, P3 chose a position in a department that was favourable for childcare or those where she received job offers first, particularly after getting married. P20 empirically recognised that promotion is heavily dependent on male-dominated networks, and initially attempted to build networks, but gradually abandoned the competition for promotion and adjusted her career path to prioritise her current job performance and personal life.

On the other hand, some female officers showed an attitude of taking the initiative in designing their careers and making progress, even if opportunities were limited. They actively sought the positions they wanted to overcome organisational limitations, or expanded their careers by overcoming constraints in their own way. For example, P9 and P17 aimed for rapid promotion to avoid the disadvantages faced by women in lower ranks, and after consistently taking

promotion exams, they were able to quickly rise to middle management positions. Female officers with a proactive attitude made efforts to achieve their career goals through job transitions, promotion attempts, and the exploration of new roles within the organisation.

As such, the perception of organisational justice had a significant influence on female officers' career orientation, which manifested itself in various career strategies. Female officers designed their careers based on an implicit understanding of what they could actually do and where they could work within the organisation. Of course, not all job choices were strategic, and some participants simply preferred certain positions based on personal preferences. However, in general, perceptions of organisational justice played a key role in shaping the career paths of female officers, and there were unseen strategies and underlying considerations in the process.

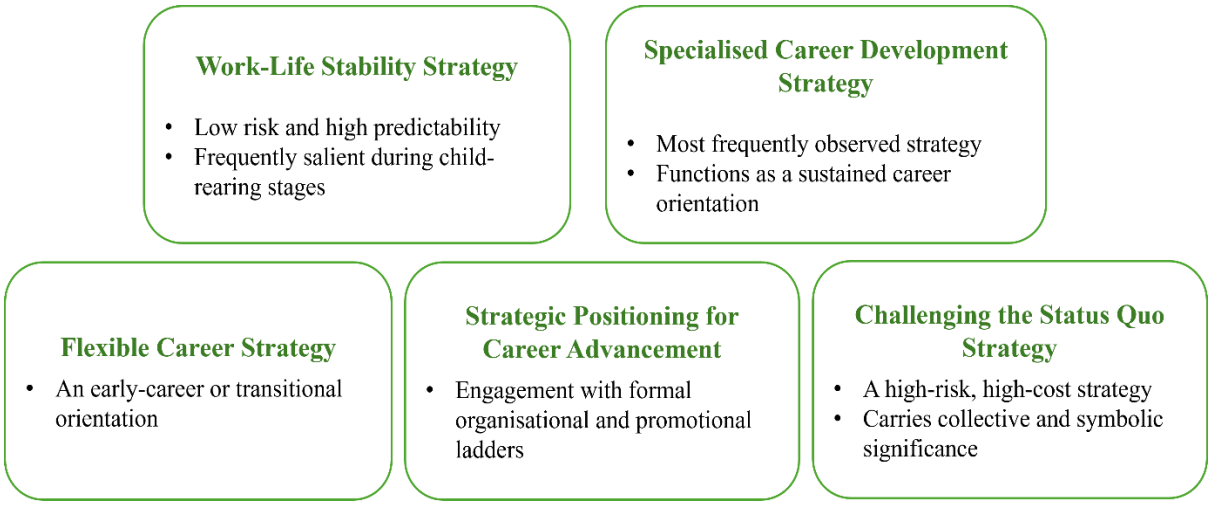
However, job choices and career trajectories of female officers cannot be explained by their perception of organisational justice alone. In the actual job decision process, various factors such as family care responsibilities, personal characteristics, work environment, and initial motivations for joining the police were taken into consideration. In other words, although perceptions of organisational justice had a significant impact on shaping the careers of female officers, it interacts with individual and environmental factors and works in a multi-layered manner.

**Career strategies of female officers**

In this study, the career strategies of the participants were categorised into several types, including work–life stability, flexible career strategy, specialised career development, strategic positioning for career advancement, and challenging the status quo. To support the

interpretation of these findings, Figure 10 visualises these career strategy typologies. Rather than representing fixed or linear career paths, the figure illustrates the strategies as predominant orientations, more commonly observed under particular life-course and organisational conditions. The spatial arrangement reflects relative frequency of observation, with strategies placed higher in the figure being more commonly observed, without implying hierarchical importance.

**Figure 10 Career strategy typologies among female police officers**




The first is the **Work-Life Stability Strategy**. Female officers who have chosen this strategy prioritise stable work schedules and predictability, and prefer positions that allow them to maintain a work-life balance. This strategy was particularly evident during the child-rearing stage of life, with these officers tending to choose desk jobs (such as those in the civil service centres, administrative teams at police precincts, etc.) that require them to work only during the daytime and have fewer unexpected situations, rather than fieldwork. For example, P1 initially preferred fieldwork, but since her husband, who is also a police officer, has been assigned to patrol duties, she applied for the administrative role at the police precinct. This choice can be seen as reflecting the practical constraints faced by female officers.

*Since we have a baby and my husband is also assigned to patrol duty, one of us has to take a desk job to take care of the child. Since the baby is still young and needs the mother's care, I had no choice but to take an administrative role at the police precinct (P1, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10 years).*

The second is the **Flexible Career Strategy.** Officers who follow this strategy tend to make practical career choices based on their current circumstances and available opportunities rather than setting fixed long-term goals. They are more likely to prioritise realistic decisions that take into account their personal lives and organisational environment. For example, P25 did not set a specific career goal but was exploring various possibilities by pursuing graduate studies related to her current duties. Regarding promotion exams, she took a flexible approach, adjusting her preparation based on whether she perceived her current work environment as favourable or unfavourable. She also mentioned that she might adjust her strategy again in the future to balance her career and family life after marriage and childbirth.

*I tend to live in the present. For now, my future plan is simply to complete my graduate studies successfully. (…) If I have a child, I think family will come first before work. I won't neglect my job, but I don't think I'll be able to pour as much passion into it as I did before (P25, 30s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

The third is the **Specialised Career Development Strategy**. Female officers who choose this strategy aim to strengthen their position by building expertise in a specific field and securing long-term career stability. This is a strategic choice that goes beyond personal satisfaction and seeks to secure continuous job opportunities by gaining recognition for one's role and value within the organisation. In particular, the anxiety that one can be easily replaced if one lacks expertise has acted as a factor that further reinforced this strategy. This was the most frequently

observed type of strategy among the participants in this study.

> *When men work in a specific field for a long time, they are recognised as veterans as they grow older. But among senior female officers, I've never seen anyone with such experience and being called a veteran. (...) I realised that if I became an expert in a particular field, I wouldn't have to struggle during personnel reshuffles like other senior female officers do (P28, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35–40yr).*

The way in which female officers build their expertise was divided into cases where they chose gender-related work and cases where they did not. The former was a way to build a career in a field that could make use of women's strengths, such as GBV and youth protection. There were differences in motivation and attitude among female officers who chose gender-related fields. Some chose these fields to accept the gender norms within the organisation and to secure a stable job, while others chose them with a proactive motivation to expand their role within the police organisation by contributing to the resolution of GBV.

Another major area in which female officers sought to build their expertise was investigative work. Three main motivations for choosing to work in the investigative field were observed. First, it was a choice to take on a more leading role. This was to take on a more independent role after female officers had experienced being restricted in exercising their authority or excluded from important cases while working as patrol officers. Second, it was the next best option due to a lack of opportunity. In other positions, the opportunities available to female officers are limited, so they are 'forced' to choose investigation to secure more continuous job opportunities. Finally, the motivation was the interest and sense of mission in the investigation work itself.

*While patrolling, I often wondered, 'Am I a useless person?' (...) As an investigator, since the work relies on evidence and paperwork, I found that even if I am physically lacking in some aspects, I can still handle my duties effectively (P21, 30s,* Inspector↓*, 5-10yr).*

Among the participants who chose to build professional expertise, some perceived developing as an expert in a specific field to be a more sustainable and meaningful career path than competing for promotion. This tendency can also be interpreted as an attempt to redefine the criteria for 'success' in the context of structural constraints and experiences of unfairness within the organisation. These officers sought to strengthen their expertise through graduate studies, accumulating field experience, and participating in specialised training. While Morabito and Shelley (2018) analysed degree attainment among US female officers as a strategic choice to enhance promotion opportunities, this thesis found that obtaining a degree was more commonly used as a strategy to build professional competence.

*I believe that becoming an expert in a specific field is more important than getting promoted. That's why I'm not particularly concerned about promotion, even now* (*P11, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 30–35yr).*

The fourth is **Strategic Positioning for Career Advancement**. Female officers who follow this strategy have adopted a method of strategically moving between positions in consideration of promotion and career advancement. Rather than simply gaining a variety of experiences, they tend to analyse the competitive landscape within the organisation and deliberately choose positions that are favourable for promotion and career advancement. In particular, they often experience various departments rather than staying in a particular job for a long time. For example, P13 was deliberately experiencing various departments to avoid being disadvantaged in job placement when she became a manager in the future. This can be seen as a strategic

approach that involves understanding the organisational structure and actively managing one's career.

> *I thought that if I didn't have strong career credentials compared to male officers when I became a Senior Inspector, I might be at a disadvantage when it came to departmental assignments. That's why I made a point of working in investigation units as well. (...) I wanted to expand the range of departments I could choose from as I moved up the ranks (P13, 40s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

Some participants aimed for exam-based promotion, which was perceived as relatively fair, and tended to transfer to positions with less competition and a more favourable environment for exam preparation. However, the position management strategy for exam-based promotion was not always effective. As in the case of P9 below, even though she quickly reached the managerial rank through exam-based promotions, she was excluded from key positions because she had spent a long period in patrol positions in the past. This suggests that if promotion strategies are not organically linked to postings management, officers may be excluded from key positions after promotion.

> *Do you know what my first assignment was after getting promoted to Senior Inspector? They made me the head of the civil service centre. And I had to work there alone—no staff. I kept going over it again and again in my head. Sure, I've done some desk work, but to those in charge of evaluations, I was just someone who'd stayed too long at the police precinct and police box, someone unproven. And on top of that, I'm a woman...(P9, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

The fifth is **Challenging the Status Quo Strategy**. Female officers who adopted this strategy sought to break through the traditional gendered division of labor by entering roles that had

been historically dominated by men or by taking on new and unconventional assignments. In particular, they showed a strong desire to be recognised for their abilities regardless of gender. They actively applied for positions where female officers were excluded or tended to prefer fieldwork to desk duties. For example, P16 described building her career in an investigative role at a time when women were rarely represented in such positions. P15 continued patrol duties for several years—despite a prevailing stereotype among male seniors that female officers eventually move to desk jobs—with the goal of becoming a patrol team leader. The women who pursued this strategy shared a sense of responsibility that extended beyond personal challenge. They viewed their actions as a way to expand the presence of women within the organisation and create more opportunities for future generations of female officers.

> *I figured if I just kept doing my job clearly and confidently, they'd start accepting women in this field too. I thought, someday, me working in this department—and our (female) juniors being here—would just feel normal to everyone* (*F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

Meanwhile, individuals do not necessarily stick to only one strategy, and career strategies change depending on the life cycle and organisational experience. For example, P11 preferred a position that would be conducive to balancing work and family during the child-rearing period, but after her children grew up to a certain extent, she switched her strategy to strengthen her expertise by going to graduate school. This can be interpreted as a change from a work-life stability strategy to a specialised career development strategy. This suggests that career strategies are not fixed, but are adjusted flexibly in the context of individual experience and organisational context.

## Balancing constraints and opportunities in career progression

An analysis of the career trajectories of participants showed that, in addition to perceptions of organisational justice, organisational and cultural factors, and personal and environmental factors all worked together to limit or facilitate career progression. In particular, the burden of childcare had a significant impact on female officers throughout their careers, and some participants were seeking various strategies to minimise the career disadvantages caused by this.

### The impact of care responsibilities on career trajectories

The career management of female officers was greatly affected by the important life events of childbirth and childcare. An American study by Ellis (2017) also found that policemoms are restricted in their choice of positions due to childcare, and experience delays in promotion opportunities and career progression. This thesis confirmed that similar patterns exist within the Korean police organisation, and furthermore, it reveals additional dynamics, such as the impact of domestic conflict caused by childcare on promotion preparation, the tendency for women married to police officers to bear a greater share of parenting responsibilities, and some female officers' strategic attempts to time childbirth in ways that minimise career disruption.

First, Korean female officers who are juggling childcare and career management are being forced to choose between the ideal police officer and the role of a parent. Hochschild and Machung (2012) explained that long working hours at work and caring responsibilities at home put women under extreme time pressure, causing them to experience time management conflicts. In this situation, many participants often adjust their job assignments to find a more stable work environment or take parental leave for several months to several years. In addition,

even after returning to work, they often preferred departments with high predictability and low workload to balance childcare and work, and played a limited role within the organisation. Within the police culture of *doing time* (Silvestri 2006), childcare has restricted the choice of positions for female officers and has acted as a factor that reinforces the tendency to stick to certain jobs in the long run.

