Title of Paper:

Navigating the police promotion system: A comparison by gender of moving up the ranks.

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Abstract

Promotion systems form a fundamental pillar in the development of organisational leadership capability. Surprisingly, little empirical research focus has been directed towards the specific decision-making processes of officers that influence their participation and engagement in the police promotion system. Importantly, gender differences must be examined as female police now represent the biggest demographic change in the pool of potential police leaders. Based on a study of police officers employed in one Australian state police jurisdiction, the research concludes that similar factors are generally associated with engagement with the police promotion system regardless of gender. Notably, gender differences only exist for factors related to support of higher-ranking officers in the promotion application process, support of colleagues once promoted, confidence in readiness for promotion, increased work hours and child/elder care difficulties and change in renumeration. The research highlights that gender equity policies designed to encourage female participation/engagement may result in unintended, negative consequences. Almost 80% of male officers in this study strongly indicating that females are promoted based on gender rather than skills and experience. The research has significant implications for police agencies who seek to support female officers moving into leadership positions.

Introduction

Promotion systems within policing have typically fallen into two categories: promotion by seniority and merit-based promotion (Savery, 1994). Most contemporary police organisations now ascribe to the merit-based promotion system. Countries such as Australia, United States and United Kingdom employ selection processes that are proposed to identify and select officers who are the most skilled and qualified to move up the ranks and remove discriminatory barriers such as those based on ethnicity or gender (Prenzler & Drew, 2013; White & Escobar, 2008). As such, opportunities in hierarchical occupations such as policing, will inevitably involve promotion pressures for employees. The pyramidal structure of policing agencies, by the very nature of this structure, involves decreasing opportunities for promotion as officers attempt to move up the hierarchy (Whetstone, 2001). This constriction has the potential to impact negatively on those who seek promotion but are unable to attain it (Morabito & Shelley, 2018). Negative influences can be manifested in the relationships between an officer and their colleagues, management and the organisation (Savery, 1994). Others have found that failure to obtain promotion increases levels of cynicism, officers feel disenchanted and this is associated with further nonparticipation in the promotion system (Scarborough, Van Tubergen, Gaines & Whitlow, 2000).

Given the significant impact that promotion systems can play in the attitudes and experience of officers within their police organisation, surprisingly, comparatively little empirical research focus has been directed towards the specific decision-making processes of officers (Archbold, Hassell & Stichman, 2010). In particular, what are the specific factors that influence engagement with the police promotion system and how does this differ or not by gender? In this study, engagement is used to describe the decision of officers to actively seek promotion through their actions of applying for available positions at the next, higher rank.

This research seeks to contribute to the limited body of work that directly compares, within a single agency, the factors that influence male and female officers' participation in the police promotion system. It explores reasons why officers choose to engage or not engage, identifying factors that are common across male and female officers and those that differ. Importantly, this research focuses on the issue of female officers moving up the ranks. It has been noted that current understanding of the promotion experiences of female officers remains limited (Morabito & Shelley, 2018). The study explores the perceptions of female officers from the perspective of how they believe they will be supported as leaders in the organisation. As will be discussed in this paper, research has often focused on the reasons why female officers may be disadvantaged within the promotion system, such as discrimination, limited opportunities and lack of mentorship (Archbold & Hassell, 2009; Archbold & Schultz, 2008; Whetstone & Wilson, 1999). However, given that many police organisations, including the one studied in the current research, has introduced proactive strategies to minimise such disadvantage, why has there not been a greater shift in numbers of female leaders? This research explores whether the decision to seek promotion is negatively influenced by the perception of others about their promotion, particularly their male counterparts and the support that female leaders perceive they will receive as leaders.

Achieving gender equity in promotions and leadership: How police organisations have responded

Police agencies have moved, sometimes only as a result of legislative direction, to embrace strategies and policies to employ more female police officers. Not until the late twentieth century were discriminatory barriers removed in most developed countries (Martin & Jurik 2007). Strategies, particularly in earlier years, focused on recruitment of female police.

The contemporary challenge for police agencies is now to increase representation of female police in more senior ranks (Prenzler & Drew, 2013). It has been argued by some police organisations that movement of female officers into more senior leadership positions will naturally occur. As the years go by, previous organisational strategies to recruit more female officers will provide the necessary, experienced talent pool of female officers to take on leadership positions (Muhonen, Liljeroth, Lindqvist Scolten, 2012 cited in Haake, 2017). Representation of female police leaders should by now have increased, at least to some degree. This is consistent with the threshold arguments noted by Brown (1997) and Silvestri (2007).

However, as noted by others (eg. Baxter & Wright, 2000; Haake, 2017; Muhonen et al., 2012 cited in Haake, 2017) substantial shifts in gender representation are required to gain even small increases in gender equity at senior management levels. Simply increasing female numbers does not necessarily translate into such increases without determined organisational policies to address inequities. The situation is potentially further constrained as recent research concludes in Australia and some policing jurisdictions in the United States (who were able to have earlier success in recruiting increased female representation) that a levelling out in female recruit numbers is now occurring (Cordner & Cordner 2011; Prenzler & Drew, 2013).

