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The progress of female police officers?

Progress of
female police
officers?

An empirical analysis of organisational commitment and tenure explanations in two UK police forces

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to establish empirically whether there is any foundation in the premise that female officers' lesser tenure and/or lower levels of commitment than men explain their lack of career progress. Although the number of women in UK police forces has grown rapidly, it appears that they continue to be under-represented in senior ranks.

Design/methodology/approach – Using whole population surveys of two county police forces in the UK the paper compares the promotion of men and women police officers controlling for tenure. The paper then compares the organisational commitment of male and female officers and analyses whether female officers experience managerial and organisational influences that undermine their organisational commitment compared to men.

Findings – The findings refute some of the widespread beliefs about reasons for female officers' lack of progress in their policing careers since the analysis indicates that gender differences in length of tenure and organisational commitment can be discounted as possible explanations for lack of advancement in these two police forces. Overall, the results clearly show that female officers are just as committed as male officers and thus cannot be justified as a reason for lack of career progression.

Research limitations/implications – It is accepted that survey methods such as ours do not capture the entirety of employee feelings and responses since they tend to homogenise male and female working experiences. However, survey methods do have the advantage that it is possible to generalise from the results and thus these two studies allow us to suggest that our findings can be viewed as providing insights to other UK police forces.

Practical implications – The relatively low levels of organisational commitment found should be a cause for concern for senior managers in the Police. The key importance that management has in influencing organisational commitment has been shown by our findings and this indicates the importance of the current Police Leadership Development Board's agenda to improve workforce management skills to encourage transformational leadership styles.

Originality/value – The paper make an original contribution by refuting widely held assumptions about the reasons for under-representation of female officers in senior ranks. It also contributes to the sparse literature that examines organisational commitment in the police and its antecedents.

Keywords Gender, Women workers, Police, Career development, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The study of women in criminal justice was virtually ignored until the rise of what was loosely called police feminist writings dating from the 1960s (Martin, 1996). Women were largely invisible in that much of crime and police management research focused on offenders and victims (Heidenshohn, 1986, 1992). Alternatively, research in the USA on women and policing in the 1970s and 1980s addressed issues relating to women's physical performance to undertake policing work (Martin and Jurik, 1996). It is only recently that the role and experience of women in the UK police has become the subject of detailed academic scrutiny as the numbers of female police officers have slowly risen throughout the 1990s (Brown and Heidenshohn, 2000; Brown, 1998; Martin, 1996). Yet, the adequate representation of women police officers in higher ranks continues to be problematical. The average percentage of women serving in English and Welsh forces has grown rapidly from eleven per cent in 1990 (Brown, 1997) to twenty one per cent in 2005 (RDS, 2005, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005). However, UK Government figures show that although female representation has increased female officers continue to be under-represented in senior ranks. For example in 2005 13 per cent of female officers were sergeants compared to twenty-four per cent for male officers (RDS, 2005). Police management scholars have highlighted that women's limited advancement in the police profession is problematic because of the work and cultural barriers faced by female officers emanating from police organisation and managerial structures (Martin, 1979; Young, 1991; Martin, 1996; Walklate, 1993, 1995; Fielding, 1994).

We would expect in the absence of work and cultural barriers that women's progress in their police career would be linked to tenure and to behaviour which scholars would describe as organisational commitment. However, there appears to be little empirical research that can throw light on whether there are gender differences in tenure and/or organisational commitment and its antecedents in the police. So the aim of this study is to establish empirically whether there is any foundation in the premise that female officers' lesser tenure explains under-representation. Secondly, whether female officers experience different managerial and organisational influences that result in lower levels of organisational commitment than men that might explain lack of career progress. The studies of two police forces that we explore in this paper fill a gap in the research literature since there are few studies of commitment amongst police personnel (Van Maanen, 1975; Beck and Wilson, 1997, 2000, exceptions) and none other than Metcalfe and Dick (2002) that explores and contrasts officers' commitment levels and their antecedents by gender. Thus while police management research has exposed male bias and opposition to women's advancement in the police there is little research data that has sought to unravel how, and in what ways, police women's commitment is forged.

Using survey data from two UK police forces the paper compares the different levels of commitment between men and women and considers if commitment is shaped by the same or different variables. Following recent conceptual advances in the theorising of commitment, (see Benkhoff, 1997a, 1997b; Siegal and Sisaye, 1997; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000) our commitment model draws on the real live HR concerns of trying to "manage commitment" (Meyer and Allen, 1997, p. 66). The paper firstly reviews the theoretical background to organisation commitment and gender and the influence of managerial factors. After explaining our research methodology we analyse our survey data for the two forces, which reveals that there are few differences in the levels of men and women's commitment, and that their commitment levels are shaped by similar

managerial factors. The discussion considers the implications for managing commitment and their relationship to equal opportunity developments within police forces.