> *(Researcher: You mentioned that you prefer patrol duties—are there any other roles you'd like to try in the future?) Not really. Maybe patrol at the police presinct, or working at the civil service centre? Honestly, taking on something new feels too overwhelming right now. (…) My child is starting elementary school next year, and at that age, they still need a lot of care. I think I'll end up focusing more on supporting my husband and taking care of our child, rather than pursuing something for myself (P14, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

Changes in career paths due to childcare were likely to put women at a disadvantage in the competition for promotion. An analysis of participants' career trajectories showed that seniority-based promotions often occurred during periods when intensive childcare took place. As a result, some female officers experienced delayed promotions compared to peers who had entered the force at the same time. For example, P15 had favourable conditions for promotion, but she missed the opportunity to be promoted because she went on maternity leave during a critical evaluation period, and as a result, her promotion was delayed relative to her cohort. P18 also mentioned that she was promoted faster than her peers when she was single, but her promotion was delayed due to the burden of childcare after giving birth.

Female officers who attempted to be promoted through examination to avoid delays in promotion sometimes experienced conflicts within their families. They suffered from extreme fatigue and stress while studying for the exam, raising children, and working, and experienced

situations in which marital conflicts intensified or family life became difficult. For example, P17 prepared for the exam by studying during commuting hours and minimising housework, but was criticised by her spouse for doing so, which eventually led to a deepening of the conflict. P3 also stated that she gave up on studying for the exam after experiencing the reality that her household was not being properly maintained while she was studying for the exam. These experiences are consistent with research by Alexander and Charman (2024), which shows that women's progression in policing is often accompanied by relational strains and family tensions.

> *There was a time when I tried studying for the promotion exam. (…) But the house was a mess, and the kids were all over the place. (…) My husband would call, angry because of the kids, and then the kids would call, upset because of their dad. In the end, I just couldn't study. So I decided that keeping peace at home was more important, and I gave up on the promotion (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20-25yr).*

In addition, female officers with childcare responsibilities were sometimes restricted from social activities at work. For example, P3 explained that before marriage, she often socialised with colleagues by sharing hobbies, but after having children, she lost contact with them and found it difficult to form close relationships with colleagues. This can lead to structural problems in which female officers are disadvantaged in the formation of informal networks, which are important for promotion and career advancement in the police organisation.

> *I really enjoy working out, and there were a lot of people in my department who were into hiking. When someone said, 'We're going hiking this weekend, want to come?' I'd say, 'I love hiking too!' and I'd go along. We even ran marathons together. (…) But all of that stopped once I started raising my kids. I couldn't exercise, couldn't join any gatherings, no more team dinners—everything just had to be given up (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20-25yr).*

Morabito and Shelley (2018) suggested that female officers need to capture and utilise 'kairotic moments' to manage their careers successfully, and identified belief in one's own abilities, family support, and obtaining a degree as factors that promote this. This thesis found that family support is a key factor in determining the promotion and career advancement of female officers who are raising children. Those who received substantial support from family members were able to successfully achieve promotion and continue advancing to higher ranks at a faster pace. For example, P7 was able to focus on police work while reducing the burden of childcare with the help of her non-police spouse and in-laws. In the case of P9, her spouse, who is a public servant, took parental leave to care for their child, which meant that her career was not interrupted and she was able to continue preparing for a promotion.

In contrast, female officers experienced significant career development constraints when they lacked support from their partners or families. In particular, female officers tended to bear a greater burden of childcare when their partners were police officers, which acted as a major factor limiting their career development opportunities. They carried the main burden of caregiving even after work, taking on the *second shift* (Hochschild and Machung 2012). For example, P3 explained that she eventually gave up after repeated conflicts with her police officer spouse over housework and childcare. P27, who has three children, said that her police officer spouse prioritised his promotion, which delayed her promotion opportunities, and that she ended up taking on the burden of childcare while supporting her spouse's promotion. This shows that female officers experience double constraints due to not only gender inequality within the organisation but also an imbalance in the division of roles within the family.

On the other hand, P21 used a strategy to minimise career breaks by negotiating with her police officer spouse to adjust the burden of childcare. She supported her spouse's promotion by

taking care of the child for the first six months after giving birth, but then arranged for him to take parental leave so that she could return to work. Her case shows that in a married couple of police officers, the female officer does not passively accept a career break due to childcare, but instead attempts to negotiate and make arrangements within the family to continue her career.

> *At first, we fought a lot about sharing childcare responsibilities. These days, things have gotten better as we've both learned to compromise, but I still don't think that part will be easy to fully resolve (P21, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

Some participants recognised the negative impact of childbirth and childcare on promotion and career paths and strategically adjusted the timing of their childbirth to minimise this. P8 witnessed the reality of female seniors whose careers were interrupted due to childbirth and childcare, and decided to postpone having children. For her, having a child was not merely a private decision about whether or not to become a parent, but a matter to be carefully considered as part of strategic career management. P6 felt a strong sense of anxiety that taking time off for childbirth and childcare would be an unfavourable factor in the competition for promotion and job assignments.

Ultimately, female officers responded in various ways, such as putting up with career setbacks due to childcare, actively using family support to minimise these negative effects, attempting to negotiate a division of roles within the family, or adjusting the timing of childbirth. However, these responses are limited in that they only address the problem at an individual level. Despite the family-friendly policies discussed in Chapter 6, this suggests the need to fundamentally resolve the contradiction between the ideal image of a police officer and the role of a parent at the organisational level.

**Enablers of career advancement**

An analysis of the career trajectories of participants who reported high levels of career satisfaction revealed that determination alone was not sufficient to achieve career advancement. In addition to the previously mentioned support from family, key contributing factors included timely opportunities, positive interactions in the workplace, a strong sense of agency and desire for authority, prior experiences of achievement, and a willingness to learn.

One of the factors that promoted the career progression of female officers was the open opportunities related to job assignments. These opportunities were provided through various channels. First, opportunities were provided through policy-based gender assignments. The gender quota policy has expanded job opportunities for women by requiring certain departments to have a certain percentage of female officers. For example, P27 had experience working in departments with low female representation, such as detective and public order management, as a result of the female placement guidelines issued by higher-level agencies. Second, providing opportunities through the support of forward-thinking managers. Some managers have selected female personnel based on the belief that more opportunities should be given to women from a gender equality perspective. Other managers have intentionally selected female personnel to anticipate and prepare for the increased policing needs of women. For example, the boss of P16 selected P16 as a team member because he judged that female detectives could also play a sufficient role under the change in the investigation method for major crimes. The boss of P4 actively selected female officers in the intelligence department in preparation for the increase in rallies by women's groups.

*I happened to go to a drinking gathering through someone I knew, and there I met a major*

*crime investigation team leader who said, 'Why can't a woman be a detective? Of course she can'. That's how I ended up joining the major crime investigation team. (...) I don't think I was selected because the organisational culture had changed—it was more because his mindset was different from others (P16, 40s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

The third type of opportunity arose due to the avoidance of male officers. Some departments have experienced a decline in the number of male officers applying for jobs due to the intensity of the work or the difficulty of work-life balance. As a result, the number of female officers being gradually assigned to these departments has increased. For example, the major crime investigation team and the sophisticated crime investigation team have traditionally been male-dominated, but as male detectives leave due to the high workload and stress, female officers have increasingly filled the vacant positions. However, because these opportunities emerged as a way to cover structural gaps, they may ultimately pose an additional burden on the long-term career sustainability and job satisfaction of female officers.

*Honestly, if a male officer had applied, I wouldn't have been able to get the position. I only got to do the job because no male officer submitted an application (P21, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

Fourth, positive relationships with supervisors or senior officers also led to new opportunities. Female officers who built trust and recognition within the organisation were more likely to receive favourable job placement opportunities. For example, P12 actively supported her supervisor's work and earned his trust. Later, when she needed to transfer departments, the supervisor recommended a suitable position, allowing her to move to the department she had hoped for.

Meanwhile, self-directed career development, such as obtaining relevant qualifications, was

also an important factor. Some female officers strategically obtained certifications in advance to perform the desired assignments. For example, P17 obtained the required certifications in advance intending to work in the national security department. Later, when the organisation sent out officers who did not have the relevant certifications, she was able to get the opportunity to be assigned to the department.

A strong desire and motivation to be promoted were also factors that encouraged female officers to advance their careers. The reasons behind their aspirations for promotion varied among individuals, including the desire to realise one's values, the need for recognition and reward, the wish to expand one's authority, the willingness to be a role model for younger female officers, and the expectation of better treatment.

> *As I moved up in rank, I noticed that the salary increased and the way people perceived and treated me changed as well. (...) I think I kept pursuing promotion because the pay got better and the treatment improved (P13, 40s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

> *It wasn't just about climbing the ranks for me—I wanted people to say, 'You got promoted because you worked hard'. (...) I wanted to show both myself and those around me that my efforts were being recognised and rewarded (P4, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 25–30yr).*

Positive interactions within the workplace also acted as an important facilitator. Female officers were able to increase their work adaptability and strengthen their willingness to develop through friendly relationships with their colleagues. In particular, this effect was prominent in the relationship with female colleagues. This is shown by the case of female officers who had not considered a promotion but were encouraged by their female superiors to challenge for a promotion (P10, P19) and the case of preparing for a promotional exam with the

recommendation and encouragement of female colleagues (P2, P10, P18, P29). P29 mentioned that her female supervisor encouraged her to maximise her potential by challenging her and pushing her to grow. Through this experience, she was able to regain her diminished self-esteem and found the motivation to pursue new challenges.

> *In the past, I just wanted to stay safe inside my shell and only do what I was good at. I think her goal might have been to break that shell. She constantly pushed me to take on new challenges—so I broke out once, then again, and again. (...) She played a crucial role in helping me regain my self-esteem (P29, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

Another driving force that sustained career development was a sense of achievement combined with an attitude of continuous learning. The experience of being recognised for one's work ability or passing a promotion exam stimulated a sustained desire to take on new challenges. For instance, P11 mentioned that it was difficult to juggle work with giving lectures, but she felt rewarded through the positive feedback from the trainees and realised her value. Such experiences of achievement often led to a continued commitment to learning. In this way, achievement and learning reinforced each other and served as key factors driving the professional growth of female officers.

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed the career strategies and organisational justice perceptions of female officers. The experiences of discrimination in job assignments, performance evaluations, and promotions shaped their perceptions of organisational justice, which in turn influenced their career strategies. Participants adopted diverse strategies, including the pursuit of work-life

stability, career flexibility, enhanced expertise, strategic positioning for upward mobility and expanded roles, and, in some cases, challenges to prevailing gender norms. These strategies were not fixed but were flexibly combined and adjusted over time, depending on life stage and organisational context. Overall, both the career trajectories of female officers and their perceptions of organisational justice were not simply individual choices or attitudes, but were shaped through organisational structures, gendered cultural norms, and everyday organisational life. Therefore, they should be understood not in isolation as personal responses, but in relation to the organisational contexts in which they are formed. Considering the conditions proposed by Brown and Silvestri (2020b), the participants' accounts indicate that gender balance across policing roles and leadership positions remains uneven. At the same time, efforts by some officers to pursue diverse career paths reflect gradual challenges to gendered career expectations.

As discussed in this chapter, positive interactions among some female officers contributed to overcoming structural constraints and promoting career advancement. The next chapter will analyse the various aspects of interactions among female officers in more detail and discuss how these can be further developed as a broader strategy to foster organisational change and empower female officers.

# [Chapter 8] Between Tensions and Solidarity: Female Officers' Interactions and Organisational Change

## Introduction

This chapter analyses the complex dynamics of relationships among female officers in South Korea, including tensions and solidarity, and explores how these interactions are related to their responses to experiences of organisational injustice and the potential for organisational change (research question 5). While previous chapters focused on structural and cultural constraints, this chapter examines how these constraints shape interactions among female officers that both produce conflict and tension and, in some cases, mitigate their effects and create a foundation for practical change. Drawing on critiques that attribute the lack of solidarity among women to individual characteristics while overlooking structural inequalities (Webber and Giuffre 2019), this chapter examines when and how solidarity among female officers emerges. By doing so, it explores how female officers can grow into critically aware, agentic actors who push for change within their organisations.

The chapter is structured to move from an analysis of relational dynamics among female officers, including competition, hierarchy, generational differences, and support, to an examination of solidarity and activism through the Police Gender Studies Network (PGSN), and their impact at the individual and organisational levels. Finally, it outlines practical strategies to foster positive interactions and empowerment among women.

**Table 12 Overview of sections and analytic levels in chapter 8**

| Section | Sub-section | Analytic level |
|---|---|---|
| **Relationships and dynamics among female officers** | Competitive dynamics among female officers | Meso |
| | Hierarchy and change among female officers | Meso |
| | Generational dynamics among female officers | Meso |
| | Supportive ties and the potential for solidarity among female officers | Meso |
| **Solidarity and activism among female officers** | Formation and growth of the Police Gender Studies Network | Meso–Micro |
| | The impact of solidarity among female officers | Meso–Micro |
| **Empowering women in male-dominated organisations** | The role of representation in female officers' empowerment | Meso |
| | Transformative learning and empowerment | Micro |
| | Activating gender-based networks | Meso–Micro |

## Relationships and dynamics among female officers

Relationships among female officers are complex and multidimensional. Some experienced supportive relationships and a sense of psychological safety through interactions and communication with fellow female colleagues, while others experienced feelings of isolation and tension within a gendered competitive structure. Their accounts reveal that historically, there has been a strict, hierarchical culture among female officers in South Korea, though recent observations suggest gradual changes in this atmosphere. The increase in the number of women in the organisation and generational changes are shaking up the existing hierarchy and homogeneity, creating new tensions as well as possibilities for change. This section aims to analyse the various aspects of relationships among female officers, along with the possibilities

for solidarity that emerge within them.