A case analysis undertaking by Prenzler and Drew (2013) on the same police agency that is the focus of the current study provides an illustrative example of the issues identified above. Prenzler and Drew (2013) noted that following a major inquiry into police corruption in the late 1980's which also called for significant changes to promotion and recruitment of police, the police agency made substantive progress in relation to gender equity. The representation of female police quickly grew to over one third representation and there were a number of promotions of female officers to senior ranks. During the period between 1998 and 2017, female officer representation has fluctuated but continues to hover around that initial one-third representation. An examination of the representation of female officers in senior ranks, reveals that despite sustained and more recent explicit polices to encourage female officers into leadership positions (see discussion later in this paper), female officers at these ranks has failed to reach 10 per cent (Queensland Police Service, 2017).

Engagement with the promotion system: A comparison of male and female officers

The following discussion examines existing research that has sought to directly compare male and female officer engagement with promotion systems, identifying similarities and differences across groups. Archbold et al. (2010) noted that at the time of their research, little research has been conducted on the promotion aspirations of male and female officers. Based on a more recent review of the literature, there remains a dearth of research in this area.

Of the research conducted, factors that are associated with engagement and attitudes towards the promotion system are surprisingly similar across male and female officers (Archbold et al., 2010; Whetstone & Wilson, 1999). Research by Whetstone and Wilson (1999) found the top four reasons for promotion system engagement were the same across gender, with just slight variations in ranking. They found officers reported engagement was associated with greater career opportunities; salary increase; reaching personal goals; and, wanting to be in a leadership role.

Whetstone and Wilson (1999) found that the top two reasons why male and female officers did not engage in the promotion was because they were happy with their current shift and assignment and the feared promotion would interfere with child and family activities. The finding that male officers are also disengaging from promotion due to childcare

responsibilities, a barrier traditionally seen as one for female but not male officers, was supported by Murphy (2006), Archbold et al. (2010) and Whetstone (2001).

Some differences by gender have been noted for actual participation in the promotion system. Gaston and Alexander (1997) and Archbold et al. (2010) found that promotion aspirations of female officers were either less or declined more rapidly with experience compared to their male colleagues. Interestingly, Gaston and Alexander (1997) found that the success rate of those officers who did participate in promotion was similar regardless of gender.

Factors that impact on decisions to participate in the promotion system: The experience of female officers

The following discussion focuses on the experiences of officers as they navigate the promotion system. Whilst the discussion primarily examines the female officer experience, relevant research is also discussed that compares how male and female officers experience either similarly or differently the promotion system. Understanding gender differences provides the basis on which to articulate those factors that need to be addressed for the whole organisation and those that are more gender-specific.

Morabito and Shelley (2018) conclude that current understanding of the promotion experiences of female officers is limited. Research such as that conducted by Schulz (2003) describes the processes by which female officers attain promotion but does not explore the experience of female officers who are unsuccessful or choose not to engage in promotion (Morabito and Shelley, 2018). Internal and external constraints deter and restrict female officers from advancement.

A possible reason for the lack of advancement of female officers is that they are, compared to their male colleagues, less organisationally committed or do not seek promotion. However, Dick and Metcalfe's (2007) study of organisational commitment failed to find any gender differences. Wexler and Quinn (1985) found that female officers expressed fear in being promoted. The differences were attributed to lack of opportunities to gain full scope of experience required to manage the tasks of their subordinates. Research conducted by Morabito and Shelly (2018) indicated that women do seek promotion and actively sought supervisory and command positions within their agency. Whilst some research has found that female officers often feel unsupported in their decision to seek promotion and feel that they are discriminated against in the police promotion system, research has not been unanimous. The work of Wertsch (1998) and Archbold and Schulz (2008) both found that the majority of female officers in the police agencies under study reported promotional opportunities positively. Other factors were in play that limited promotion participation.

The proposed barriers to female officers achieving leadership positions within their police agencies are numerous. The overarching discussion often rests on the impact of organisational culture of policing environments (Crank, 2004; Reiner, 2000). The police culture is described as masculine, macho and conservative and those that do not fit male norms and values are excluded (Haarr, 2005; McCarthy, 2013; Muhonen et al., 2012 cited in Haake, 2017; Myers, Forest & Miller, 2004; Workman-Stark, 2015). The roles of female police are often more restricted compared to their male counterparts and in turn, due to a lack of diversity of operational policing experience and deployments in specialist areas, impact on promotion outcomes (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Haake, 2017; Prenzler, 1995; Van Velsor & Hughes, 1990). Some have found that female officers feel that they are disadvantaged due to a lack of role models and mentors (Hyman, 2000).

Often research has focused on the impact of demands on female police that are outside of the workplace. Issues related to childbearing, childcare and the comparatively greater difficulties experienced by female police in balancing work and family responsibilities, particularly shiftwork and overtime (Adams, 2001; Irving, 2009). Whilst some progress has been made in some police agencies in the availability of part-time work and more flexible work options, there is much work to be done (Charlesworth, Keen & Whittenbury, 2009; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013).