Theoretical background

The literature breaks commitment into organisational, professional, and career amongst others with a great deal of overlap (see Meyer and Allen, 1997). Traditionally the term commitment tends to be used in a holistic sense in everyday organisational life, although managers generally perceive it as a desirable feature. Commitment is linked to lower absenteeism, lower turnover rates, and increased intention to stay with the firm (See Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Steers, 1977). Moreover, employees who are highly committed are more likely to “contribute to the organisation in more positive ways than less committed workers” (Aven *et al.*, 1993, p. 63). Much research on commitment is based on the definition by Porter *et al.* (1974, p. 604) which identifies three components of commitment:

- (1) a strong belief and commitment to organisational goals;
- (2) a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation; and
- (3) a strong desire to retain membership of the organisation.

These three dimensions referred to as identification, involvement and loyalty comprise the well-tested organisational commitment questionnaire (OCQ). However, this theoretical framework is not without its critics. A number of scholars are re-appraising traditional models of commitment in the light of employee relations changes (see Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000; Baruch, 1998; Mowday, 1998). This study seeks to provide evidence for further theoretical development by using a commitment measure that was shaped and guided by the police managers’ views of what constitutes organisational commitment behaviours.

Gender and organisation commitment

Research on attitudinal commitment associated with gender is inconclusive. Mowday *et al.* (1982, p. 31) cites several studies that show that women are more committed than men; see also Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993). Maier (1999) however notes that men and women experience similar levels of organisational commitment. Mathieu and Zajak’s (1990) well cited meta analysis suggested there was a link between gender and commitment but the variations across professional groups led them to conclude that there was no consistent relationship between gender and commitment. Thus, there appears to be a lack of consensus as to whether gender and commitment are interrelated. It is also worthy of note that research into perception of women’s organisational commitment has reported that they are often perceived as less committed than their male counterparts (Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993; Dickens, 1998), specifically in professional groups (Dodd-McCue and Wright, 1996).

One way of discerning what moulds organisational commitment is to distinguish between the gender model and the job model (Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993; Dodd-McCue and Wright, 1996).

The gender model. In discussing gender models theorists have highlighted the childbearing and childcare differences for women, which impact on commitment and how organisations have to compete for a woman’s loyalty since she has greater family responsibilities than men (Dickens, 1998; Wajcman, 1996). Women’s differing priorities

thus affect the role and importance of work in terms of her self and professional identity (Aven *et al.*, 1993). The gender model contends that women establish their identity through their interdependent relations with others and place primary emphasis on family roles. In contrast, men's socialisation process leads themselves to identify themselves as independent and assertive and goal directed. They view their organisation roles as central to their self-perceptions and in framing work identity. This implies that because of familial ties women will be less committed to their work organisation than their male colleagues.

Job model. An alternative to the gender model posits that commitment is related to the individual's work environment. Thus, commitment differences between men and women are accounted for because of their differing work experiences, not gender socialisation. Powell (1999) notes that there is inconsistent support that commitment levels between men and women may vary. His review uncovered few gender differences relative to job motivation and work behaviours. This finding is also supported by Marsden and Kalleberg (1993) who utilised General Household Survey (GHS) data, which incorporated both job and gender variables. They found that whereas men showed slightly higher commitment than women, this was attributable to gender differences in commitment related jobs and career attitudes. However, women may be slightly more committed to their organisations than are men in comparable positions. Overall, they found that commitment is enhanced by job related variables, and not by differences between men and women and family roles as the gender model implies.

Demographic factors and organisational commitment

It would seem reasonable to expect organisational commitment to increase with hierarchical position in an organisation and there is some evidence for this. McCaul *et al.* (1995) found a relationship between organisational commitment and hierarchical level. Benkhoff (1997a) also found a similar relationship using alternative organisational measures. One would expect this to be replicated strongly in the uniform police with their rigid rank hierarchy, but there is little research available to confirm or deny this.

There appears to be some evidence that tenure and years of experience are positively associated with commitment. Previous studies have indicated that position tenure (Gregersen and Black, 1992; Mottaz, 1988) and organisational tenure (Mathieu and Hamel, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) have positive effects on commitment. This can be explained as a result of the organisation's socialisation process. The length of service in an organisation is positively related to the level of internalisation of organisational values, which results in greater commitment from the individual (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995; O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991). However, some studies for instance Lok and Crawford (1999) and Brewer (1996), have not found this relationship.

In contrast, the studies of uniform police that we now review show a negative affect of tenure on organisational commitment.

Police studies of organisation commitment

The earliest study of policing and commitment was conducted by Van Maanen (1975, p. 207) who examined the development trend of organisation commitment. He surveyed a group of recruits to the US police force over a period of thirty months during their induction and training. He reported that their organisational commitment decreased

with tenure and experience and attributed this to the “powerful character of the police socialisation process”, as well as their motivation to gain acceptance from their supervisors. Another significant finding was that police commitment is significantly higher than comparable public professions.