**Competitive dynamics among female officers**

Lavender and Todak (2022) and Sanders et al. (2022) argued that the gendered competitive structure within the police organisation weakens the bond between women and makes it difficult to form sisterhood. This analysis is also deeply connected to the reality of the Korean police organisation, where female officers are structurally in a competitive relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are structural constraints in the Korean police organisation, such as implicit restrictions on women's assignments or the operation of gender quota practices in promotion, both of which limit their opportunities. Under such constrained conditions, female officers come to perceive each other not as someone to collaborate with, but as someone with whom they must compete for scarce resources. As a result, some female officers have developed a sense of rivalry towards their fellow women from the earliest stages of their careers, which has naturally contributed to relationships centred on caution and tension rather than trust or solidarity.

For instance, P15 recalled feeling a sense of unease when the recruitment of female officers was expanded during the time she was planning a pregnancy. She reflected that she had unconsciously internalised a sense of competition toward her female colleagues, fearing that the increased number of women might reduce her own opportunities. Some female officers reported preferring to interact with female administrative staff who were not direct competitors for promotion or deployment, rather than female officers who competed with them. While such interactions may have provided female officers with a sense of psychological safety, it remains unclear how the administrative staff themselves perceived or experienced these interactions.

One participant reported feeling disappointed and hurt when female juniors she had mentored were promoted ahead of her, even questioning whether she had been ‘used’.

> *At first, I supported those younger female officers, but when they eventually surpassed me, I couldn’t help feeling a sense of disappointment. If we had shared a truly close bond, I might have felt happy for them. But because that wasn’t the case, I started to wonder if they had simply used me (P4, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 25–30yr).*

Some male colleagues have directly or indirectly intervened in relationships among women, sometimes causing conflicts. In certain cases, they heightened competition by singling out or comparing certain women, or shifted responsibility onto female colleagues simply because of their gender, expecting them to resolve problems on behalf of others.

> *I was on a different team, but they told me to address issues with her (a younger female officer). Yet, the people on her own team would have known her shortcomings best. They asked me to handle it simply because I was also a woman, and I found that really burdensome (P21, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

P4 shared that she was deeply hurt when her male colleagues treated a particular junior female officer as someone who needed protection and special consideration for promotion, while telling her, ‘You’re strong enough to manage on your own’. This kind of differential treatment can lead to feelings of alienation and resentment among women. P26 also shared that when she was experiencing tension with her female boss due to personality differences, she was told by a male colleague that ‘I think she’s jealous of you’, which caused her emotional turmoil. This kind of interpretation reduces conflict between women to an emotional issue and works to cover up structural causes.

However, the structural background of these conflicts is often not sufficiently recognised among female officers. Tensions between women are interpreted as personalities or relationship issues, manifested in blame-shifting or distancing from each other, which is linked to the *Queen Bee Syndrome* (Duguid 2011; Derks et al. 2011), where women avoid solidarity with other women and seek to position themselves as exceptional to survive in the organisation. For example, some female seniors maintaining a certain distance from junior women, or some female juniors feeling more comfortable in their relationships with male colleagues, can be understood in this context. Indeed, P3 revealed a lowering of expectations between women when she said, 'I don't even expect senior female officers to serve as role models. I'm just grateful if they don't speak badly about other women'.

The competitive environment can further hinder the development of natural mentoring relationships among female officers (Lavender and Todak 2022). Some participants explained that they did not have any role models or mentors to provide advice on career planning and that they had to solve their career concerns independently. For example, P8 shared that she was struggling to navigate decisions around childbirth and her career, but had no access to concrete advice or guidance. In this way, the gendered personnel structure within the South Korean police has functioned in a way that encourages competition rather than collaboration among female officers, and reproduces distancing and tension rather than solidarity.

**Hierarchy and change among female officers**

The background to the conflicts and tension among women described above cannot be fully explained by the competition alone. In the Korean police organisation, beyond the formal rank hierarchy, an informal time-served hierarchy based on year of entry has long operated among

women. This informal hierarchy has had a significant influence on relationship-building and intergenerational interactions among female officers.

In the past, the strict seniority-based hierarchy among female officers was not merely a matter of courtesy, but also had substantial impacts on personnel decisions and work assignments. For example, P29 described an experience where, even after a decision had been made internally to transfer to a desired unit, the decision was suddenly reversed because a senior female officer, based on entry year, was deemed to have priority. This demonstrates that a hierarchical structure centred on seniority has acted as a constraint on female officers' organisational opportunities.

The influence of senior women operated in a variety of ways both on and off the job. For example, P9 recalled being severely reprimanded by a senior female officer after missing a police station event organised for female officers due to patrol duty. P9 also shared that, although she held the same rank, she was pressured by another female officer—who had entered the force slightly earlier—to consistently address her as 'senior'. Taken together, participants' accounts and contextual clues suggest that, in the past, senior female officers tended to expect this form of address more strictly from junior women than from junior men. Some senior officers asserted hierarchical authority by criticising junior female officers for non-work-related matters, such as their appearance or behaviour.

> *At first, I thought it was understandable. But over time, it became more intense. I was still quite young then and liked to dress up, and they would say things like, 'Why would a mother dress so flashily?' They even started commenting on things unrelated to work. It felt suffocating (P27, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Within this strong influence, junior women were often able to move into their desired departments through the recommendations or support of senior women. In some posts, informal bonds between senior and junior female officers had a tangible impact on personnel decisions, with a senior's assessment of a memorable junior often leading to personnel opportunities. This demonstrates that the influence of senior female officers took on a complex nature, involving both control and the provision of opportunities. In other words, the influence of senior women was not merely a mechanism for controlling and disciplining juniors, but also functioned as a pathway for career advancement for some. This aligns with O'Neil et al.'s (2011) analysis that women's networks can serve as a tangible asset for career development for their members. However, the fact that these opportunities depended on informal ties and emotional trust with senior women limited their stability and fairness as a means of career support.

> *They needed at least one female officer in the Women and Juvenile Affairs unit, but the male officers didn't really know the female officers well. So, a senior female officer who was working in an administrative position within the unit recommended me (P2, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

Informal but customary groups of female officers existed in almost all police stations and higher-level headquarters. These groups were not officially registered but operated as an institutionalised practice within the organisational culture, underpinned by the strict seniority-based relationships described earlier. When female officers were assigned to a police station or provincial headquarters, they were automatically included in the women's group of that workplace, with one existing in each location, which left little scope for voluntary choice. They held regular gatherings and engaged in volunteer activities such as helping disadvantaged communities to promote the presence of female officers externally. These groups functioned

more as a symbolic performance of femininity within the organisation than as a space for voluntary solidarity. Due to implicit pressure from senior officers and the performative nature of these activities, junior female officers often experienced psychological burden. Some participants perceived this group as a space for reproducing a top-down, obedience-based organisational culture. This limitation resonates with O'Neil et al. (2011), who pointed out that women's networks are limited in their impact and remain symbolic when they are not recognised as strategic assets by both management and members.

> *I already had investigation schedules and a backlog of work, but the senior female officers kept telling me I had to show up for volunteer activities. They said I was the only one not going... It was incredibly stressful (P20, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Within these groups, another form of tension existed. Female officers who entered the force at the rank of inspector through elite tracks such as the Police Cadet Program or the Korean National Police University found themselves in ambiguous positions. Although they outranked their seniors who had entered as a rank of police officer, they were younger or had fewer years of service. This ambiguous positioning resembles the issue raised in the UK policing context regarding 'direct entry', where new officers with different social or educational backgrounds enter higher ranks and disrupt the traditional rank hierarchy, often encountering internal resistance (Silvestri 2018). Some participants with such backgrounds described feeling marginalised or excluded within the women's groups in their workplace, as they were not clearly recognised as either juniors or seniors. Such experiences reflect structural tensions created by the intersection of different social positions, including entry route, rank, age, and length of service (Crenshaw 1991). In the case below, P5 may have expected automatic solidarity among women simply because they were of the same gender when they joined the

organisation, but this expectation overlooked the complex dynamics within the same gender group.

> *I also wanted to get along with them, calling each other 'sister' and building a close bond, but I never felt like I could fit in. They always seemed guarded around me. At the time, it made me feel really hurt and lonely... but looking back now, I can understand why they might have felt that way (P5, 30s, Senior Inspector↑, 10–15yr).*

In this atmosphere, some juniors developed negative feelings toward senior women and deliberately distanced themselves from them. This made it difficult to build positive relationships with their seniors and led to a breakdown in advice and mentorship. As previous studies (e.g. Jones 2017; Lavender and Todak 2022) have shown, mentoring relationships among female officers can play an important role in confidence, learning, and professional development. From this perspective, the breakdown of mentoring caused by competitive and hierarchical structures in this thesis reinforced a survival strategy of 'every woman for herself', which contributed to deepening the sense of isolation within the organisation.

> *I don't really like the senior female officers. They acted like old-fashioned authoritarians, and I don't think any of them genuinely cared about the juniors. Sometimes, it even felt like we were just there for them to take out their frustrations on (P19, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

Unlike in the past, changes are being observed in the relationships among female officers today. Participants observed that the increase in the number of female officers has naturally led to changes in senior-junior relationships and internal culture. Many participants mentioned that traditional female officers' groups mentioned earlier have gradually declined or disappeared. Some explained this as a natural outcome of the less formal and more individualistic orientation

of younger recruits clashing with the traditionally collective culture. In particular, the practice of automatically joining groups regardless of their wishes caused generational differences in perception, which led to conflict.

> *When you were assigned to a police station, you were automatically enrolled in the women's group. Millennials and Gen Z just doesn't understand this idea of automatic enrollment (P23, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

> *Honestly, just being around the senior officers is uncomfortable. We're not meeting because we want to; we're being forced to. It might be fine for the seniors, but the new officers really don't like it (P25, 30s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

A number of participants showed a preference for informal, peer-based networks based on personal intimacy and voluntary participation rather than groups formed involuntarily based solely on gender. This shift has also led to a weakening of the influence of senior female officers. The increase in the number of female officers, coupled with the expansion of the organisation's gender policy, has provided women with a wider range of career opportunities than in the past, resulting in junior women no longer having to rely on the recommendations or networks of their seniors to advance their careers. This demonstrates a gradual weakening of hierarchy-driven collective bonds and a shift towards more peer-oriented female networks based on individual preferences and voluntary participation.

> *I keep in touch with the ones I'm close to. Now that there are so many female officers in the station, there are a lot of people I don't even know. I just stay close with those I already know, and honestly, I don't even recognise many of the newer officers anymore (P20, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

**Generational dynamics among female officers**

Although hierarchical structures have eased compared to the past, differences in perceptions shaped by generational experiences have created new boundaries among female officers. A shared gender identity alone did not automatically guarantee solidarity, and the increasing number of female officers did not necessarily translate into expanded networks or stronger mutual support. In fact, such tensions between senior and junior women were observed in a notable number of interviews.

Younger female officers with less than 10 years of experience were critical of the way older generations worked and perceived gender roles. They expressed discomfort with the attitudes of senior women who adapted to and reproduced a male-dominated organisational culture. For example, P12 said she found it difficult to build rapport with older female colleagues and felt more comfortable in relationships with peers regardless of gender. P14 expressed disappointment that a female senior officer made comments in response to a sexual harassment incident that seemed to side with a male perpetrator. P15 was shocked by a female senior officer's comment that 'Don't think you're being treated unfairly because you're a woman', and F8 noted that she felt uncomfortable when her female superior likened female officers to flowers. These examples show that the generational gap among female officers is not simply a matter of age, but reflects deeper divergences in gender sensitivity and perceptions of organisational culture, leading to complex relationship dynamics.

> *For me, I think having less of a generational gap is more important than simply sharing the same gender. I felt more comfortable talking to people who were closer to me in age rather than to older female officers (P12, 20s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

In contrast, some senior female officers felt an emotional distance from their younger female colleagues in their 20s and 30s, perceiving them as individualistic and difficult to deal with, or reluctant to interfere. For example, P16 gave necessary advice to a junior female officer on the same team, but showed herself drawing a line, saying, 'She won't listen to me anyway'. P21 noted, 'Younger officers today expect respect as a given, so we have to be even more cautious around them than they are around us'. This shows that the generational distance is not simply a matter of juniors being disrespectful but rather stems from changes in interaction styles and expectations. Lyons and Kuron (2014) explain that the younger generation places greater value on work-life balance, autonomy, and horizontal relationships. In the Korean police context, these generational orientations have influenced how female officers interact with one another. This generational conflict is similar to the dynamic described by Campeau (2019), where different cultural scripts between 'old-school' and 'new-generation' officers clash.

> *Young people these days really want things to make sense. If they don't find something reasonable, they don't want to do it. But if they believe something is fair or justified, they're incredibly quick and proactive about getting things done (P17, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

> *I think the younger generation feels uncomfortable around us. They don't really see the need to eat with older people, and conversations with us probably feel boring and awkward to them. (···) These days, I can really feel that I'm getting older (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Differences in generational perceptions are closely linked to variations in the timing of entry into the organisation and the corresponding experiences of organisational culture. According to Brown's (1997) model, female officers who entered during the *Integration* stage (those with

over 25 years of service in the Korean context) adapted to gendered roles to survive within a male-dominated organisation. Younger generations may perceive this as an attitude of conformity to organisational culture or internalised patriarchy. In contrast, female officers who joined after the *Reform* stage (those with less than 10 years of service in the Korean context) entered at a time when discourses on gender equality and feminist awareness were spreading both inside and outside the organisation, leading to greater sensitivity to gender discrimination (Choo 2019; Oh 2020).