A number of studies have found that female police officers feel they need to constantly prove their abilities and feel that they need to perform better than their male counterparts (Archbold & Schultz, 2008; Haarr & Morash, 2013). Police officers have concerns about the capabilities of female officers, particularly in relation to skills and physical strength (Chu & Tsao, 2014; Dodge, Valcore, & Gomez, 2011). The lack of physical capability of female police is perhaps the longest-held myth that has plagued female officers (Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013).

Research by Muftic & Collins (2014) found even when male officers report that male and female officers are equally effective, male officers still portray female officers negatively. Further, despite female officers being successful leaders in police agencies, they are often considered less competent than male leaders (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Female officers have demonstrated their competence to enact the diversity of police roles and have the potential to add to the police organisation through expanded and enhanced dimensions of empathy and caring (Kingshott, 2013). Further research has discussed positive impacts of female officers on police responses to violence against women, domestic violence (Homant & Kennedy, 1985) and less aggressive and more communicative policing styles (Linden, 1983; Grennan, 1987). Whilst it was believed that female officers may adopt male-dominated views of their policing abilities and be limited in their promotional aspirations due to a lack of confidence in their abilities, recent research has found that females believe that they are as good, if not better in certain aspects of policing, compared to their male colleagues (Rabe-Hemp, 2009).

Drawing on the seminal work of Kanter (1977a, 1977b) and the construct of 'tokenism', female officers are likely to be highly visible, potentially isolated, struggle with assimilation in the dominant group and feel performance pressure. It has been posited that tokenism can result in female officers allowing others to assume visible leadership stemming from the fear of being visible themselves (Kanter, 1977b). Similarly, the early work of Martin (1979) and later research conducted by Whetstone and Wilson (1999) found that the pool of female officers that consider promotional opportunities is typically disproportionately smaller than the numbers of female police in the agency.

Of particular relevance to the current study, is the work of Archbold and Schulz (2008) and Archbold et al. (2010) who examined the impact of token status on decisions of female officers to participate in the promotion process, perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the promotion process and perceptions of female officers regarding their treatment after promotion. The studies were based on a small number of officers employed in a Midwestern police agency in the United States. The police agency employed 19 female officers in a department of 129 police personnel. Interestingly, this research found that some female officers felt they were treated like tokens due to the organisations push for hiring and promoting female officers. Female officers felt that promotion was available to them, particularly given that females who applied were likely to get promoted because of the organisational need for more female leaders. The support of male supervisors had a negative influence on promotion. Support of male supervisors of female officers was creating a perception that female officers could be promoted simply because they were women, not

based on leadership capability or potential effectiveness as leaders. It was concluded that rather than being encouraging, it served to single out female officers and draw unwanted and negative attention from male colleagues (Archbold & Schulz, 2008). More however needs to be learnt about the type of support that female officers receive and the context of the organisation. Officers who participated in a recent study undertaken by Morabito and Shelley (2018) found that many female officers reported encouragement and mentorship from senior male officers. In this case, support was strongly correlated with participation in the promotion process.

Archbold and Schulz (2008) present findings that differ from conclusions typically drawn from the work of Kanter (1977a). Strong encouragement of female recruitment and promotion may in fact be counterproductive and act as a discouraging factor for those officers and their career trajectory. Archbold et al. (2010) found that over half of the female officers felt that they were not fairly treated upon promotion and questioned the respect that they would receive as leaders. The conclusion from these studies was that the administrative push of the police agency to promote female police was backfiring, particularly in respect to the perception it created amongst male officers. This resulted in discouraging females from participating in the promotion process.

These studies are specifically relevant to the current research given that the police organisation under study has recently introduced and has been very vocal in new policy initiatives aimed at increasing female police numbers at recruitment and into leadership positions. The Queensland Police Service launched a new campaign, 'That could be me', as part of the drive to achieve the new stated target of recruit intakes of 50/50 male and female officers. Within a year, it was reported that the organisation was finding it difficult to achieve their targets (Murray, 2017). At the same time, the police agency was actively encouraging female officers within the ranks to apply for promotion to senior levels. Antidotally, the situation within the organisation regarding gender equity became somewhat tense. The mood of the agency was that many officers, particularly male officers, believed that recruitment and promotion was no longer meritorious and female officers were being advantaged due to their gender regardless of skills and experience. Given these circumstances that were occurring at the time of the current study, it provided the researchers with an opportunity to further explore and extend the work of Archbold and Schulz (2008) and Archbold et al. (2010). This study provided the opportunity to study with a much larger sample, in a much larger police agency, the potential negative impacts that gender-promotion strategies can have on engagement of female officers in the promotion system.