More recent research looking at organisational commitment in policing is sparse. Beck and Wilson’s (1997) study of 739 officers in the New South Wales service also saw the inverse correlation between organisational commitment and length of service. They noted the significance of socialisation processes operating within police culture whereby new recruits were exposed to older, experienced, and more “cynical” officers, whose views had a long-lasting “destructive” effect on work attitudes. A further study of 479 Australian police officers by Beck and Wilson (2000) – using Porter and Smith’s OCQ measure – analysed the development trend of affective commitment and also found that commitment decreased with tenure. These findings were significant for interpreting police commitment behaviours since they contradict the findings in mainstream research that indicates that organisational commitment increases with tenure. Although the data is limited, studies have found that commitment increases with tenure primarily due to an employees’ greater sense of belonging (see Meyer and Allen, 1997, pp. 49-50). In Beck and Wilson’s (2000, p. 132) study however they concluded that police agencies may have unique “organisational characteristics” and “managerial practices” that “flag a lack of support, justice and value”, as they build on an “inventory of bad experiences”.

Police studies have thus emphasised the significance of managerial factors in shaping levels of organisation commitment. The findings also suggest that police employees have relatively negative attitudes of their working experiences, and imply shortcomings in employee relations systems (See Meyer and Allen, 1997, pp. 68-81). However, it is difficult to draw general conclusions since these studies have relied on relatively small sample sizes. Moreover, any analysis of gender has tended to be excluded.

Police studies of gender

The majority of studies of gender in the police have focused on trying to unravel the discriminatory experiences of women officers (For example Brown, 1998; Martin and Jurik, 1996; Brown, 1997, 1998). The focus of these studies is primarily the limited opportunities available to women in respect of different policing assignments and their experiencing of sexual harassment. In the UK it has been shown that women are over represented in community relations and supporting roles, and where women are employed in criminal investigations, the majority tend to be employed in child protection or vice units (Brown, 1998, p. 275; see also Martin, 1996, p. 515-16). It has also been highlighted that female officers are more likely to be allocated supportive police tasks with men more likely to be allocated leadership responsibility for criminal investigations than women (Brown *et al.*, 1993; Brown and Heidenshohn, 2000). These gendered deployments may stem from the expectation that policewomen demonstrate lesser commitment to the police profession than their male officers (implying the influence of the Gender Model). However, there appears to be no empirical research apart from that of Metcalfe and Dick (2002) to confirm or deny that the actual organisational commitment of policewomen reflects these expectations of lower organisational commitment.

Managerial factors affecting organisational commitment

Many studies have revealed that the level of organisational and managerial support an employee feels, their involvement in decision making (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997), and the amount of feedback received about job performance and job role (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) influence whether a person has high or low organisation commitment. It is also suggested that bureaucratic work practices often result in negative employee commitment, while a supportive work environment could result in greater commitment and involvement among employees (Brewer, 1993).

The relationship between leadership style and commitment has been examined by Blau (1985). A consideration leadership style was found to have a greater influence than a concern for structure leadership style (or task-oriented style) on commitment. Confirmation is found in Williams and Hazer (1986) study that found consideration leadership style to be one of their antecedents to commitment. The important role of superiors in aspects of organisational commitment is also shown by Benkhoff (1997a) who found that employees who regard their superiors as competent, who like their management style and who trust their superior, report, significantly more often, that they share the values of the organisation and feel proud to be members.

There is little in the literature to inform us whether the managerial factors discussed above apply to police organisational commitment other than Dick and Metcalfe (2001) who observed that similar managerial factors affect commitment in both police officers and civilian staff. However, there may well be other factors specific to being a police officer that will affect their organisational commitment since uniform police work is like no other work and requires officers to draw on a vast range of cognitive and physical capabilities (Kakar, 1998; Reiner, 1998).

In summary there is evidence that the practices and behaviour of line managers will affect the level organisational commitment. Generally, low commitment is indicated where individuals view the organisation as unsupportive, have a limited role in decision making and receive little feedback about their job role and performance. The prevailing management style and practices in organisations may thus serve to affect favourably or adversely organisational commitment along with other work experience determinants.

We now go on to discuss the methodology that we used to survey the total uniform police population of two county police forces that has allowed us to do a detailed comparative analysis of commitment behaviours with the aim of bridging the research void on gender differences in organisational commitment in the Police and whether organisational commitment antecedents differ by gender.

Research methodology

The analysis in this paper is based on data from two large police forces in the United Kingdom. It follows on from earlier research by the authors that investigated factors associated with organisational commitment (Metcalfe and Dick, 2000; Metcalfe and Dick, 2001) and the influence of gender (Metcalfe and Dick, 2002) in a large English county police force (labelled as ForceCo). This paper presents the results of a replication study in a second police force in Wales, that we entitle Force X, that allows us to compare results with our earlier findings to illuminate what are unique, as against common, factors in gender and organisational commitment.