However, despite the spread of this more critical awareness, some young officers still find it difficult to speak up in problematic situations or adapt to the organisation by conforming male-centric norms (see Chapter 6). As Campeau (2019) points out, this may be because even new-generation officers, while internalising changed values, strategically utilise existing cultural scripts to navigate their careers and maintain a stable sense of identity. This explains the reality that gender sensitivity or consciousness does not automatically translate into action, suggesting how the strong cultural inertia within the police organisation continues to constrain individual agency and practical action.

**Supportive ties and the potential for solidarity among female officers**

In contrast to the conflicts and tensions among female officers discussed earlier, some cases also revealed positive interactions and mutual support. These cases demonstrate that relationships among female officers are not always competitive or disconnected, but can also be based on trust, support, and mentoring. This distinguishes itself from the tendency observed in some women to distance themselves from their femininity or female colleagues as a means of adapting to a male-dominated organisational culture (Rader 2005; Del Carmen et al. 2007;

Rabe-Hemp 2009; Webber and Giuffre 2019; Sanders et al. 2022).

As discussed in Chapter 7, some senior female officers demonstrated an attitude of recognising and supporting the abilities of their junior colleagues and continued to take practical steps to rebuild relationships. They prioritised empathy and support over authority and sought to bridge generational gaps through mentoring, emotional support, and relationship-oriented communication.

> *Whenever the juniors invite me, I'm always grateful and I go. There's a 12-year and 8-year age gap between us. I'm thankful they include me in their gatherings. I just listen to them and take their side (P19, 40s, Inspector↓, 15–20yr).*

The positive interactions among female officers identified in this thesis performed four key roles within a male-dominated organisation. (1) validation, (2) mentoring, (3) emotional support, and (4) co-operation. Each of these functions contributed to enhancing interpersonal trust and emotional safety. First, it served to validate experiences and legitimise emotions. Through conversations with other female colleagues, female officers recognised that their doubts and discomfort at work were not merely personal feelings. This cognitive exchange enabled them to understand the situation more clearly and determine how to respond. For example, P15 felt she was being discriminated against in dispatch assignments during her time as a patrol officer, but found it difficult to raise the issue. However, after talking with female senior officers from other teams, she became convinced that her doubts reflected real problems and was subsequently able to raise the issue with her superior.

> *I was thinking, 'Why does it feel like I'm the only one not getting sent out on calls?' Then I spoke to some senior female officers from other teams, and they told me that when they*

*first started, they weren't given many patrol car assignments either. That's when I realised — it wasn't just me feeling that way; it was actually true. I really was being assigned to patrol cars less and sent out on fewer calls compared to others (P15, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

The second is informal mentoring and sharing coping strategies. Female officers formed relationships where they informally shared practical coping strategies and advice based on their common gender-based experiences. P21 mentioned that she formed a sense of empathy with female colleagues about the comments they hear as women and received information from senior officers about how to handle such situations and people to watch out for. Such informal mentoring practices often emerged in response to gendered risks within the organisation, functioning as a mechanism through which women collectively exchanged warnings and survival knowledge (Angehrn et al. 2021).

*It's not easy to talk about the discriminatory remarks I hear as a female officer when I get home. But when I share these things with other female officers, they tell me, 'In situations like that, you should say this', and give me advice on how to handle it. I feel like I've learned a lot about how to respond and stand up for myself (P21, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

The third function is emotional support. Sharing their workplace stress with female colleagues provided them with comfort and emotional relief. Such emotional exchanges helped to reduce feelings of isolation and ease everyday tensions. For example, P17 explained that going hiking with female colleagues frequently has been a great help in relieving workplace stress through the conversations shared during these outings. P22 similarly said that venting frustrations and comforting one another provided great emotional support.

The fourth is cooperation and information exchange. Exchanges based on trust between women

have led to flexible cooperation and practical information sharing that goes beyond the formal chain of command. In particular, information and requests for support conveyed through informal relationships have served as important resources in actual work, often crossing departmental boundaries.

> *Even if you weren't close before, once you build a rapport, it becomes possible to cooperate across different departments. Sometimes, even without going through the formal channels, just asking someone can lead to getting the support you need (P3, 40s, Inspector↓, 20–25yr).*

Such positive interactions among women can contribute to restoring participants' perceptions of *interactional justice*. Some female officers were able to alleviate emotional burdens stemming from feelings of exclusion or unfair treatment. As discussed in Chapter 6, authority is not guaranteed by official positions alone, and when informal power is lacking, that authority can easily be challenged. Conversely, informal networks based on trust and support can reinforce formal authority and function as a source of substantial power. In this sense, positive interactions among women can serve as an important resource for strengthening their influence within the organisation.

However, supportive ties among women did not immediately lead to a shared sense of purpose or collective action. While the cases discussed earlier illustrate various forms of emotional exchange and practical cooperation, they did not necessarily progress towards goals such as promoting gender equality or improving organisational culture. Hooks (2000) distinguishes between temporary support and genuine solidarity, arguing that solidarity is realised through communities formed on the basis of shared concerns and common goals, going beyond mere intimacy. From this perspective, the interaction experienced by the participants in this thesis

mostly remained at the level of emotional comfort and casual friendship, or was limited to a potential foundation for solidarity. In the in-depth interviews, many participants reacted to the word ‘solidarity’ with a sense of awkwardness or unfamiliarity. Such reactions appear to reflect a broader unfamiliarity with feminist terms such as ‘sisterhood’ or ‘solidarity’, which are rarely used in the mainstream discourse within Korean police organisations.

> *I meet up with other female officers sometimes to have a meal together. (...) But we don’t really talk much about our careers. (...) It’s more like just getting with people I’m close to, having a meal, and grabbing a coffee (P1, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

> *To build solidarity, you need a certain level of awareness. But since there weren’t many senior officers or leaders at the frontline who had that kind of awareness, it ended up being just about socialising, nothing more (P28, 50s, Senior Inspector↑, 35–40yr).*

Sanders et al. (2022) point out that the female officers who participated in their study in Canada often perceived the concept of sisterhood as overly emphasising gender differences, leading them to reject it as a barrier to inclusion. Among the participants in this thesis, rather than this kind of resistance, there was a more pronounced tendency to find the concept itself unfamiliar due to a lack of experience in imagining or practising what sisterhood or solidarity might mean and how they could be realised.

Even so, some participants described experiences of solidarity grounded in sisterhood that moved beyond supportive ties. Through these relationships, they spoke of shifts in how they saw themselves and their work, suggesting that solidarity can mark the beginning of practical efforts towards changing the organisation. For example, P8 and P15 found it difficult to build consensus with their female colleagues on gender issues and attempted to form solidarity, but

encountered cynical reactions and felt frustrated. It was only later, through their involvement with the Police Gender Studies Network (PGSN) activities, that they met peers who shared similar concerns. They reflected that this experience gave them a renewed sense of belonging and hope.

> *I'd only ever read about solidarity in books—I'd never really experienced it myself. (...) Whenever I brought up topics like gender equality or gender segregation, a lot of people seemed uncomfortable, so I felt like I didn't really have anyone to talk to. (...) Back then, I felt like I was the only one who thought that way, and it was a bit lonely. But now, I think things have really changed (P8, 30s, Inspector↓, 10–15yr).*

The following section examines the activities of the PGSN as a concrete example of such solidarity practices. Through this, the analysis explores the possibility that relationships among Korean female officers can go beyond simple supportive ties and develop into collective action that challenges gender discrimination within the organisation.

## Solidarity and activism among female officers

Unlike most participants in in-depth interviews, the term 'solidarity' was used more naturally by participants in the focus group interviews (FGIs). Meyerson (2001) proposed *tempered radicalism* as a strategy for pursuing gradual change within an organisation, emphasising the importance of individual-level activism and building solidarity within the organisation. Here, *tempered* refers to an attitude that pursues feasible change by considering both radicalism and the realities within the organisation. Tempered radicals do not completely reject existing institutions and systems, but bring about change from within through quiet resistance and

careful issue-raising. This concept is particularly relevant in contexts where open confrontation can be inefficient or risky, such as male-dominated organisations (Meyerson 2001). When applied to the context of the Korean police organisation, the PGSN can be understood as a site where female officers engage in practices of *tempered radicalism* to promote change from within. This section focuses on the formation of the PGSN and offers an in-depth analysis of how female officers shared critical awareness and pursued organisational change through solidarity.

**Formation and growth of the Police Gender Studies Network**

As discussed in Chapter 5, the progress for female officers in the Korean police organisation has been primarily driven by top-down policy initiatives led by the authorities, while female officers' own voices have rarely been made visible. Even in the process of promoting gender equality policies, collective advocacy by female officers and the formation of networks based on feminist identity have been weak. This contrasts sharply with the situation in the UK and the US, where solidarity among female officers, litigation, and active engagement in policy processes have been drivers of gender equality (Brown et al. 2013; Humiston and Rabe-Hemp 2020).

In this context, the PGSN, formed in 2018, can be seen as a significant effort to promote solidarity among women within the organisation and to seek change from within. The PGSN was established following a meeting held in 2017 between the Police Reform Committee (composed of external experts) and female officers, with feminist experts affiliated with the Committee playing a key role in encouraging and advising the group. Unlike the traditional, station-based women's groups that primarily focused on gender identity and symbolic

representation, the PGSN was initiated and shaped through interactions between external feminist mentors and internal practitioners. These mentors provided a clear sense of direction to the group based on gender-conscious perspectives, which played a crucial role in the PGSN's growth as a group rooted in feminist values. One participant involved in the early stages of the PGSN recalled the period as follows:

> *Back then, the main issue in the organisation regarding gender equality was just increasing the number of female officers. But I believed that real change had to come from women's own awareness and reflection. And honestly, I didn't see many women like that in the organisation. I actually got scolded a lot by them (the feminist experts from the committee) when I said that. (...) They kept calling me, saying, 'Right now,* you *need to be the one who takes on that role—being the focal point for solidarity. If you refuse, what about the younger officers? Are you going to let them go through the same discrimination you did?' They were really persistent and kept asking to meet (Participant, early member of the PGSN).*

Following this process, several female officers in mid-level leadership positions became actively involved in establishing and sustaining the group. Although they did not explicitly define themselves as feminists during the interviews, their critical awareness of gender inequality, ongoing exploration of gender issues, and long-term practical engagement within the organisation can be interpreted as reflecting a lived feminist orientation.

> *I used to have a very negative view of the women's groups that existed at police stations, so I had no desire at all to start another one. But this time, it was her who suggested it, and the external mentors also encouraged us to do it, so I think I decided to give it a go because I trusted them. It made me realise just how much it matters who is leading the effort (Participant, early member of the PGSN).*

In the early stages, around ten female officers who had participated in the meeting with the Committee gathered once a month to share their struggles, offer each other support, and build trust. Rather than forming simple personal relationships, they built deep bonds by sharing and empathising with the everyday experiences of inequality and injustice they faced in the organisation. Considering the attention and pressure associated with gatherings focused on gender issues, the members chose to organise themselves as a 'study group' officially registered with the Korean National Police Agency. This strategy enabled the PGSN to survive and grow within the institutional framework.

> *Right from the time we were deciding on the name for the Police Gender Studies Network, there was fear among the members. That's why we felt it was important to emphasise that we were a study group operating within the official system. We used the format of a 'field study group' as a kind of shield (F11, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

The formation process of the PGSN can be understood as the practice of *tempered radicalism* (Meyerson 2001). Members maintained their identity and critical awareness within the organisational framework and attempted gradual change. In the early stages, they focused on internal cohesion and the formation of a collective identity rather than on outward expansion. New members were carefully invited, with particular attention paid to whether they shared a sensitivity to gender issues. This approach contrasts with more inclusive models such as those in the UK, where female officers are automatically registered with a network like the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) upon appointment. The initial members of the PGSN prioritised shared gender consciousness and mutual trust over broad inclusion, as they were concerned that differing levels of gender awareness could dilute the group's purpose and direction before it had fully established itself.

*It wasn't like we invited people who said things that sounded too much like 'honorary men'... At the very least, they had to be people who didn't say those things, and who showed some interest. Rather than setting strict criteria, we brought in people who shared a sense of concern and were willing to think through these issues with us (F11, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

As the group entered its second year, leading members began to expand the membership to pursue broader change. Online platforms such as group chats and virtual meetings were effectively utilised to enable the participation of female officers working in diverse regions. This facilitated real-time communication among members scattered across different areas. In addition, quarterly in-person meetings were also organised. This hybrid mode of interaction goes beyond traditional offline-based solidarity models and offers new possibilities for flexible and sustainable network formation.

The PGSN gradually expanded its external activities through events such as academic seminars and a book publication. To support this growth, it established an executive body and refined its operational structure by dividing roles and responsibilities. Building on this foundation, the PGSN began to speak out to the outside world. A representative example is the public statement in the name of PGSN during the 'Daerim Female Officer Case (2019)' mentioned in Chapters 4 and 6. Despite the complexity of the case, it was quickly framed by media discourse as a failure of female policing, leading to the spread of misogynistic and sexist remarks against female officers online. The PGSN issued a statement pointing out that the essence of the case was the denigration of legitimate law enforcement authority and urged the cessation of hate speech. The statement was disseminated through the social media accounts of the PGSN members and reported in the media. This marked the first attempt and turning point for the PGSN to move beyond a simple internal network and become a public actor engaging

in gender-related issues. Moreover, the statement provided psychological support to the female officer who had been experiencing severe isolation due to the surrounding hostility (Joo et al. 2022).