Current Study

The current research seeks to explore those factors that influence engagement (push factors) and disengagement (pull factors) with police promotion systems. The terminology of push and pull factors was developed by the researchers to encapsulate the range of specific factors associated with engagement and disengagement with the promotion system. It has been noted that current understanding of the promotion experiences of female officers remains limited (Morabito & Shelley, 2018). As such, this study includes a direct comparison of the experiences of male and female officers. By studying both male and female officers within a single study, the study is able to clearly identify those factors that are relevant to officers regardless of gender and those that are more gender specific. Gender equity continues to evolve in policing, a reliance on older research may lead to erroneous or at the least, outdated conclusions. Further, drawing on the seminal work of Kanter (1977b), the study extends previous work through its exploration of how perceptions of support for female police officers when they reach leadership position is likely to affect their decision to participate in

the promotion process. Police agencies can put in place progressive and effective strategies to reduce gender discrimination and bias in the promotion system, however if female officers perceive that they will be undermined as leaders, such organisational policies are unlikely to have any real effect in increasing female leadership numbers. Female officers will simply not participate in the system and not seek to progress.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study included officers employed by a large, Australian state police organisation (the Queensland Police Service). The study was undertaken in late 2016. The police agency under study has a current strength of approximately 12 000 sworn officers. Of sworn personnel, 27.1% of the strength of the police organisation are female (Queensland Police Service, 2017). The organisation polices over 1.8 million square kilometres and a resident population of over 4.8 million people (Queensland Police Service, 2017). The survey used in the study was sent to 715 officers at the ranks of sergeant and senior sergeant. Officers were included in the study if they had attended in-service management development leadership training within a five-year sample frame. The in-service leadership training is a prerequisite requirement for officers seeking promotion to the next rank within the organisation. A final sample of 324 officers was obtained, representing a response rate of 46.43%. The final sample included 194 sergeants (24.7% female) and 130 senior sergeants (29.2% female).

Materials and Procedure

An online questionnaire was developed for this study. Research ethics approval was obtained from both the academic institution of the researchers and the police organisation. Officers were sent a link to the online questionnaire via the internal police email system. The email provided a brief overview of the purpose of the research. Once officers accessed the link, the officers were presented with a comprehensive information sheet detailing who was conducting the research and for what purpose. Informed consent was obtained from the officer prior to commencing the survey.

The survey began with a range of demographic questions, including gender, age, education, years of service, current rank, years at current rank, current role and geographic location of workplace. Questions were developed to address the key aims of the current study, specifically to identify those factors that are likely to encourage and discourage officers to engage with the promotion system and better understand how officers perceive the effectiveness of the organisational system in supporting them to develop and achieve leadership positions, particularly female officers. The questions were generated on the basis of a review of relevant existing literature and based on the expert knowledge of the researchers who have extensive experience working within police agencies. The survey was pilot tested with 5 staff employed in leadership development and education within the police agency under study. Leadership development and education staff conduct in-service training that is a prerequisite for promotion and hence, have contemporary knowledge of the promotion system within their agency. Officers rated, using a five-point Likert scale (range: 1-5; with 1 representing 'not at all important' and 5 representing 'very important'), a range of factors that influence their decision to participate in the promotion process (push factors) and a range of factors that influence their decision not to participate in the promotion process (pull factors). A single item was used to measure each factor, with an overall lead question. An example of a lead question that was provided is, "How important are the following factors in discouraging your decision to participate in the promotion process?". A list of factors, for

example, "Want to stay in current position", were then presented. Each factor was rated by the respondent using the 5-point Likert scale.

From a gender perspective, this study was particularly interested in the perceptions of officers towards the development and appointment of female police leaders and gender-specific attitudes and perceptions of female officers regarding their personal experiences in developing as police leaders. The following three questions used a five-point Likert response scale (range: 1-5; with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree') to indicate level of agreement. To assess the extent to which all officers felt that female officers were being promoted based on gender only, respondents were asked, "How likely is it that the organisation will promote female officers due to their gender rather than their skills and experience?". Female officers were asked the specific question, "How likely is it that the following groups of officers would believe that my promotion was partly because I am a female officer, not because of my skills and experience?". Further, female officers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about the level of support they felt they would receive from junior officers, colleagues at rank and higher ranked officers if they were to be promoted. An example of the statements presented was, "female leaders receive the same support as male leaders by their male colleagues (at rank)".

Results

The following results are presented according to the three key substantive themes of the current study, including "push" factors that encourage officers to participate in the promotion system; "pull" factors that discourage officers from engaging in the promotion system; and, attitudes regarding gender and leadership.

Push factors and the promotion system

The following table, Table 1, provides the overall mean score (range of 1 to 5) of officers regarding their level of agreement with each identified factor that encourages them to engage in the promotion system. The factors are grouped into four categories: readiness for promotion (self-assessment of officers regarding their abilities and confidence to perform at next rank); career specific (focus of officer that promotion decision is being driven by a particular trajectory that will be achieved by a specific position within the organisation); organisational hygiene (organisational factors that are external to the work itself but can cause employee dissatisfaction if unfulfilled by the organisation); and, support and encouragement to apply for promotion (influence of various groups on levels of engagement with the promotion system). The top five reasons why officers are encouraged to participate in the promotion system are shaded. It is noted the same top five factors were identified by male and female officers and also, ranked the same.