The original questionnaire was formulated after extensive semi-structured interviews with operational and executive staff at ForceCo that allowed the identification of managerial and organisational themes that were considered to be important to, and have an influence on, commitment. The resulting research instrument sought to evaluate a broad range of management and employee relationships, with a specific concern to identify performance improvement behaviours and how management encourages or discourages these behaviours.

Our commitment model embraces recent research themes on the nature and dynamics of commitment that considers the extent to which employees will engage and contribute to improving performance, and how far they identify and understand the organisations strategic objectives (See Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). The value of this measure is that it represents the organisation and managerial constructions of commitment and the subsequent HRM agendas that inform police management policy development. In this respect our research instrument reflects the real life concerns of trying to “manage commitment” (Meyer and Allen, 1997, pp. 66-7) in a changing policing context (see Baruch, 1998 for discussion on this).

Our research finding at ForceCo rejected the proposition that there were gender related links to organisational commitment as it showed that both women and men shared similar levels of organisational commitment and were influenced by similar managerial factors. However, left open was the question of how far these findings could be generalised since the results may have been due to a pattern of factors that are unique to ForceCo. Thus, this replication of the research study in another police force aims to uncover if this lack of gender influence on organisational commitment is unique to ForceCo or a theme common to other police forces.

The survey populations

The original ForceCo questionnaire was administered by the police force concerned to all uniform officers with official encouragement to respond anonymously via the post. The ForceCo population surveyed was approximately 2,400 officers with a 54 per cent return rate in 1998. The replication at Force X was administered in an identical manner in 2003 to the total population of approximately 1500 police officers with a return rate of 48 per cent. Both return rates are significantly higher than most police force surveys that typically achieve a return of only 25-30 per cent (Brodeur, 1998). Details of the respondents' profile by gender and rank for the two forces are given in Table I. Because of the agreements to keep details that could identify the forces concerned confidential, further contextual information on geography, policing demands and specific HR issues cannot be provided here. However it can be said that both forces have similar geographic and policing demands and each has city populations and large rural areas to police that make them comparable.

Uniform rank	Male	ForceCo Female	Total	Male	Force X Female	Total
Constable	672	223	895	397	104	501
Sergeant/Inspector	278	18	296	118	16	134
Chief Inspector and above	43	2	45	11	1	12
Respondent count	993	243	1,236	526	121	647

Table I.
Respondent profile by
gender and rank seniority

The surveys' large response rate allows us to include a gender comparison between senior officers and other ranks; that previous surveys because of their smaller sample size have had insufficient power to do (Cohen, 1988). In each survey, the data was tested for evidence of respondent fatigue (i.e. inconsistent responses to similar questions in different parts of the questionnaire). It was concluded that a bias of this kind was not present. In addition, a number of awareness tests were applied (i.e. where certain questions had a different tone or measurement scale to surrounding questions). Coefficients were calculated to test the hypothesis that respondents failed to pay attention to the change with the conclusion that there was little or no evidence of bias of this kind.

Development of a commitment measure in a police organisation

Our measure of commitment is a job based one and relies on trying to capture the nature of work experiences in the Police. The pool of items to measure organisational commitment were formulated after extensive semi-structured interviews with operational and executive staff at ForceCo that allowed the identification of behaviours and attributes that were agreed as exhibiting commitment to the organisation. Drawing on the methodological concerns raised by Benkhoff (1997a, 1997b) and Siegal and Sisaye (1997), we see our dependent variable organisational commitment as a function of identification with the organisation and internalisation of its strategic goals and values. This can be a prime motivator since individuals who closely identify themselves with their employer's goals and values are more likely to take on a diverse range of challenging work activities, and are more responsive to change. They are thus motivated to direct their efforts towards organisational objectives (Siegal and Sisaye, 1997; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999). Consequently, to measure organisational commitment we posed questions designed to assess three constructs, pride in the force, understanding of strategic direction, and employee involvement in service and quality improvements. We anticipated that these three constructs would represent an oblique model of affective commitment since extra involvement and effort is forthcoming from those employees who show an understanding, and commitment to corporate goals and objectives etc. (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer and Allen, 1997).

In all eighteen questions were posed on a five point Likert scale in the original study. To test the commitment model the original Police questionnaire was factor analysed using a principal components analysis with a Varimax rotation, which produced an oblique three-factor model of commitment with factors clearly identified for six items under a factor called Pride, four items under a factor called Goals and five items under a factor called Involvement. The remaining three items from the pool, which displayed low loadings, were discarded and not used in the replication study. A listing of the questionnaire items used to measure organisational commitment can be found in Table II.

Development of an item pool for the independent variables

Our independent variables pool was influenced by previous studies which have assessed the level of organisational and management support, the feedback given about role requirements and job performance (Mathieu and Zajak, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997), and the level of participation in decision making (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997). In the initial study a pool of nineteen questions were posed, on a five point Likert scale, of which ten loaded on a factor we described as Management Support with another six loading on a factor we described as Organisational Support.