> *One morning on my way to work, I heard some male officials on the radio defending the female officer, saying she handled the situation really well. But listening to that, I thought—do we have to rely on men even for this kind of support? As soon as I got to the office, I wrote a statement under the name of the PGSN. Some members in the group were concerned, saying it might be too risky, but I pushed hard for it and we eventually released it. I think that incident really helped raise awareness of the PGSN among other female officers and also made it known externally (F10, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 25–30yr).*

Since then, the PGSN has gradually expanded its external outreach through events such as a book launch, media interviews, and academic seminars. This can be seen as an attempt to connect gender issues within the police organisation to the broader social agenda. In particular, academic seminars have broadened the scope of discussion to include not only gender discrimination within the organisation but also issues that affect society as a whole, such as gender-based violence (Choi 2024).

**Figure 11 Examples of the PGSN activities**

Participation in the International Association of Women Police Conference (Lee 2024)

PGSN-Korea National Police University Joint Academic Seminar
(https://police.ac.kr/police/posori/master/71/160869/boardView.do?mdex=posori21)

Meanwhile, as the PGSN's activities gradually became known to the outside world, backlash both within and outside the organisation followed. On anonymous online communities for office workers, posts repeatedly appeared that either mocked the group or questioned its very legitimacy. In some cases, even the real names and affiliations of executive members of the PGSN were disclosed online by anonymous users, resulting in the exposure of their personal information. This type of online targeting, known as 'doxing', is a typical gendered tactic that intimidates and silences women who speak out or seek to play a public role. This illustrates how collective solidarity among female officers, when it evolves into a public voice, can encounter resistance from inside and outside the organisation.

> *The entire list of the PGSN executive members was posted on Blind (an anonymous online community popular among South Korean office workers). I remember thinking, 'Someone must've put in a lot of effort just to dig that up...' There wasn't any hate speech in the post itself—just the list—but underneath it were tons of hateful comments (F10, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 25–30yr).*

As mentioned earlier, Webber and Giuffre (2019) argue for the need to explore both the effects of women's solidarity and the conditions that enable it. From this perspective, the PGSN can be evaluated as an important case demonstrating how women's solidarity is formed and maintained within the police organisation. This thesis identifies several key conditions that have supported the development of solidarity within the PGSN: feminist leadership that provided vision, voluntary participation of members, a shared critical awareness of gender issues, horizontal communication that mitigates the effects of rank hierarchy, structural mechanisms for operational sustainability, leadership rotation through regular executive

turnover, and the use of digital communication technologies that enabled emotional connection and coordination across regions. These conditions have enabled female officers to combine their identity with collective agency, thereby developing and cementing solidarity, and fostering change within the organisation.

The PGSN is noteworthy as the first gender-conscious network voluntarily formed within the Korean police organisation, but compared to international examples, it lacks institutional support. For example, the Kenya Association of Women in Policing, the SAPS Women's Network (South Africa), the Australasian Council of Women and Policing (Australia), and the BAWP (UK) are all operated based on their respective countries' gender policies and official institutional frameworks. These organisations have played a practical role in supporting the career development of female officers and realising gender equality within their organisations, going beyond mere social networking (Prenzler et al. 2023). In contrast, the PGSN is not an official association and relies heavily on the voluntary participation of its members and an informal network. This suggests that the Korean police organisation needs to recognise women's networks as strategic assets and provide policy support and resources to ensure their stable and sustainable operation.

**The impact of solidarity among female officers**

Nevertheless, participation in the PGSN has brought about various changes in female officers on an emotional, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural level, contributing to strengthening individual and collective agency within the organisation.

First, on an emotional level, effects such as reduced isolation, restored sense of belonging, and emotional support and security were observed. Many cases have been identified where female

officers experienced relational support and regained a sense of belonging through the PGSN. These experiences demonstrate that PGSN functions not merely as a learning group but as a psychological safe space that fills the 'lack of belonging' that is not addressed within the formal organisation. As discussed in Chapter 6, female officers often found it difficult to develop a sense of belonging through everyday work practices due to gendered exclusion within male-dominated departments. Against this backdrop, the case of F7 below suggests that the sense of belonging gained through the network may have had a meaningful impact on her career continuity.

> *I haven't felt any real sense of belonging to the organisation for a long time. When I told members of the PGSN, 'I'm planning to leave the force in a few years', they said, 'Don't say that—you're someone who's really needed in this organisation. If things are hard, why not try this or that first and then decide?' They tried to hold on to me (F7, 20s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

> *The biggest thing was... I feel a sense of reassurance. Even though it's unlikely to happen, if I ever have to fight or struggle, I feel like I have someone who will always support me no matter what (P15, 30s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr, FGI).*

In this way, the experience of gaining a new sense of belonging amidst organisational marginalisation can be understood as a process of identity transformation in which female officers redefine themselves and their relationship to the organisation. The concept of *liminality* described in Chapter 2 provides a useful framework for understanding this process. Female officers found themselves in a liminal position, neither fully integrated into the male-dominated organisational culture nor established as agents capable of critically responding to gender discrimination (Brown et al. 2020). The PGSN served as a space where female officers in this

liminal state could verbalise their experiences and construct new identities and a sense of belonging.

> *When I joined the group, I saw that everyone was working in places where they were often the only woman among many male officers, and yet they were so passionate. I felt like I was drawing energy from that. Even though we don't get much empathy or support in our own offices, the PGSN felt like a space that offered emotional warmth and a sense of support (F8, 40s, Inspector↓, 5–10yr).*

In addition to emotional impact, changes in perception and attitude also emerged as important shifts. Experiences that had previously been regarded as personal issues began to be understood as the result of organisational culture and structural inequality, and as a result, female colleagues came to be seen naturally as peers and sisters rather than competitors.

> *Joining the PGSN made me reflect on myself for the first time. As I started to objectively look back on what I had experienced within the police organisation, I felt a deep sense of sadness—but also pride in myself. It also became a turning point that made me pay more attention to the experiences of other female officers around me (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

Some participants were prompted to re-examine gender roles and ways of life that they had internalised for a long time. For example, F3 reflected on the submissive role she had played within her family and said that she gained an opportunity to reinterpret her life from a gender lens.

> *At home, I was always the one expected to yield to my older brothers, and after getting married—maybe because I married someone I really loved—I naturally put my husband first. Looking back, that was just how things were for me. But after joining the PGSN, I*

*realised that maybe it didn't have to be that way. I guess I started to learn that it wasn't necessarily normal or right (F3, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

These shifts did not stop at internal changes within individuals but became a foundation for behavioural changes within the organisation. This process represents the move from gender awareness or consciousness to gender activism. For example, F2, who previously accepted unreasonable situations without question, was able to actively protect a junior colleague who experienced sexual harassment after participating in PGSN. Some participants gained the power to 'speak out' through experiences of solidarity, which led to everyday actions that disrupted the power structures within the organisation.

*Doing the media interview to speak on behalf of female officers was a bit stressful for me, but I think it actually became a valuable opportunity for growth. I'm not the kind of person who enjoys being in the spotlight, but once I did it, I realised it wasn't such a big deal. It was tough, but through that experience, I felt like I was growing, too (F11, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

*I didn't realise these things were even problems before—but once I did, I started sharing that awareness with junior officers and colleagues around me. And when it felt necessary, I began to speak up. I guess I act like a bit of a shy feminist (F4, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 15–20yr).*

However, this space for solidarity has not always been smooth or uncomplicated. A few members have experienced a lack of belonging, self-censorship, and psychological inhibition within the group due to a perceived lack of gender awareness or a self-consciousness that they are not 'true feminists'. Such anxiety demonstrates that when standards for what constitutes a 'true feminist' operate implicitly within activist or gender-aware spaces, they can cause some

members who feel they do not meet these standards to become discouraged and pushed to the margins (Scharff 2016). In South Korea, where feminism itself is often socially stigmatised and subject to backlash, some hesitate to be labelled as feminists from the outset or find it difficult to build confidence in this identity (Oh 2019; Jeong and Bae 2024; Jung and Moon 2024).

> *I had always admired people with strong gender awareness or those with a background in gender studies, but I've always felt that I lack that kind of awareness myself. I joined the group out of that admiration, but emotionally, it was quite difficult. Every time we had conversations in the group, I often felt myself shrinking, like I wasn't good enough to be there (F2, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

Hooks (2000) emphasises that what is important in feminist solidarity is not the sharing of identical experiences, but an intersectional approach that understands and acknowledges different life conditions. Johnston (2016) also describes the space of activism as a 'battleground' where conflict, tension, and self-reflection coexist. In this sense, recognising tension and reconfiguring one's experiences can catalyse internal growth and transformative action. In fact, F2 and F3 reported that while they initially experienced feelings of intimidation and confusion, they later experienced learning and growth within the space of solidarity.

Ultimately, the solidarity experiences of female officers have served as a catalyst for them to critically recognise the gender discrimination structures within their organisation and strengthen their agency to respond to them. As argued by Giddens (1984) and Sewell (1992), structures are not fixed frameworks that unilaterally determine individuals, but rather fluid systems that are constantly reconfigured through individual practices. From this perspective, solidarity operates as a mechanism that enables female officers to critically reflect on and

intervene in structures rather than passively adapting to them. This can serve as a basis for cracking the gender power structures within the policing domain.

## Empowering women in male-dominated organisations

Solidarity between women is a catalyst for change, but to translate it into meaningful intervention within an organisation, institutional and cultural foundations are necessary. This section examines the empowerment strategies and enabling conditions that allow female officers to critically respond to gender-discriminatory structures and to engage in activism aimed at transforming them. Empowerment goes beyond merely improving access to resources; it refers to a process of transforming individuals into agents who can choose what was previously unavailable to them, thereby strengthening their agency (Kabeer 1999). The following discussion explores three strategies for realising empowerment, identified through the experiences of the study participants: expanding representation, providing transformative learning experiences, and activating gender-based networks. These strategies are best understood as interrelated conditions that together enable female officers to move from passive presence within the organisation to more active forms of engagement and influence.

### The role of representation in female officers' empowerment

Female officers make up just 16% of the total police force in Korea. As seen in Chapter 3, previous studies have shown that increasing women's representation is closely related to enhancing organisational legitimacy (Riccucci et al. 2014; Schuck et al. 2021), emphasising women's strengths in police work (Sun 2007; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Schuck 2014b), and the potential for organisational change (Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2014; Brown et al. 2020). This

thesis adds to existing discussions by focusing on numerical representation as a strategic condition that enables the empowerment of female officers. This reflects Brown's (1997) concept of *tip-over*, understood as a qualitative turning point beyond symbolic inclusion. The findings of this study suggest that numerical representation is not a sufficient condition for organisational transformation, but a necessary precondition under which further mechanisms of change may become possible.

The connection between numerical representation and empowerment emerged naturally in several participants' accounts. For example, F10 stated that in an environment where women are extremely few in number, even highly capable individuals find it difficult to fully utilise their abilities and cannot expect fair evaluation. She expressed concern that such a structure ultimately makes it difficult to build trust in women's leadership, leading to a vicious cycle in which negative perceptions are repeatedly reproduced.

> *First of all, it's the numbers. When there are so few women, there's hardly any room for their capabilities to be properly recognised. Even now, people don't really believe that female senior superintendents earned their rank based on merit. Female officers need to be able to demonstrate their abilities and be fairly evaluated. Only then can younger women in the organisation have experiences of success (F10, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 25–30yr).*

This shows the reality that female officers are required to meet additional conditions in order to be recognised fairly beyond gender stereotypes. In this sense, women's representation is not merely a numerical issue, but a cultural one, as it concerns who is recognised as an ordinary police officer. Ultimately, when female officers are seen as ordinary rather than exceptional, dynamics such as competition and isolation among women may be mitigated, contributing to

more supportive workplace relationships.

In particular, when more female officers advance to senior positions, they can gain influence over key organisational decisions and operations, which may help reshape organisational culture and address gender issues more effectively (Dolan 2000; Andrews and Miller 2013; Silvestri et al. 2013; Hong 2021; Pyo and Lee 2023). This goes beyond mere participation in the decision-making process, as it allows female officers to be recognised as authoritative figures and to speak for themselves, while also serving as a source of symbolic empowerment for younger female officers. F5 recalled an incident that occurred recently at a training institution where gender issues arose. She explained, 'Things started to move forward when a high-ranking officer of the same gender spoke up'. Similarly, F12 shared that during her time as a police precinct chief, she directly observed how male colleagues treated female colleagues differently, explaining that the presence of women in senior positions positively influences not only the organisational atmosphere but also everyday interaction.

> *When I was the precinct chief, the male officers were all careful. The junior female officers told me that while I was in charge, the men didn't talk to the women in that way. But after I left and a male chief took over, their attitudes changed again. It made me realise that just having a woman in a high-ranking position can make people more cautious and actually lead to real changes in behaviour (F12, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20–25yr).*

These cases demonstrate that the presence of female leaders in senior positions can change behavioural norms and interaction patterns within organisations. Furthermore, when female leaders demonstrate solidarity, their influence extends to the empowerment of subsequent generations of female officers.