Table 1. Mean score, rank order and significant differences for each push factor by gender

Push factor	Male Mean(SD) (Rank)	Female Mean(SD) (Rank)	F
Readiness for Promotion			
Skills and Experience Required at Next Rank	4.58(0.65) (1)	4.70(0.49) (1)	2.387
Challenge of Next Rank	4.42(0.85) (2)	4.53(0.60) (2)	0.993
Confidence in Training and Development Prepared for Next Rank	4.03(0.95) (3)	4.03(0.94) (3)	0.000
Career Specific			
Application Only for Specific Position	3.68(1.24) (4)	3.80(1.13) (4)	0.592
Organisational Hygiene Factors			
Increased Pay Rates	3.30(1.30) (7)	3.30(1.29) (7)	0.000
Prestige of Position	2.22(1.13) (9)	2.09(1.09) (9)	0.889
Support and Encouragement to Apply			
Support and Encouragement of Officers at Higher Rank	3.44(1.16) (5)	3.76(1.07) (5)	4.635*
Support and Encouragement of Immediate Supervisor	3.39(1.16) (6)	3.64(1.11) (6)	2.827
Support and Encouragement of Colleagues (at rank)	3.22(1.14) (8)	3.25(1.09) (8)	0.042

Note: 5-point Likert scale (range: 1-5; with 1 representing 'not at all important' and 5 representing 'very important')
*= significant $p<0.05$

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether gender differences existed in the top five reasons for engaging in promotion. A statistically significant difference at the $p<0.05$ level was found for gender on only one factor, $F(1, 305) = 4.635$, $p=.032$ (see Table 1). A statistically significant difference was found for support and encouragement of officers at a higher rank, with females (M=3.76; SD=1.07) compared to males (M=3.44; SD=1.16) more strongly agreeing this was a factor that encouraged them to participate in the promotion system.

Pull factors and the promotion system

The following table, Table 2, provides the mean score (range of 1 to 5) of officers regarding their level of agreement with each identified factor that discourages them from engaging in the promotion system. The top ten reasons why officers are discouraged from participating in the promotion system are shaded. As indicated in Table 2, 8 out of the 10 factors were the same for male and female officers, but with slightly different rankings. For male officers only, change of pay (loss of operational shift allowance) was ranked sixth and wanting to stay in current position/role was ranked as the tenth most important factor. For female officers only, increased work hours (9th/10th) and increased difficulties with child or elder care (8th) were in the top ten reasons for not participating in the promotion process.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether gender differences existed for the top ten reasons for not engaging in the promotion process. Analysis was conducted for the top ten reasons nominated by both male and female officers, meaning that statistical tests were conducted on twelve factors. A statistically significant difference at the p<0.05 level was found for gender on five factors. A statistically significant difference was found for increased work hours, $F(1, 306) = 6.878$, p=.009; change of pay (loss of operational shift allowance), $F(1, 305) = 6.191$, p=.013; increased difficulties with child and elder care, $F(1, 306) = 7.208$, p=.008; do not feel I will be supported as a leader by my colleagues, $F(1, 303) = 3.918$, p=.049; and, not 100% prepared for the responsibilities of next rank, will wait till prepared, $F(1, 305) = 12.731$, p=.000 (see Table 2).

Female officers compared with male officers more strongly agreed with the factors of increased work hours (Females M=2.99, SD=1.29; Males M=2.57, SD=1.20), increased difficulties with child and elder care (Females M=3.00, SD=1.65; Males M=2.48, SD=1.44) and do not feel I will be supported as a leader by my colleagues (Females M= 2.20, SD=1.16; Males M=1.92, SD=1.03). Males (M=2.94, SD=1.52) compared to female officers (M=2.45, SD=1.47) more strongly agreed with the factor of change of pay (loss of operational shift allowance).

Table 2. Mean score, rank order and significant differences for each pull factor by gender

Pull factor	Male Mean*(SD)* (Rank)	Female Mean*(SD)* (Rank)	*F*
Readiness and Access to Promotion			
Lack of available positions at next rank	3.84 *(1.19)* (1)	3.71*(1.25)* (1)	0.638
Unfair and biased promotion process	3.66(1.25) (2)	3.54*(1.36)* (2)	0.563
Not 100% prepared for the responsibilities of next rank, wait till prepared	2.18(1.35)	2.83(1.53)	12.731**
Difficulty in accessing opportunities to relieve at higher rank	3.14(1.47) (4)	3.33(1.52) (3)	0.921
Difficulty in accessing lateral/secondment opportunities	3.15(1.44) (3)	3.14(1.58) (6)	0.004
Insufficient support to access training and professional development programs	2.80(1.31) (8)	3.04(1.37) (7)	1.922
Career Specific			
Want to stay in current position/role	2.77(1.32) (10)	2.71(1.39)	0.117
Organisational Hygiene Factors			
Changes in work patterns and schedules	2.99(1.27) (5)	3.25(1.27) (4)	2.461
Increased work/family conflict	2.86(1.37) (7)	3.16(1.51) (5)	2.665
Change of pay (loss of OSA)	2.94(1.52) (6)	2.45(1.47)	6.191**
Increased work hours	2.57(1.20)	2.99(1.29) (9/10)	6.878**
Increased difficulties with child or elder care	2.48(1.44)	3.00(1.65) (8)	7.208**
Support Pre and Post Promotion			
Lack of support officers at higher rank	2.78(1.36) (9)	2.99(1.45) (9/10)	1.383
Lack of support immediate supervisor	2.67(1.34)	2.86(1.50)	1.095
Lack of support of colleagues (at rank)	2.21(1.09)	2.21(1.17)	0.000
Do not feel will be supported as a leader by those above me	2.15(1.23)	2.35(1.25)	1.485
Do not feel will be supported as a leader by my colleagues	1.92(1.03)	2.20(1.16)	3.918*
Do not feel will be supported as a leader by junior ranks	1.81(0.97)	1.98(1.08)	1.695