Item	ForceCo factor loading	Force X factor loading
Organisational commitment		
Reliability for combined items from pride, goals and involvement	0.85	0.86
<i>Pride factor</i>		
Proportion of variance per cent and reliability	10% 0.80	10% 0.78
I am proud to be working for the Force	0.76	0.72
I hold the Force in high regard	0.72	0.64
The quality of the work within my division/department is excellent	0.61	0.57
I'm not really interested in the Force its just a job ^a	0.60	0.42
My role is considered important within the Force	0.59	0.57
Generally my division/department is taking action to improve the quality of its work	0.55	0.59
<i>Goals factor</i>		
Proportion of variance per cent and reliability	9% 0.87	10% 0.83
I understand the links between the Police Authority's annual plan and the policing priorities of the Force	0.86	0.90
I am aware of the goals/vision of the Force	0.84	0.67
I understand the links between the Police Authority's annual plan and my division/department plan	0.78	0.89
I am aware of the priorities and strategic direction of the Force	0.78	0.62
<i>Involvement factor</i>		
Proportion of variance per cent and reliability	8% 0.73	9% 0.80
Please indicate your level of involvement in improving your division/department quality/work standards	0.73	0.68
Please indicate your level of involvement in developing objectives for your division/department	0.69	0.66
Please indicate your level of involvement in negotiating your own work objectives	0.67	0.73
I contribute to decisions that affect my work	0.58	0.73
I have considerable freedom in negotiating my work priorities	0.57	0.74
Note: ^a Reverse coded items		

Table II.
Factor analysis of
questionnaire items
loading on variables that
are components of
organisational
commitment

The remaining three items from the pool, which displayed low loadings, were discarded and not used in the replication study. A listing of the questionnaire items used to measure the independent variables can be found in Table III.

Factor structure and reliability

To confirm the validity and reliability of the measurement models used in the ForceCo study the Force X survey data was factor analysed using a principal components analysis with a Varimax rotation constrained to five factors. The results showed identical factors to the ForceCo study and for 27 out of 30 items very similar loadings (detailed in Tables II and III). Reliability testing of the internal consistency of the components of the additive scale using Cronbach's alpha, results in similar coefficients to the ForceCo study and all exceed 0.7 which is regarded as indicating a robust measure (Nunnally, 1978). Overall, the results from the Force X factor analysis strongly confirm the stability of the measurement model and factors. Statistical details for both

Item	ForceCo factor loading	Force X factor loading
Management support factor proportion of variance per cent and reliability	18% 0.92	22% 0.91
My supervisor/manager does a good job of negotiating clear objectives	0.82	0.82
My supervisor/manager is good at encouraging teamwork	0.81	0.81
My supervisor/manager provides the right information for me to do my job properly	0.80	0.79
My supervisor/manager does an effective job in keeping me informed about matters affecting me.	0.79	0.81
Personal development is encouraged by my supervisor/manager	0.75	0.76
My supervisor/manager holds back information on things I should know about ^a	0.71	0.78
My supervisor/manager is usually receptive to suggestions for change	0.70	0.72
I get regular feedback from my supervisor/manager regarding my performance	0.62	excluded
In my division/department the supervisor/manager is very interested in listening to what I have to say	0.61	0.63
In my division/department there is not enough opportunity to let supervisor/manager know how you feel about things that affect you ^a	0.50	0.48
Organisational support factor proportion of variance per cent and reliability	9% 0.79	7% 0.72
I have confidence in the decisions made by the executive team of ForceCo	0.60	0.70
Most of the time you can say what you think without it being held against you	0.61	0.41
If I make a mistake it would be treated as a learning opportunity	0.66	0.40 ^b
There is openness and honesty between different grades	0.69	0.72
I regularly spend time on dealing with issues that have arisen due to inadequate communication ^a	0.43	0.15 ^a
How do you rate the management style you have experienced	0.47	0.12 ^a

Notes: ^aReverse coded items; ^bItems load more strongly on management support than organisational support in Force X

Table III.
Factor analysis of
questionnaire items
relating to independent
variables

surveys showing the loadings on the Pride, Goals and Involvement components of the latent Organisational Commitment factor are detailed in Table II, while the managerial factors are detailed in Table III. The factor we name as Management Support is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of the respondent's supervisor or line managers listening and communication skills, while the factor we name as Organisational Support is strongly influenced by whether there is blame or supportive organisational culture.

Findings

A summary of the UK Governments statistics for female officer strength by rank seniority for all English and Welsh police forces for 1999 to 2005 is shown in Table IV. This reveals that although the proportion of female officers has increased substantially from 19 per cent in 1999 to 24 per cent in 2005 female officers remain significantly

under-represented in senior ranks. An improvement trend can be observed in representation in higher ranks in Table IV but substantial gender differences remain. Could this be because many female officers leave before their tenure is long enough to be considered for promotion?