*The women who act like honorary men are really no help at all to their female colleagues… But the ones who are different, they pull junior women up and bring them along. At first, I thought the men would criticise them. And they did, but even while criticising them, they couldn't dismiss them. That made a big difference. For junior female officers, those senior women were a real source of strength (P8, 30s, Inspector↑, 10–15yr).*

As discussed in Chapter 3, many studies have pointed out that merely increasing numbers is not sufficient to bring about transformative changes in organisational culture (Silvestri 2015; Brown et al. 2019; Turner 2024). Numerical representation is an important starting point, but connecting it to meaningful change requires fostering positive interactions and solidarity among women, which can function as a relational mechanism for organisational change, alongside the development of broader cultural and institutional mechanisms. Without such mechanisms, increased representation risks remaining passive rather than developing into active engagement with organisational change.

**Transformative learning and empowerment**

For the strategic potential of numerical representation to translate into meaningful empowerment, learning opportunities must be provided to help female officers reflect on their experiences, verbalise them, and grow as agents of change. Unlike general gender sensitivity training, this approach focuses on connecting personal experiences to structural contexts, critically reflecting on internalised norms, and strengthening the capacity for action (Mezirow 1991; Cranton 2016). Rather than 'correcting' women, it aims to support those who have experienced gender inequality but have found it difficult to recognise or speak about it to reframe their experiences. While transformative learning is also necessary for male officers,

this discussion focuses specifically on the design and conditions needed to implement it for female officers.

Some female officers who participated in this thesis said that through lectures, books, and study groups for women, they were exposed to feminist ideas and principles and gained a new awareness of their own experiences that had not been verbalised before, and became aware of the problems with male-centred organisational culture. For example, P15 stated that after first encountering feminism in a gender equality lecture for female officers, she realised that not all women inherently possess high gender sensitivity and that her past experiences finally made sense. She emphasised the need for learning opportunities that address experiences unique to female officers. F11 also mentioned that without encountering feminism, she would have adapted to the organisation as an honorary man and explained that through ongoing studying of feminism, she has gained the ability to critically examine organisational structures.

> *I sometimes think that if I had never encountered feminism, I would have become the type of person who fully adapts to the organisation. There were moments when I felt I had to keep studying to avoid becoming an honorary man (F11, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

Such learning opportunities need to be designed to enable female officers to reconfigure their perceptions of their careers and leadership. For example, F5 shared that she was deeply moved by advice from a female lecturer who urged female officers to pursue their ambitions for power without being swayed by the challenges of their life stages, to advance gender equality within the organisation. This prompted her to reassess her career goals and reaffirm her leadership potential, serving as a transformative learning experience.

> *She said that if the organisation is to change, women need to hold on to their ambition for*

*power and not let it go—and that they shouldn't be constrained by life stages. Just holding on to that ambition, she said, could make a big difference over time. That really stayed with me (F5, 30s, Inspector↓, less than 5yr).*

This account can be read not as a normative expectation placed on women, but as an empirical illustration of how some female officers reinterpret ambition as a means of resisting organisational constraints on their advancement. F5's reflections also resonated deeply with other female officers who participated in the same focus group. P15 said, 'When F5 spoke about holding on to the ambition for power, I felt like I was going to cry'. She explained that the vague desire for organisational change she had long harboured was finally connected to a concrete direction—promotion and the exercise of leadership. This case demonstrates that transformative learning can be further strengthened and disseminated through peer interactions. Such learning can also serve as a foundation for female officers to develop the capacity to voice their perspectives and to build courage and resilience through repeated acts of speaking out.

These learning opportunities can be provided throughout one's career, but it is particularly important to provide them during the early stages of employment. Many female officers are assigned to patrol units early in their careers, where they absorb a male-dominated organisational culture and often choose adaptation over challenge. Therefore, providing learning opportunities during this period is crucial for laying the groundwork for attempting organisational change and designing their careers proactively, rather than conforming or remaining silent. This learning structure can also be extended to male officers and serve as a foundation for enhancing gender sensitivity.

**Activating gender-based networks**

If transformative learning provides a foundation for expanding the critical awareness and capacity for action of individual female officers, the activation of gender-based networks may be essential to ensure that such learning is translated into sustainable practice. Here, gender-based networks refer not to affinity groups based on simple gender similarities but to relational spaces where members share gendered experiences, reflect on structural inequalities, and collectively explore possibilities for action. Such networks, as exemplified by the PGSN, can provide emotional support, a sense of belonging, and informal mentoring, fostering trust and mutual understanding.

For such networks to function effectively, diversity in format and purpose is also important. Drawing on her experience with the operation of the PGSN, F12 stated that a single network has limitations in accommodating all needs and made the following comments.

> *I think we need a variety of different groups—some that are just for female officers, like a women's police association; others where both men and women come together to study feminism; and some informal or loosely structured groups for female officers, like study circles or social gatherings. There should be more spaces like these (F12, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

This suggests the need for a flexible network environment that allows female officers to participate selectively according to their interests. Furthermore, F12's remarks reflect the pragmatic understanding that solidarity among female officers alone may not be sufficient to bring about organisational cultural change. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, some male managers have contributed to the integration of women in policing by supporting their career development and serving as mentors. Therefore, gender-based networks can consist of women-

only groups or be expanded into collaborative networks that include men, and such diverse forms of networks can serve as a substantive foundation for organisational change.

Meanwhile, F9 emphasised the need to design structural opportunities that allow more members to easily access the network. This highlights that, unlike countries such as the UK, Australia, or South Africa where official women police associations or automatically enrolled networks exist, participation in Korea still largely depends on individual motivation and informal connections, which can limit accessibility.

> *If someone is introverted but still wants to take part, then of course we should bring them along. But we can't include people who simply say, 'I don't want to do that'. (...) That said, I feel like right now, the opportunities themselves just don't exist (F9, Inspector↓, 30s, 5–10 yr).*

Such networks can become a resource that supports the empowerment of female officers when they are activated to foster solidarity rather than simply socialising. Furthermore, when these networks are not limited to internal exchanges but are also connected to external actors, they can play a more expanded role. F10 envisioned this as follows.

> *The PGSN still has some internal limitations, but I think it would be good to expand outward a bit—maybe by connecting with other women's organisations or professionals in similar fields who share our values. Rather than just staying as a small group of female officers sharing how hard it is to deal with workplace sexual harassment, I'd like to see us develop a more advanced model (F10, 40s, Senior Inspector↑, 20-25yr).*

For such networks to remain stable and sustainable, some degree of organisational-level support is likely to play a meaningful role. For autonomously formed networks to function as

meaningful spaces for learning and action, support in the form of guaranteed time and space, operational resources, and institutional linkages can enhance their continuity and effectiveness. Previous studies also suggest that when management recognises these networks as strategic assets and provides substantial resources, their effectiveness is maximised (O'Neil et al. 2011; Webber and Giuffre 2017). In the Korean police context, this raises important questions about how such institutional support can be mobilised to sustain gender-based networks and their role in policy engagement.

In summary, the empowerment of female officers becomes possible when numerical representation, transformative learning, and solidarity experiences through networks work together. This, in turn, can develop members' gender sensitivity and critical consciousness into gender activism that transforms organisational structures and culture.

## Conclusion

This chapter analysed the complex relationships among female officers within the Korean police organisation and the potential for solidarity that emerges within these relationships. Relationships among women were formed within a complex context of hierarchy, competition, intergenerational tensions, and mutual support, which were the result of gendered personnel practices and a hierarchy-oriented organisational culture. The absence of solidarity was not due to individual tendencies but rather resulted from implicit norms and the male-dominated organisational culture, as well as survival strategies chosen under such conditions.

Nevertheless, some female officers demonstrated the potential for empowerment by forming positive interactions and trust-based relationships. In particular, the PGSN case can be

interpreted as the practice of *tempered radicalism* (Meyerson, 2001), which involves recognising organisational constraints from an insider's perspective, negotiating them, and seeking gradual change. Seen in light of the conditions identified by Brown and Silvestri (2020b), this may reflect the role of 'pioneers' who promote gender equality within policing organisations. However, their activities are not yet sufficiently linked to official organisational systems or policies, highlighting the need for additional institutional support to establish a stable and sustainable foundation. This reveals the challenges facing the Korean police organisation when compared to official women's networks operating in countries such as the UK, Australia, and South Africa (Prenzler et al. 2023).

To advance toward a gender-equitable organisation, the Korean police should thoroughly understand the multi-dimensional interactions among female officers, promote positive interactions, and establish institutional and cultural foundations to empower them. Through such measures, female officers can move beyond being mere survivors within the organisation and become active agents in realising gender equality.

## [Chapter 9] Conclusion

This thesis explored the extent and nature of women's integration into Korean policing by examining female officers' career experiences and perceptions of organisational justice, alongside the broader institutional developments that shaped these experiences. This chapter first presents the main themes identified in the study and answers the key research questions, followed by a discussion of the academic contributions and implications of the findings for the field of policing research. Finally, the chapter acknowledges the limitations of the study and outlines directions for future research.

### Summary of the study

The main findings of this thesis can be summarised under three key themes. The first theme is **'Negotiating gendered work: challenges and responses of female officers**'. This theme addresses the gendered dynamics that female officers encounter in the course of their duties and their responses to them. Participants found themselves in an environment where they were consistently assigned specific types of tasks based on gendered role expectations. This is analysed as stemming from the legacy of a period before the *integration* stage (Brown 1997) when the roles of female officers were officially restricted, as well as from pervasive gender stereotypes within the organisation. Additionally, participants frequently experienced gendered exclusion and undermining of their job authority by citizens or colleagues during their work. This appears as a defensive mechanism against the perceived threat of policing work, which is structured around masculinity, being taken over by women (Hunt 1990; Brown et al. 2019; Krantz and Trainor 2019). In this process, participants experienced gendered and often invisible emotional labour, psychological disempowerment, and workplace isolation. Furthermore, the

majority of participants reported experiences of gender-based harassment in their relationships with colleagues and superiors. Notably, during the gender reform phase initiated by the Korean National Police Agency in 2018, anti-policewomen discourse spread both within and outside the organisation, which served as a factor weakening female officers' confidence and ability to exercise their authority in law enforcement situations.

Female officers navigated between *doing gender* and *undoing gender*, engaging in fluid practices to survive within the organisation (West and Zimmerman 1987; Deutsch 2007; Chan et al. 2010; Morash and Haarr 2012). These practices varied depending on individual factors such as career stage, work environment, and level of gender consciousness. Many participants acknowledged the visible institutional improvements in gender policies but emphasised that, in the lack of corresponding changes in gender sensitivity among organisational members, a gender-discriminatory culture remained structurally embedded.

The second theme is **'Organisational justice and career navigation: gendered strategies in policing**'. Most participants perceived the organisation's opportunity structure as gender discriminatory. Female officers are viewed as 'leave at any time' during their childbearing years and as 'lacking competitiveness' after the child-rearing period. As a result, female officers experienced opportunity constraints throughout their life cycle. Additionally, implicit restrictions on positions women could hold, informal caps on the number of female officers within departments, and informal networks influenced by *homosociality* (Holgersson 2013; Silvestri and Tong 2022) not only limited opportunities for women but also intensified competition among them. Participants held diverse views on promotions compared to job assignment opportunities. This was attributed to affirmative action, such as the female officer promotion target system. While some evaluated that such measures ensured women were not

at a disadvantage in the promotion process, others perceived that they generated gender-discriminatory perceptions or left women in a structurally disadvantaged position. This illustrates the paradox of simultaneous progress and regression (Silvestri 2015) often associated with affirmative action.

Perceptions of injustice led to reduced career motivation and psychological disengagement from the organisation, which in turn influenced career attitudes. Perceptions of organisational justice interacted with individual and environmental factors to significantly influence the formation of career strategies. This study categorised participants' responses into five career strategies. First, participants with significant caregiving responsibilities adopted a work-life stability strategy within the organisational culture of *doing time* (Silvestri 2017). They preferred departments with high predictability and tended to accept limited roles. Second, some adopted a strategy of flexibly and pragmatically adjusting their careers according to changing circumstances and opportunities. Third, many participants sought to secure career stability by working for a long time in specific fields such as criminal investigation, thereby gaining expertise. Some of them showed that they valued strengthening their expertise more than promotion. Fourth, some intentionally pursued positions that were advantageous for promotion or career advancement, often moving between different departments. Fifth, some went beyond the existing gender-based division of labour and challenged areas traditionally dominated by men or took on new roles. This can be interpreted as gender activism. It is important to note that individuals do not necessarily adhere to a single strategy, and their approaches may evolve over time based on their life stage and organisational experience.

The third theme is **'Between tensions and solidarity: female officers' interactions and organisational change'**. Shared gender identity alone did not automatically lead to solidarity

among women, nor did an increase in the number of female officers directly translate into the expansion of women's networks. Relationships among female officers in South Korea have been characterised by competition, strict hierarchy, and generational divisions within a gendered personnel system and broader organisational culture. Although informal groups of female officers have long existed at the police station level, they often functioned as spaces where femininity was symbolically performed or existing hierarchies were reproduced. As a result, possibilities for mentoring, mutual support, and solidarity were often limited. Generational tensions among female officers were also significant. This is partly explained by the fact that senior and junior officers entered the organisation under different social climates and institutional conditions, as outlined in Brown's (1997) progress model of women in policing. As a result, they had distinct organisational experiences. Generational differences in perceptions have brought changes to the dynamics of senior-junior relationships, contributing to the gradual decline of traditional, police station-based women's groups.