Note: 5-point Likert scale (range: 1-5; with 1 representing 'not at all important' and 5 representing 'very important')
**=significant p<.001
*= significant p<0.05

Gender and leadership

The views of male and female officers in respect to the promotion of female officers in the organisation were examined. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether there were gender differences in respect to the following question, "How likely is it that the organisation will promote female officers due to their gender rather than their skills and experience?" A statistically significant difference at the $p<0.00$ level was found, $F(1, 275) = 54.654$, $p=.000$. Males (M=4.10, SD=1.03) compared to their female (M=2.96, SD=1.36) colleagues more strongly agreed with the statement. Of male officers surveyed, 78.1% believed it was likely or very likely that female officers would be promoted due to their gender rather than their skills and experience, compared to 40.9% of female officers.

Female officers were asked how likely was it that officers at junior ranks, at rank and at higher ranks would consider that their promotion was, in part, based on gender rather than skills and experience. As indicated in Graph 1, female officers believe that male officers (regardless of rank) hold negative views regarding their promotion and female officers perceived that male colleagues were the most negative (M=3.50, SD=1.33).
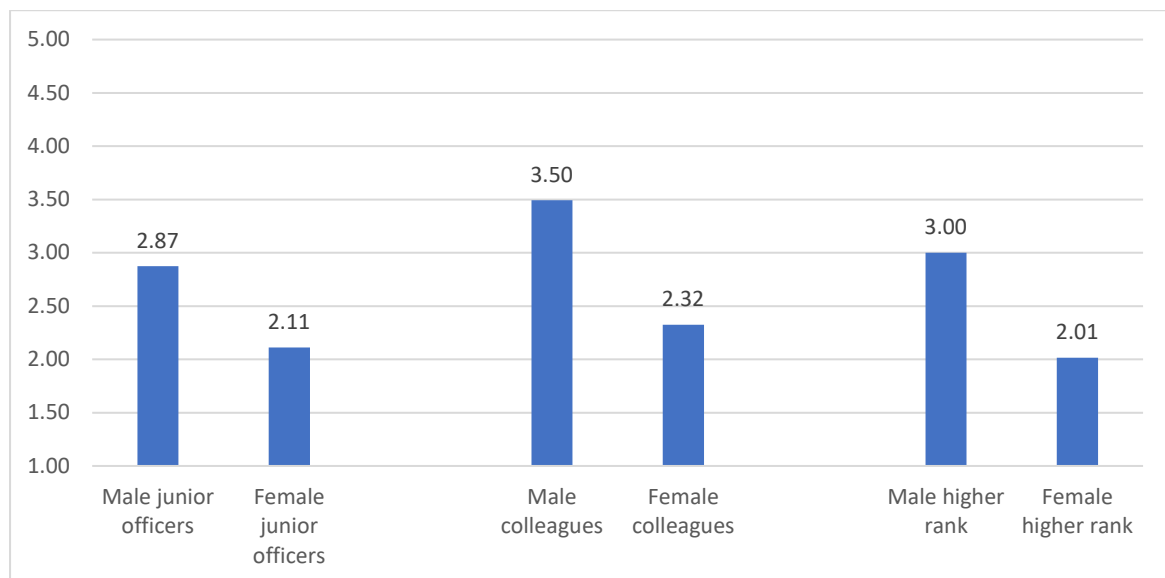
Graph 1. Perceptions of female officers: Perceived view of female officers that promotion is based on gender only, analysis by rank and gender.