The statistics for our survey respondents indicate roughly similar levels of female representation in the ranks (20 per cent at ForceCo; 19 per cent at Force X) to the UK Government statistics. However, we possess richer respondent data that will allow us to control for gender tenure length differences to see if women are less likely than men to gain promotion despite having similar years of experience in the police. To test this we calculated the usual length of service in our two police forces before constables obtained promotion. Both surveys reveal that most sergeants achieve their promotion to that rank with around ten years service experience, so we can judge the true representation of women in ranks above constable by considering the proportion of female officers with ten or more years tenure achieving promotion relative to men. At ForceCo out of seventy-six female officers with ten or more years service only twenty, (26 per cent), have been promoted to ranks above constable compared to 50 per cent of men; while at Force X out of 76 women with ten or more years service only 20, (23 per cent), have achieved promotion compared to thirty-eight per cent amongst men. So it seems that in these forces the under-representation of female officers cannot be explained by differences in tenure.

Clearly, the analysis reveals that women are less likely to achieve promotion than men and this cannot be attributed to less service experience length than men. So since organisational commitment is often seen as essential to promotion could it be that female officers are less committed (as suggested by the gender model of organisational commitment) than males and therefore less like to seek or succeed in achieving promotion to higher ranks. To test this we next examine whether commitment levels in female officers are different or comparable to their male colleagues.

The means for organisational commitment for male and female officers are compared by rank in Table V. The results found in Force X show organisational commitment levels that are consistently lower across the ranks than those we found at ForceCo, being on average close to the mid scale point (45) of the organisational commitment scale compared to the mean of fifty-one at ForceCo. Although the means are lower at Force X there are no significant differences in the level of organisational commitment shown by female compared to male officers at the constable level, which suggests that lack of organisational commitment in female officers cannot be used as an excuse for under representation in higher ranks. However, we note that for both

Year	1999	2001	2003	2005
Constable %	19	20	21	24
Sergeant %	8	10	11	13
Inspector %	6	8	9	11
Chief Inspector and above %	6	8	9	11
Total female %	16	17	19	21
Female count	19,885	21,800	25,390	30,162

Source: DDR (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005)

Table IV.
Female police officer
strength by rank
seniority for England and
Wales 1999-2005

women and men organisational commitment increases with seniority as it does in ForceCo. Also notable in both surveys, is that as we move up the hierarchy, we find that this increase is slightly lower for women than for men but caution is needed here as the number of senior female officers is too small to allow generalisation.

One might expect the standard deviation for organisational commitment to be larger for women than men due to the influence of familial ties suggested by the gender model of commitment. However, there is no indication of this to be found in Table V where the standard deviation for organisational commitment is lower for women (SD 6.0 to 6.7) than men constables (SD 7.0 to 7.2). However, conclusions cannot be drawn from the standard deviations for higher ranks due to the small numbers of females represented.

To test the strength of the relationships between gender and the organisational commitment and managerial variables that we derived from our factor analysis, correlation coefficients were calculated. The statistically significant correlations are displayed in Table VI. The results for Force X are shown above the diagonal and the comparable results for ForceCo are shown below the diagonal. The results confirm that there is no association of significance between gender and organisational commitment (Force X, n.s.; ForceCo -0.09). As we would expect from the findings already presented, there is a small to moderate negative correlation between gender and rank seniority (Force X, -0.10; ForceCo, -0.21).

Although it is clear from Table VI that there is a strong association between the level of organisational commitment and the degree of management support (Force X, 0.49; ForceCo, 0.54) and organisational support experienced (Force X, 0.51; ForceCo, 0.59), it is notable that in both police forces there is no significant association between a respondent's gender and the levels of management and organisational support received. When we look at tenure length this appears to have only a small overall

Table V.
Organisational
commitment means by
rank within gender

	ForceCo				Force X			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Constable	49.6	7.0	49.4	6.0	44.9	7.2	44.5	6.7
Sergeant/Inspector	54.0	6.7	52.9	3.2	48.3	7.1	47.2	8.7
Chief Inspector and above	61.3	5.2	58.0	5.6	58.0	4.2	55.0	
Total	51.4	7.4	50.0	6.0	45.9	7.4	45.0	7.0

Note: Organisation commitment scale mid point is 45.0

Table VI.
Correlation of
organisation
commitment, with rank
seniority, tenure and
gender ForceCo below the
diagonal. Force X above
the diagonal

Variable	Gender	OC	Management support	Organisational support	Rank	Tenure
Gender	1.00				-0.10	
Organisational commitment	-0.09	1.00	0.49	0.51	0.26	0.12
Management support		0.54	1.00	0.69		-0.11
Organisational support		0.59	0.59	1.00		-0.11
Rank seniority	-0.21	0.31	0.08	0.15	1.00	0.36
Tenure length	-0.28	0.15	-0.09		0.44	1.00

Note: Spearman's correlations all significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed

influence on organisational commitment reported in both forces (range 0.12 to 0.15). We also tested for the association of age with the other variable and found that this produced results parallel to those of the tenure variable. Overall it would appear that compared to management variables an individual's gender, tenure and age have only a small influence on organisational commitment.