However, some female officers have formed supportive relationships or solidarity with other female colleagues in response to unfair experiences within the organisation. Positive interactions among women within a male-dominated organisation served functions such as validating experiences of discrimination, mentoring, emotional support, and collaboration. In particular, the Police Gender Study Network (PGSN), which some participants are involved in, is a gender-conscious network formed voluntarily within the Korean police organisation. It functions as a space for *tempered radicalism* (Meyerson 2001), recognising organisational constraints from an insider's perspective and gradually attempting change, while also influencing the strengthening of members' capacity for action. This demonstrates the potential

for gender sensitivity and critical awareness to drive organisational change through transformative learning and network participation experiences.

Based on the above analysis, the study provides the following answers to each research question. **First, what approach has been adopted by the police in South Korea in its development of gender diversity and equality for its workforce?**

Although not addressed in the above summary, as confirmed in Chapter 4, the Korean police organisation has consistently emphasised gender differences whenever increasing the number of female officers or expanding their roles, adopting an approach that assigns tasks deemed suitable for women (e.g. work involving women and children, emotionally labour-intensive tasks). This approach has reinforced the practice of *doing gender* within the organisation (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, it stands in contradiction to the current institutional and societal expectations that female officers perform to the same standards as their male counterparts, resulting in a paradoxical situation for women in policing today.

**Second, how do women police experience their work as police officers (both in relation to colleagues and to the wider citizenry)?**

Gender has been a significant factor in the daily organisational life of female officers in South Korea, particularly in relation to their colleagues and citizens. Gender-based role expectations exist within the organisation, leading to gendered job assignments. Female officers often experience exclusion from core duties and undermining of their job authority due to their gender, even in law enforcement settings. This can be attributed to a complex interplay of factors, including a police model that assumes men as the default despite the diversity of roles involved in policing (Choo 2019), low gender sensitivity among members, and institutionalised

gender role stereotypes. As a result, female officers navigate complex tensions between fulfilling their roles as police officers and negotiating their positions within the organisation as women, and they practise survival strategies in their everyday working lives.

**Third, how do female officers navigate and manage their career progression within policing?**

The career trajectories of female officers in South Korea were not merely the cumulative result of individual preferences or choices, but were shaped by the widespread influence of structural factors and cultural norms within the organisation. Female officers have been constructing their career strategies while considering caregiving responsibilities at various life stages and gendered constraints within the organisation. This was based on an implicit understanding of what they could actually do and what positions were accessible to them. In particular, their perceptions of unfairness in job assignments, promotions, and career development opportunities significantly influenced the formation of their career strategies. While participants' career attitudes fell along a spectrum from passive adaptation to active engagement, most were navigating their careers through their own strategies in response to organisational constraints.

**Fourth, what are female officers' perceptions and experiences of organisational justice within policing?**

Participants reported experiencing inequality compared to male officers in various aspects, including job assignments, promotions, work opportunities, and everyday treatment. This served as an important backdrop in shaping their perceptions of organisational justice. However, the degree and manner in which participants perceived unfairness varied depending on

individual factors, which can be attributed to the complex interplay of various factors such as career length, generational cohort, organisational position, and level of gender consciousness. For example, younger participants with shorter careers tended to be more sensitive to inequality within the organisation, while those with longer careers and greater familiarity with organisational culture emphasised improvements compared to the past. However, some long-serving officers with strong gender consciousness critically recognised and addressed organisational inequality. This demonstrates that understanding an individual's perception of organisational justice requires considering diverse experiences and contexts rather than relying on a single explanatory factor.

**Fifth, what are the impacts of experiencing organisational injustice in their careers? How do female officers cope and respond to this?**

Unfair experiences within the organisation had a negative impact on female officers' sense of belonging to the organisation, self-efficacy, and career motivation. These experiences often acted to restrict their individual agency. However, responses to perceived injustice varied among individuals. Some chose to conform to gendered expectations within the organisation or endure them, while others responded to unreasonable situations through straight talk, raising issues, or everyday resistance. Their practices manifested in complex and strategic ways, oscillating between *doing and undoing gender*, between adapting and challenging, and between silence and voice. Relationships with female colleagues were also characterised by various dynamics, including competition and tension, as well as support and solidarity. Through transformative learning and positive interactions with other women, some empowered participants demonstrated practices that went beyond personal survival to seek organisational change. This illustrates that Korean female officers, while positioned as subjects of gendered

oppression, also act as agents who negotiate and attempt to transform the gendered structures of the police organisation.

Ultimately, this thesis presents the following conclusion to the overarching question of **'To what extent and in what ways have women been integrated into policing in South Korea?'** Although the representation of women in South Korean policing has increased, their integration remains partial in terms of roles performed, access to opportunities, and cultural perceptions. Despite institutional changes, gender-based division of labour, unfair distribution of opportunities, and low gender sensitivity persisted, and female officers responded in various ways to negotiate their positions. This suggests that women's integration into Korean policing is still ongoing, and that full integration will be possible when institutional, cultural, and relational transformations occur simultaneously.

## Contributions and implications

### Academic contributions

This thesis builds on existing discussions on the integration of women into policing and gendered police organisations, and makes the following academic contributions.

First, considering that gender studies in policing have largely focused on Western contexts, this thesis expands the geographical and cultural scope by empirically analysing gendered police organisations and the experiences of female officers in the South Korean context. The representation of women in South Korean policing stands at 16% as of 2024, which is relatively low internationally, and domestic research on this topic has also been limited. This thesis fills

a significant gap in the literature and strengthens regional diversity and experience-based analysis within gender and policing research.

Second, the thesis analyses the Korean case in light of major international comparative studies (e.g. Brown 1997; Rabe-Hemp and Garcia 2020; Garcia 2021; Prenzler et al. 2023), identifying both commonalities and contextual differences from a global perspective. Across many contexts, structural and cultural constraints—including male-dominated hierarchies, gender bias among members, exclusion from informal networks, and persistent resistance in the form of backlash and conflict—have been widely observed as barriers to women's integration. In the Korean case, however, several distinctive features emerge. Unlike in some Western contexts where female officers have played a more visible role in advancing women's integration into policing, efforts in South Korea have largely been led by the organisation, limiting opportunities for female officers to participate meaningfully in advancing integration. Strong social backlash since the 2010s, including misogynistic discourse specifically targeting female officers, has weakened the effectiveness of institutional reforms and destabilised women's position in policing. In addition, structural factors such as rigid hierarchies among female officers and gendered promotion and deployment practices that foster competition have also hindered solidarity and networking among women. As a result, many female officers have been left navigating these constraints in isolation, with limited opportunities to develop collective voice or sustained forms of solidarity. These dynamics underscore why gender remains a useful conceptual tool, as the constraints experienced by female officers were explicitly gendered in both organisational practices and wider public discourse. The Korean case thus illustrates how integration outcomes are shaped not only by structural barriers common across contexts, but also by localised socio-cultural dynamics that uniquely constrain female officers' agency and

solidarity. Nonetheless, in the case of the PGSN, where solidarity was actively practised, there was evidence of the potential for meaningful change. This suggests that, alongside organisational responsibility, recognising female officers as agents of change constitutes an important component of achieving full integration. This should not be understood as shifting the burden of reform onto female officers, but rather as a call to move beyond perspectives and policy approaches that have tended to view women solely as passive beneficiaries of gender equality policies or as a protected minority.

Third, the thesis examines the integration of women into policing by linking it to perceptions of organisational justice, which has rarely explored in previous research, and analyses how the injustices experienced by female officers influence their career strategies, trajectories, and the development of their agency. Unlike the neoliberal perspectives that view career as a matter of individual autonomy and choice, this thesis empirically demonstrates how the career formation of female officers interacts with structural and cultural constraints. This supports Rottenberg's (2018) criticism that discourse reducing women's career formation to individual responsibility or effort can conceal structural inequality.

Fourth, this thesis empirically analysed the background behind some female officers' preference for gendered roles in policing. It demonstrated that such preference is not simply a matter of personal inclination but is shaped through a sequential and structural process, beginning with experiences of exclusion in male-dominated units during the early stages of their careers and followed by the restoration of self-efficacy in units where women are considered essential. This finding may provide insights into the phenomenon of gendered role preferences among female officers observed in some countries (Stroble 2008; Natarajan 2008; Chu 2013; Chan and Ho 2013; Chu and Abdulla 2014; Chu 2018; Shen and Schulz 2022).

Finally, this thesis identified the existence of voluntary solidarity groups among female officers within the Korean police organisation, which had been relatively difficult to detect. It demonstrated that such groups emerge and operate in the absence of formalised networks such as an official women's police association. By exploring how gender-conscious solidarity networks are formed and the constraints they face in such institutional contexts, this thesis offers insights for Asian countries with similar organisational conditions.

**Theoretical implications**

This thesis employs Acker's (1990, 2012) gendered organisation theory, organisational justice theory, and Brown's (1997) model of women's progress in policing as a theoretical framework. Through this, it analysed the experiences of female officers in a more structured and contextual manner and derived theoretical implications regarding women's integration into policing.

First, Acker's (2012) theory of gendered sub-structures provided a useful framework for analysing how gender inequality is reproduced within Korean police organisations. The male-dominated culture, opportunity structures that operate differently based on gender, and gendered exclusion and harassment demonstrate that gendered sub-structures are operating organically. At the same time, this thesis shows that female officers attempt to negotiate these structural constraints rather than simply conforming to them, and to redefine their roles and identities. This analysis reflects the critical discussion by Nkomo and Rodriguez (2019) that Acker's theory should be expanded beyond structural analysis to provide direction for achieving substantive equality and social justice.

Second, organisational justice theory served as a useful framework for analysing the organisational experiences of Korean female officers, as it allowed these experiences to be

examined across the dimensions of opportunities, treatment, and outcomes. This thesis also empirically supports existing literature (e.g. Colquitt et al. 2001; Bradford et al. 2014; Charman and Tyson 2024) suggesting that perceived organisational injustice has negative consequences. At the same time, some cases in this thesis suggest that experiences of injustice can lead to leadership growth and mentoring practices, indicating that organisational justice theory can extend beyond explaining negative outcomes alone, to also account for the potential for recovery and transformative responses.

Third, this thesis applied Brown's (1997) model of women's progress in policing to the Korean context and confirmed its usefulness as an analytical framework beyond Western settings such as the US and Europe. At the same time, the Korean case revealed patterns that cannot be fully accounted for by the model's assumptions of linear progression and its facilitating mechanisms, particularly because female officers' roles in advancing integration were often limited or invisible, with the integration process largely driven by organisational initiatives. Across departments, gender-based role segregation was reinforced in some contexts, while in others efforts were made to expand women's participation, illustrating the coexistence of gendered and non-gendered role practices. This pattern highlights the persistence of gendered organisational logic in the utilisation of female personnel and points to the model's limitations in capturing the hybrid and context-specific dynamics of women's integration in Korean policing. In this respect, the Korean case both supports and extends Brown and Silvestri's (2020b) argument that women's progress in policing is contingent upon broader organisational and cultural conditions. Findings from this thesis further illustrate how several of the organisational and cultural conditions identified by Brown and Silvestri (2020b) as necessary for the transition to the *Tip-over* stage remain only partially realised in the Korean policing

context, including the persistence of gender-segregated role practices, the limited representation of women in leadership positions, and the continued presence of social backlash against changing gender roles in policing.

Building on the theoretical frameworks discussed above, this thesis proposes the following comprehensive theoretical implications for assessing women's integration into policing. Institutional developments or increases in the number of female officers, while important indicators, are insufficient on their own and need to be complemented with qualitative assessments that reflect the subjective experiences and perceptions of female officers. This thesis demonstrated that Schuck's (2019) concept of integration, presented in Chapter 1, is useful for such qualitative evaluation. In this regard, female officers' perceptions of organisational justice should be understood not simply as individual attitudes but as experiences shaped by institutional conditions, organisational culture, and everyday interactions within a gendered organisational context. Consequently, this thesis argues that discussions of women's integration should not rely solely on Brown's (1997) model of institutional progress but also incorporate Schuck's (2019) focus on female officers' subjective experiences, interpreted within broader structural and cultural contexts.

**Policy and practice implications**

This thesis presents the following practical implications for gender equality policies and practices in the Korean police organisation. First, while increasing the number of female officers is important, it is also necessary to critically examine and reform gendered practices embedded in the organising process, including promotion and personnel placement. In particular, practices of assigning specific positions or tasks based on gender must be

discontinued, and structural factors that cause competition among women must also be mitigated. In addition to addressing individual behaviour of sexism, institutional measures, including personnel sanctions, are required to address department-level discriminatory practices that exclude specific genders during recruitment. In the case of local police stations, gender inequality is often more entrenched than in metropolitan areas, so region-specific gender equality strategies are required, and the on-site experiences and voices of local female officers must be reflected more in this process. Additionally, it is necessary to provide institutional support at the organisational level for the voluntary formation of gender-based networks that encompass diverse regions.

Second, a qualitative shift in gender equality education is required in terms of capacity building of the Korean police. It is important to institutionalise gender awareness and sensitivity training for all police officers and, in particular, to provide transformative learning opportunities at the early stages of their careers. The current life-cycle-based gender equality education system has achieved certain results, but it has been criticised for its limitations as a top-down, didactic approach. Future training should be designed to provide a space where members with diverse perspectives can share their opinions, express their anxieties, and reflect on conflicts. Through this, the training setting should function as a *reliable container* where the organisation can acknowledge and process the emotions of its members (Obholzer 2019b; Stokes 2019). Additionally, exposure to feminist and gender theory and to the gendered nature and experiences of officers, should be introduced even before formal entry into the police force (such as the Korean National Police University or the Central Police Academy). Feminism should not be limited to the content of women's education, but rather adopted as an official approach to transforming organisational culture, thereby reaching both women and men.