Note: Standard deviations ranged between 1.10 and 1.45

As depicted in Graph 2, female officers felt greatest concern about the level of support they would receive from junior male officers, male colleagues at rank and higher ranked male officers if they were to be promoted. Female officers felt that would receive the least support from males at higher ranks (M=2.46, SD=1.07).
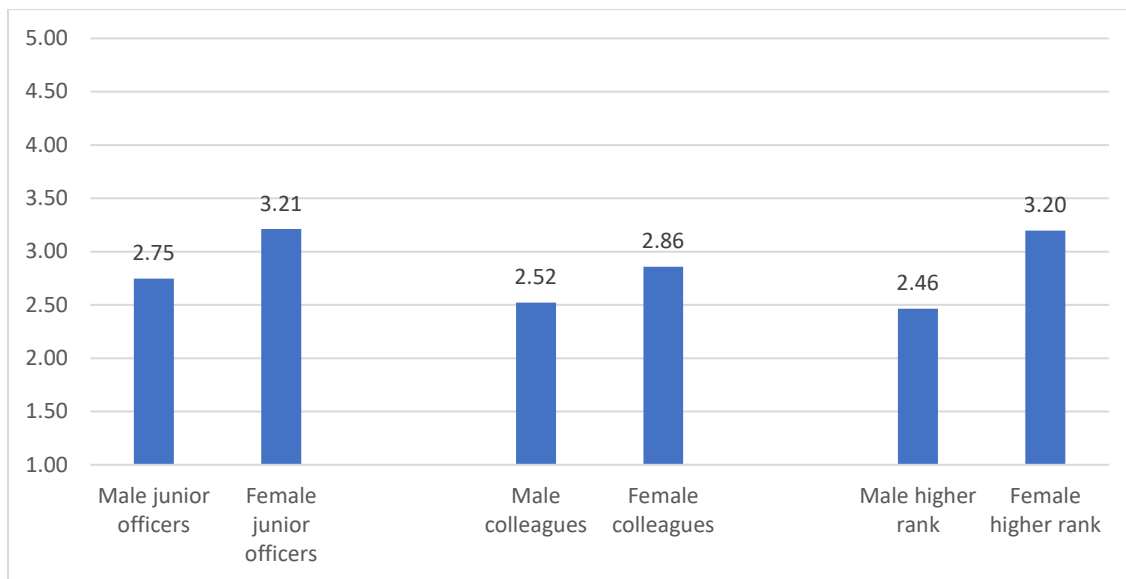
Graph 2. Perceptions of female officers: Perceived view of female officers of the support received from male and female officers following promotion.

Note: Standard deviations ranged between 0.83 and 1.12

Discussion

The current study sought to explore the factors that influence engagement (push factors) and disengagement (pull factors) with police promotion systems, with a specific focus of understanding the impact of gender on the decision-making process. This study within a single agency provides the opportunity to guide police organisations as to whether strategies and improvements aimed at engaging officers with the promotion system can be developed as single focus approaches or whether gender-specific initiatives may be more effective. This research is important as it provides a contemporary snapshot of the experience of the promotion system for both male and female officers. Promotion systems and particularly, gender equity strategies that influence female officer recruitment, selection, promotion and leadership continue to evolve.

Push and pull factors

The research found that the factors that influence the decision of officers to engage in the promotion system are very similar, with male and female ranking each of the surveyed factors for engagement in the same order. This is consistent with the earlier work of Archbold et al. (2010) and Whetstone and Wilson (1999).

The current study found eight out of the ten factors that were ranked in the top ten factors that discouraged officers from participating from the promotion system were the same for male and female officers. The findings suggest that officers regardless of gender make individual assessments of their own readiness for promotion, and at that time will be encouraged to participate in the promotion system. Officers need to be confident in their skills and experience, developed through training and development that have prepared them for promotion and have the personal motivation to be ready for and take on the challenge of the next rank. The need for the organisation to prepare their best officers for promotion opportunities is reinforced by the finding that officers are discouraged from promotion when

they have difficulties in gaining experience through on-the-job development and training opportunities.

The research suggests that organisations need to be cognisant of the real potential for officers who either feel ready and confident for promotion or who actively seek to develop to prepare themselves for promotion will become frustrated, develop poor work attitudes and disengage from the organisation (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006). This study found that officers were particularly discouraged from engaging with the promotion system due to a perceived lack of available positions at the next rank and unfair and biased promotion processes. Poor work attitudes and outcomes are likely to result when employee cohorts perceive they have limited opportunities for advancement or are being stifled in their efforts to develop. This is further compounded when officers start to actively disengage from the promotion system altogether because they do not believe that promotion is one based on merit and they are helpless in their pursuit of a leadership position. The organisation is left with a shrinking pool of officers participating in the promotion system and a potential constriction of the ability of the organisation to select the best potential leaders. Many officers may choose to self-select out of and not engage at all in the process.

Both male and female officers identify factors related to changes in work patterns and schedules and increased work/family conflict as important factors that discourage them from participation in the promotion system. In addition, female officers nominate the significant influence of the inter-related factors of increased work hours and changes to childcare and eldercare as barriers to seeking promotion. While female officers may be more impacted, consistent with the work of Whetstone and Wilson (1999), issues of balancing work and family life are relevant to all officers. Police organisations need to consider the challenges of modern day families, with households likely to include both partners working full-time. Organisational policies developed to assist officers juggle the demands of their home and work lives, whilst greatly benefiting female officers, will also impact on male officers. Male officers, similarly to their female officer counterparts, can be dissuaded from promotion due to non-work related factors.