To investigate if there are gender differences in how the variables affect organisation commitment we undertook separate regression analysis for female and male respondents for each police force. Only the factors already identified as having strong correlations with organisational commitment (see Table VI) were included in the regression resulting in the omission of tenure length.

Checks for assumption of linearity and homogeneity were satisfactory and the overall test for good fit for the regression equations is highly significant for both surveys and gender groups (significance $F = 0.000$) indicating that the regression equation is most unlikely to have occurred by chance. The results of the regression analysis are summarised in Table VII. The analysis shows that the regression equation for ForceCo accounts for over forty-eight per cent of the variance in organisation commitment in males, but only forty-two per cent in females; the comparable results for Force X being forty- four per cent for both females and males. Overall, these are very strong findings given that percentage of the data (residing in the factors) that was incorporated into the regression equation was fifty-four per cent for ForceCo and fifty-five per cent for Force X.

Table VII shows the beta weights for female and male officers for both forces. The beta weights signify the relative contribution of each of the factors to the overall change in organisational commitment. At ForceCo, the dominant factors affecting organisation commitment are organisational support (female beta 0.488; male beta 0.388), followed by management support (female beta 0.257; male beta 0.292).

The Force X finding for males are similar in rank order to those found at ForceCo with organisational support (beta 0.376) having the strongest influence on organisational commitment with management support being less important (beta 0.240). In contrast, at Force X female officers' organisational commitment is most strongly influenced by the degree of management support they receive (beta 0.351) closely followed by degree of organisational support they experience (beta 0.310).

We note that rank seniority at both ForceCo and Force X has a substantial bearing on organisation commitment with the influence being stronger for male senior officers (ForceCo, beta 0.244; Force X, beta 0.343) than female senior officers (ForceCo beta, 0.154; Force X, beta 0.292).

Variable	ForceCo		Force X	
	Female beta weight	Male beta weight	Female beta weight	Male beta weight
Organisation support	0.488	0.388	0.310	0.376
Management support	0.257	0.292	0.351	0.240
Rank seniority	0.154	0.244	0.292	0.343
Percentage of OC explained	42	48	44	44

Note: *t*-tests of coefficients are all significant at the <0.01 level

Table VII.
Regression analysis:
organisation commitment
for female and male
police officers

Discussion of findings

The UK Government statistics for 2001-2005 that we have analysed reveal that female officers are significantly under-represented in senior ranks. We used the data from the two forces we have surveyed to check the explanation that many female officers do not have sufficient tenure to be considered for promotion by examining male and female officers with ten or more years' service. Comparison of the proportion of female officers achieving promotion relative to men shows that even with similar years of service in the police they are much less likely to be promoted. Since our analysis revealed that women are less likely to achieve promotion than men and this cannot be attributed to less service experience length than men we next examine whether organisational commitment is an influence that might explain lack of career progression.

Since organisational commitment is often seen as essential to promotion, we examined the proposition of the gender model of organisational commitment that predicts females are less committed to the organisation they work in and therefore less likely to succeed in achieving promotion to higher ranks. Our findings strongly refute this proposition since we have found there are no significant differences in the level of organisational commitment shown by female compared to male officers at the constable level. Therefore, a lack of organisational commitment in female officers cannot be used as an excuse for under representation in higher ranks.

Overall, the findings from both surveys strongly support the argument that managerial variables have by far the greatest influence in shaping organisational commitment compared to the individual variables gender, tenure and age. This has been found to be consistent across both surveys.

Based on the findings from both police forces we can conclude that both men and women officers share similar levels of organisation commitment, thus offering evidence to refute the stereotype of women officers' having less organisational commitment because of the influence of familial ties suggested by the gender model of commitment (Aven *et al.*, 1993; Wajcman, 1996). That is not to say that the gender model has no influence on organisational commitment but rather that the job model's influence is strong enough to counter balance any gender model influence that might lower organisational commitment.

In support of previous studies we have also found in both forces that organisational commitment increases with tenure (Gregersen and Black, 1992; Mottaz, 1998; Mathieu and Hamel, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) but we have found that tenure only explains a small variation in organisational commitment (r^2 1.4 to 2.2 per cent[1]). Like Benkhoff (1997a) and McCaul *et al.* (1995) we found that organisational commitment is associated with hierarchical position in the organisation (r^2 6.8 to 9.6 per cent).

The preceding analysis provides support for the findings in the literature on supportive management behaviours affecting organisational commitment (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Like them we have found having the opportunity to participate in decision making and receiving regular feedback on performance were strongly valued by both men and women, and shaped their level of organisation commitment (r^2 24 to 29 per cent). Our results also provide support for the finding in the literature on the link between an organisations culture, managerial style and organisational commitment (Brewer, 1993; Blau, 1985; Williams and Hazer, 1986; Benkoff, 1997a). Like them we have found that

organisational support is an important antecedent of organisational commitment (r^2 26 to 35 per cent). Both male and female junior ranks felt there was little scope for them to make mistakes, they were limited in how they expressed themselves, they perceived there was a lack of openness and honesty between ranks and they disliked the management style they experienced. Overall, the two surveys show that managerial factors have an even greater impact on organisation commitment for female officers than male ones.