However, considering that the term ‘feminism’ may evoke misunderstanding and resistance in Korean society (Oh 2019; Jeong and Bae 2024), educational content should be designed to reflect sociocultural receptivity. In this process, the gender diversity and gender sensitivity of instructors should also be considered as key variables in the effectiveness of the training.

Finally, the main findings of this thesis will be shared with the academic community through presentations at academic conferences, including the PGSN seminar, and publication in domestic and international academic journals. A summary in Korean will be provided to all research participants. Furthermore, a report summarising the key points and recommendations will be submitted to the gender equality division of the KNPA to contribute to the improvement of relevant policies and systems.

## Limitations and directions for future research

As discussed in Chapter 5, this thesis has several methodological limitations, including sample constraints, the researcher’s insider positionality, and limitations related to the analytical scope. These issues were carefully considered during the interpretation of the findings and have informed the recommendations presented below. Based on these limitations and the themes identified from the data, I propose the following directions for future research within the Korean context.

A gender-focused analysis of Korean police education and training programmes at the pre-employment stage is necessary. Some participants in this study mentioned strict gender segregation in training institutions and a lack of gender sensitivity among instructors. Qualitative research involving current trainees or newly recruited officers who have recently

completed their training could be conducted to analyse their gendered experiences. Additionally, there is a need to explore the experiences of female administrative staff, another minority group within the Korean police organisation. Some data from this study revealed tensions or supportive relationships between female police officers and female administrative staff. However, research on the experiences of female administrative workers within gendered hierarchies remains limited. Such research could contribute to understanding another gendered power dynamic within the organisation.

This thesis aimed to include both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, but the experiences of female officers working in rural areas, which are classified as second- or third-tier areas, require further in-depth exploration through separate research. In such regions, gender role expectations and organisational cultural inertia may be more pronounced, and the impact of policy interventions may also operate differently. Research reflecting regional characteristics could provide important clues for developing tailored practical strategies.

Meanwhile, research analysing the organisational experiences of voluntary resigners from a gender perspective is also important. While this study briefly analysed recent attrition statistics, further research is needed to analyse the organisational experiences and factors influencing resignation decisions from a gender perspective, thereby identifying the specific reasons why female officers leave the organisation.

Following the implementation of gender-integrated hiring systems, tracking the experiences of female officers who joined the organisation through this system and comparing their commonalities and differences with existing female officers could also be a meaningful research topic. Since they entered the organisation under the same standards as men, they may

exhibit different patterns in terms of gender role performance or assignment and promotion, and such comparisons could provide valuable data for evaluating the effectiveness of institutional changes.

In addition, the experiences of female officers who are married to fellow police officers could also be considered as a future research topic. Among the participants in this study, many had spouses who were also police officers, and their relationships had both direct and indirect influences on the female officers' career trajectories, particularly concerning caregiving responsibilities at home. While there is already accumulated research on police couples in the US (see Archbold and Hassell 2009; Campbell et al. 2022), such qualitative research remains scarce in Korea and could offer new insights.

Finally, research is also needed on male officers' perceptions of gender equality policies and their experiences interacting with female colleagues. This is because changes in organisational culture or the effectiveness of gender-based networks can vary significantly depending on the perceptions and attitudes of male members.

## Final reflections

During this study, a female officer who attended a meeting of the Human Rights Committee of the KNPA to share voices from the field spoke about the gender-discriminatory practices and exclusion from opportunities that persist in frontline policing. In response, one committee member remarked, 'Didn't women choose to work in those departments themselves?' and 'Now that there are many female officers, why is this discussion even necessary?' (Lee 2023). This incident highlighted that both internal and external understandings of structural gender

discrimination within the Korean police remain superficial, and that there is still a lack of empirical data to refute such claims. Many participants in this study also considered their career decisions as simply a matter of personal choice, but data analysis revealed that even decisions they considered ‘autonomous’ were shaped by their perceptions of organisational justice and structural environments, and that these career trajectories in turn influenced their future assignment opportunities and performance evaluations.

Only when all members, regardless of gender, are guaranteed equal opportunities, outcomes, and treatment can we say that the full integration of women into policing has truly been achieved. It is hoped that this thesis contributes, even in a small way, to that ongoing effort.

## Appendix A : Participant Information Sheets (for in-depth interviews)

**RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE: Integration of women into policing in South Korea**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If you need clarification or want more information, please ask.

**WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT**

My name is Yelam Kim and I am undertaking a PhD thesis at the University of Kent, UK. This thesis explores the extent and nature of women's integration into South Korean policing and seeks to identify effective ways to achieve gender equality and gender justice in police organisations. This research is supervised by the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research in the Faculty of Law, Society and Social Justice at the University of Kent. It has received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the above school.

**WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?**

I conduct one-to-one interviews to hear your experiences and views on your motivations for a career in policing, career progression, promotions, working life, workplace relationships (including with citizens), and the challenges and opportunities in being a woman police officer. The interview may be conducted online or in-person, depending on availability. Interviews are expected to last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded (for in-person interviews) or video-recorded (for video interviews) to capture the natural flow of the conversation. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, please express this in advance.

**WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?**

As a serving woman police officer, I am undertaking this research with a keen interest in the future of women in policing. As this research seeks to reflect women's lived experiences, I would like to hear directly from current women officers about their experiences and views. You are invited to this interview as a woman officer with more than five years of experience.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?**

Interviews are entirely voluntary. You may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time, for any reason, and without consequence. At this time, you may express your wish to have all materials relating to you destroyed. This decision will not negatively impact the relationship between us.

**WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

The fact that you are taking part in this study will be kept confidential. Interviews will be conducted outside of your working hours and at a location of your choice, and you will not be obliged to report to your organisation. Any interview data included in the thesis as a direct quote will be labelled with an identification code such as A, B, or C to ensure participant anonymity.

**HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE USED**

With your consent, I will collect the following information before the interview: pseudonym, contacts, age (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s), rank (below Inspector/above Senior Inspector), length of service (in five-year increments), work location (Metropolitan City/Province), and recruitment path. Pseudonyms are collected for use during interviews, and other information is collected as background information to analyse and interpret the data.

**HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?**

Interview recordings are transcribed as soon as possible after the interview and destroyed once the transcription is complete. During this process, all personally identifiable information will be removed or altered. Interview recordings, signed consent forms, personal information, and transcriptions will be kept in encrypted files on a password-protected personal computer under the researcher's direct control. Access to all data will be restricted to the researcher and supervisory team, but you can access the information you have provided at any time.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

The final findings will be submitted as a PhD thesis (in English). I will provide you with a summary of the final thesis translated into Korean with an acknowledgement. You may request a fuller copy of the research results. If you wish to get feedback before finalising the results, I will provide a general summary of the results in Korean before the final stage. I hope to share my findings through conference presentations and journal publications. To this end, the data you provide will be retained for use in my future research for five years after the publication of the PhD thesis. During this period, data may be shared with academic colleagues for research purposes only, with all personally identifiable information anonymised.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?**

Please do not hesitate to contact me (yk235@kent.ac.uk /+82 (0)10-4476-8668) with any concerns or questions. You may also contact my main supervisor, Dr Marisa Silvestri (m.silvestri@kent.ac.uk). Thank you so much.

## Appendix B : Participant Information Sheets (for focus group interview)

**RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE: Integration of women into policing in South Korea**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If you need clarification or want more information, please ask.

**WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT**

My name is Yelam Kim and I am undertaking a PhD thesis at the University of Kent, UK. This thesis explores the extent and nature of women's integration into South Korean policing and seeks to identify effective ways to achieve gender equality and gender justice in police organisations. This research is supervised by the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research in the Faculty of Law, Society and Social Justice at the University of Kent. It also has ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the above school.

**WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?**

I would like to conduct focus group interviews with members of the Police Gender Studies Network to hear your experiences and views on police recruitment, the promotion system, anti-policewomen discourse, the relationship between gender and police work, and sexism and harassment in the police, including your experiences with this group's work. The interviews will be conducted via a video conferencing system with 4-5 members of the above group. The interview is expected to last between one and one and a half hours. The interview will be video recorded for a natural flow of dialogue and documentation. If you are uncomfortable with being recorded, please express this in advance.

**WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?**

As a serving woman police officer, I am undertaking this research with a keen interest in the future of women in policing. As this research seeks to reflect women's lived experiences, I would like to hear directly from current women officers about their experiences and views. You are invited to this interview as a woman officer and member of the Police Gender Studies Network.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?**

Interviews are entirely voluntary. You may withdraw or discontinue participation at any time, for any reason, and without consequence. At this time, you may express your wish to have all materials relating to you destroyed. This decision will not negatively impact the relationship between us.

**WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

The fact that you are taking part in this study will be kept confidential. As the interview will be conducted outside of working hours, you are not obliged to report your participation to your organisation. Focus group participants need to maintain the confidentiality of what is discussed during the interview and each other's participation. The interview may be included in the thesis as a direct quote but will be labelled with an identification code such as A, B, or C to ensure participant anonymity.

**HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE USED**

With your consent, I will collect the following information before the interview: pseudonym, contacts, age (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s), rank (below Inspector/above Senior Inspector), length of service (in five-year increments), work location (Metropolitan City/Province), and recruitment path. Pseudonyms are collected for use during interviews, and other information is collected as background information to analyse and interpret the data.

**HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?**

Interview recordings are transcribed as soon as possible after the interview and destroyed once the transcription is complete. During this process, all personally identifiable information will be removed or altered. Interview recordings signed consent forms, personal information, and transcriptions will be kept in encrypted files on a password-protected personal computer under the researcher's direct control. Access to all data will be restricted to the researcher and supervisory team, but you can access the information you have provided at any time.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

The final findings will be submitted as a PhD thesis (in English). I will provide you with a summary of the final thesis translated into Korean with an acknowledgement. You may request a fuller copy of the research results. If you wish to get feedback before finalising the results, I will provide a general summary of the results in Korean before the final stage. I hope to share my findings through conference presentations and journal publications. To this end, the data you provide will be retained for use in my future research for five years after the publication of the PhD thesis. During this period, data may be shared with academic colleagues for research purposes only, with all personally identifiable information anonymised.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?**

Please do not hesitate to contact me (yk235@kent.ac.uk /+82 (0)10-4476-8668) with any concerns or questions. You may also contact my main supervisor, Dr Marisa Silvestri (m.silvestri@kent.ac.uk). Thank you so much.

## Appendix C: Interview Schedule (for in-depth interviews)

What motivated you to participate in the interview? Were there any hesitations or concerns you had?

How did you decide to become a police officer?

What was the process of preparing for the police entrance exam like? How was your experience at the police academy?

Could you describe your career path so far? How do you feel about your career? What have you prioritised in managing your career? Has anyone been particularly influential or helpful?

What is your current role like? Have there been times when your gender became an issue or played a significant role at work? Have you ever been assigned or excluded from specific tasks because you are a woman? What are your thoughts on gender-based role division?

Could you tell me about your experience with promotion? What challenges have you faced? Do you have any specific goals or plans related to promotion?

Has being a female officer influenced your interactions with citizens? If so, in what ways? Has the public discourse that devalues female officers affected you personally?

Have you had any positive experiences in networks or relationships with other female officers?

What are your thoughts on gender discrimination or sexual harassment in the police? Are you willing to share any personal experiences that come to mind?

How do you usually respond when you face unfair or unjust situations because of your gender?

What are your thoughts on the shift from gender-segregated to integrated recruitment systems? How do you feel about the increasing number of female officers?

Is there anything you would like to see improved in terms of gender equality within the organisation?

Is there anything else you would like to add or share?

## Appendix D: Interview Schedule (for focus group interview)

**<For general members of the Police Gender Studies Network>**

What motivated you to join and participate in the Police Gender Studies Network?

What does the Police Gender Studies Network mean to you, and how do you think it has influenced you?

Do you believe that opportunities for promotion and assignment are fairly distributed between male and female officers? Could you explain why or why not?

Do you think a police officer's gender plays a significant role in how police work is carried out? If so, in what ways?

What are your thoughts on gender discrimination or harassment within the police organisation? Do you feel there have been any changes or improvements in this regard?

As a female officer, have you ever tried—either in small or significant ways—to bring about change related to gender equality? If so, what did you do, and how was it received? On the other hand, have there been times when you hesitated to act? If so, why?

In your opinion, what are some effective ways for female officers to raise their voices and engage more actively in gender equality issues within the organisation?

Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss further?

**<For founding and core members of Police Gender Studies Network>**

What motivated you to initiate and lead the Police Gender Studies Network?

When inviting people to join the group in its early stages, what criteria or considerations guided your decisions?

What does the Police Gender Studies Network mean to you personally, and how has it influenced you?

While leading the group, what challenges or meaningful moments do you remember most?

Could you share a memorable experience related to activism, whether big or small? What form did it take, and how was it received?

Speaking out or taking action on gender issues likely involved some difficulties—what kinds of challenges did you encounter?

In your view, what are some effective ways for women in the organisation to raise their voices and engage more actively with gender equality issues?

Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss further?

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