Male and female officers indicated that support of higher-ranking officers, as distinct from support from colleagues at rank and supervisors, is of importance. It was identified as a factor that both encourages and (lack of support) discourages promotion engagement. The importance and relevance of support of higher-ranking officers particularly impacts on female officers. Female officers compared to male officers strongly indicate that this is a lynchpin factor in encouraging their participation in the promotion system. The relevancy of support for female officers in applying for promotion will be explored in the following discussion.

Perceptions of support following promotion

The current study, given the organisational policy environment of the police agency involved in this research, sought to extend previous work that focused on how perceptions of support for female police officers when they reach leadership position is likely to affect their decision to participate in the promotion process. As discussed earlier, the police organisation under study has recently introduced and has been very vocal about new policy initiatives aimed at increasing female police numbers at recruitment and moving female officers into leadership positions. The mood of the agency, particularly amongst male officers, is that recruitment and promotion is no longer meritorious and female officers were being advantaged due to their gender regardless of skills and experience. As such, the context of this study provided the opportunity to explore the impact of these strategies designed to reduce discrimination and

bias in the promotion system. If female officers perceive that such policies serve in some way to take away from the perception that they have attained their leadership position based on merit, the policies will be at best, ineffective and at worst, counterproductive. They will likely discourage female officers from even engaging in the promotion system.

The level of agreement of male officers regarding female officers being advantaged simply due to their gender was startling but perhaps not unexpected. This study found that almost 80% of male officers believed it was likely or very likely that female officers would be promoted due to their gender rather than their skills and experience. The flow-on effect of these attitudes were then seen in the level of support female officers perceived they would receive from colleagues, those at higher ranks and junior officers. Further research is needed to explore the reasons that underpin such negative attitudes and in turn, to develop evidence-based strategies that identify and challenge such perceptions.

The current study found that support of higher-ranking officers on engagement or disengagement of officers in the promotion system, particularly for female officers, is important. This coupled with the finding that female officers perceive that male officers (regardless of rank) are unlikely to be strongly supportive of their promotion once in leadership positions is of critical concern. Archbold et al. (2010) found that organisational policies that were created to encourage female officers into leadership position can result in negative consequences with female officers being less likely to apply for promotion. This discouragement stems from the negative attitudes of, primarily male colleagues, who do not perceive female promotion being on merit. Haake (2017) stated, "the risk is that support strategies exclusively for women could focus on gender differences and reinforce the view that women are 'deviant' or 'weak' and men are 'normal' and 'strong' because they do not need special initiatives" (p. 250). Consideration needs to be given to more effective strategies that can be used by senior officers to encourage and support female officers who are considering or seeking promotion.

Whilst it is not definitive, given we do not have data prior to the creation and focus of the police agency on recruiting and promoting female officers, it must be considered that the polices of the agency studied in this research have exacerbated the negative attitudes towards female officers within the agency and have negatively impacted on female officer participation in promotion. Given the significant implications of these findings, further research is needed to more fully explore and quantify, using a longitudinal research design, the impact of gender-supportive and gender-focused recruitment and promotion strategies introduced by police agencies. Future research should seek to extend and replicate this research across a more diverse police sample population. This would address a potential limitation of the current study and test the generalisability of the findings beyond a single police organisation.

Conclusions

The research suggests that careful consideration needs to be given to how the pursuit of increasing female numbers is achieved. This research, supported by the work of others (Archbold et al., 2010; Whetstone & Wilson, 1999), finds that engagement with the promotion system is largely non-gender specific. Most factors associated with engagement and disengagement are similar. Organisational approaches focused on encouraging officers and overcoming barriers that dissuade officers from seeking promotion can be developed for all officers and will be effective regardless of gender. Even policies, traditionally seen as gender-focused policies, such as those that help officers balance the demands of their work and non-work lives, will address concerns of male officers who are struggling, albeit perhaps

not to the same degree, as their female counterparts. Policies need to be developed as good organisational practice. Wherever possible, policies need to be crafted and communicated to all staff using empirical evidence such as that provided here. For example, in the case of policies developed to assist in work/life balance, evidence should be presented that whilst it may traditionally be perceived as a gender-focused policy, the evidence indicates that this policy addresses issues faced by all staff. As such, the policy is not introduced and managed as a traditional equity policy that is gender-focused or applicable to one group over another, it is a mainstream policy that is able to be accessed and benefits both male and female officers.

Undoubtedly, more needs to be done, female officers remain proportionately under-represented in the leadership ranks despite many decades of active recruitment (Prenzler & Drew, 2013). But the key challenge may be to focus on changing perceptions. The goal of contemporary policy development in policing agencies should be one of unification, where justified, rather than division. To disregard this conclusion, has the strong potential to negatively impact on female officers, with female officers actually becoming more segregated, isolated, marginalised and disincentivised to pursue promotion. Organisational policies may have good intentions but lead to poor outcomes. More evaluation on the impact of policies on perceptions, not just numbers is needed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of best practice.

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