The strong influence of managerial support on both women's and men's commitment indicates the critical place that front line managers have in shaping commitment. Moreover, both they and their subordinates are greatly affected by the level of support they perceive they receive from the force as a whole. Taking the findings of the two surveys together provide evidence of the differing work experiences of men and women, however it is fair to say that the variations are not so great as to view men and women as having radically different employment experiences. Although the surveys reveal that organisational commitment is low, especially among lower level personnel, the key management variables used to measure commitment indicated that both men and women are treated and managed in similar ways.

Clearly our data does refute some of the widespread beliefs about reasons for women's lack of progress in their policing career since gender differences in length of tenure and organisational commitment have been discounted as possible explanations in these two police forces. Given the fewer numbers of female officers climbing the ranks within both forces there are clearly other social or organisational factors affecting women's career progression a point we will return to in the conclusions. Overall, our results clearly show that female officers are just as committed as male officers and that the antecedents we tested apply equally to men and women.

Conclusion

Previous research on women in policing has highlighted how police organisations are commonly believed to be dominated by men, with many work practices and organising arrangements structured in such a way so as to deter female entry, and also career advancement. Unlike other public sector occupations, women's entry into the police has generally been actively resisted by the male majority, especially in the USA (Martin, 1996; Martin and Jurik, 1996; Brown, 1997). Conceptualisations of police work which draw on masculinist characteristics and qualities have reinforced the view that policing is not a suitable job for a woman. Central to this assumption is that women are perceived as less committed to a policing career. However, our findings strongly refute this since there were no significant differences in the levels of commitment found between men and women in either force.

Our analysis of commitment should offer confidence to UK Home Office strategists and police managers because it suggests that forces have been successful to some extent in avoiding a gender bias in their management of their officers and the organisational support they provide for them. However, the relatively low levels of organisational commitment should be a cause for concern for the forces. Clearly the importance of good management for organisational commitment has been shown by our findings and this indicates the importance of the current Police Leadership Development Board's agenda to improve workforce management skills

to encourage transformational leadership styles (see Dobby *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, there clearly remains much to be done to make police HRM policies more effective in achieving equality in promotion opportunities since the data presented shows that women's careers are lagging behind even when tenure is taken into account. We have shown that organisational commitment in female officers is similar to male officers but do male officers perceive women's commitment to be the same as their own? We suspect that many of them do not (see Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993; Dickens, 1998). Improving promotion procedures to achieve equality of opportunity will help, but alone these are unlikely to be effective unless the gender perceptions of the predominantly male senior officers who make promotion decisions are addressed. Our findings indicate that there is no evidence to support these subjective perceptions. Indeed we have used an organisational commitment measure that was agreed with senior officers who were predominantly male, so there is no room for senior officers to suggest that the measures used are inappropriate for judging commitment in the police.

We suggest that future research would incorporate both job and gender characteristics so as to discern the entirety of women's work experiences, which would permit a rich and insightful analysis of gender, commitment and their interrelationships. This line of research inquiry follows the recent work of feminist police scholars who argue that investigations of policewomen need to be positioned in relation to broader social stereotypes and gendered working structures, what Holdaway and Parker (1998) name "engendered inequalities", since it is these engrained beliefs, both in the wider structures of gender relations, and the organisational and structural contexts of police employment, that present opportunities and constraints for women (Gaston and Alexander, 1997).

We accept that survey methods such as ours do not capture the entirety of employee feelings and responses since they tend to homogenise male and female working experiences. Dickens (1998) for example has noted that when conceptualising what is meant by organisation commitment, academic scholars and management practitioners tend to use the "male" employee and his working lifestyle as the "benchmark" (see also Maier, 1999, pp. 80-82). This line of analysis is significant as it acknowledges the way in which commitment is socially constructed in organisations and allows for the potential to read and interpret gender and commitment dynamics in fluid and diverse ways that cannot be captured through survey methods. However, survey methods do have the advantage that it is possible to generalise from the results and thus this replication study and comparison with our previous study allows us to suggest that our findings can be viewed as providing insights to other UK police forces in particular, and to the broader field of the antecedents of organisational commitment in general.

In summary, our aim was to establish empirically whether there is any foundation in the premise that that female officers' lesser tenure and/or lower levels of commitment to their forces explain under-representation in senior ranks. Our findings revealed that women are less likely to achieve promotion than men and this cannot be attributed to less service experience. It was also found that if commitment to the police force is seen as essential to promotions there is no lack of it in female officers. They are as committed as their male colleagues, and like them their organisational commitment is most strongly influenced by how they are managed.

Note

1. The coefficient of determination r^2 shows the proportion of the total variability in organisational commitment accounted for in per cent terms by the variable.

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