



Framework for Policy: Career Growth, Challenges and Strategies of Working Mothers in Law Enforcement

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ARTICLE INFO

Date Received: 08-24-2022

Date Last Revised: 03-26-2026

Date Accepted: 06-30-2026

KEYWORDS

career development
work-life balance
working mother
law enforcement
adaptive strategies
resilience
personal growth

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the career experiences of working mothers in law enforcement, analyzing their efforts to balance work and family against systemic and gender-related barriers that can lead to potential stagnation. It utilized a qualitative research design, specifically a case study, to answer the research questions. Moreover, purposive sampling was used in identifying research participants who were mothers, had experienced operational tasks in the field, and were willing to be interviewed. Then, a semi-structured interview guide was formulated as a tool to gather data. These gathered data were analyzed utilizing Yin's data analysis. The research identified the values influencing the participants' career growth and the struggles they encountered with themselves, the management, the organization. Findings demonstrated the mothers' remarkable resourcefulness, determination, and commitment. Furthermore, the participants employed diverse adaptive strategies, including self-help, rest and recreation, support groups, and women empowerment initiatives, to manage work-life conflict and to meet professional goals. The study concluded a call for organizational initiatives to promote gender equality and foster a supportive, healthy environment, ensuring these mothers' unique strengths are recognized and allowing the mothers to thrive professionally and personally.

Introduction

Women are increasingly making their mark in police forces worldwide, a presence evident in countries like the United States and Australia and in citizens' favor for greater female representation in places like Afghanistan (Williams, 2014). Despite this growing global presence, women remain underrepresented in the ASEAN Region, comprising only 6% to 20% of officers (United Nations Women et al., 2020). In the Philippines,

17% of law enforcement officers are women, influenced by the Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998 (Republic Act 8551), which mandates a 10% quota for women in annual recruitment, training, and education. Out of the 17% women police force, 71% of them are married. Research consistently shows that women police officers are more adept at defusing potentially violent confrontations by employing a policing style that relies less on physical force (Harrington, 2001). While equally capable,



they still face unfair recruitment and selection practices and persistent gender inequality within patriarchal institutions (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007).

Despite these advancements, a recent study by United Nations Women, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and International Police (2020), reveals that women remain underrepresented across law enforcement agencies in the ASEAN Region, accounting for only 6 to 20% of officers. In the Philippines, 17% of law enforcement officers are women. One of the reasons for this number of women enforcers in the Philippines is Republic Act Number 8851. Specifically, Section 5 of this law mandates the PNP to reserve a 10% quota of its annual recruitment, training, and education for women.

Research consistently shows that women police officers often employ a style of policing that relies less on physical force, proving more adept at defusing potentially violent confrontations (Harrington, 2001). While equally capable of performing most police work, women still face unfair recruitment efforts and selection practices (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007), compounded by gender inequality in patriarchal institutions (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008).

This research focuses on working mothers who balance parental responsibilities with demanding law enforcement careers. Motherhood introduces a potential conflict with professional pursuits, exacerbated by societal biases and the "maternal wall" which hinders career advancement (Wilson, 2006; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Williams et al., 2004). The double burden of unpaid care work and career, workplace harassment and discrimination, gender pay gap and economic disparity, and vulnerability in informal and remote work severely exacerbate the challenges working mothers face in balancing professional and personal responsibilities (Lee, 2021; Mhando & Kayuni, 2019). Although contemporary Philippine legislation, such as the 105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law (Republic Act 11210), Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act of 2009 (Republic Act 10028), and Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710), offers support, there is limited research on its impact on the career growth of women in law enforcement. Crucially, there has been no study on the experiences of working mothers in the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency when it

comes to career growth. It is imperative to look into these experiences to determine better choices and decisions for mothers aspiring to enter a policing career.

Thus, this study examined the experiences of working mothers serving as intelligence officers in a law enforcement agency in the Philippines. Specifically, the study addressed these key questions: 1) What are the career growth experiences of working mothers? 2) What are the challenges that working mothers encounter in achieving career growth? and 3) What are the strategies that working mothers employ to achieve career growth? By understanding these experiences, this research aimed to support policies that encourage gender diversity and inclusion by recognizing the unique strengths and contributions of working mothers in policing. Specifically, the findings would provide evidence-based recommendations for policy creation or amendment within law enforcement agencies, addressing critical issues such as inflexible work schedules, limited access to childcare, and gender bias in promotion processes. Ultimately, the study sought to empower organizations to create more equitable and supportive environments for working mothers, leading to greater gender diversity and inclusion at all professional levels.

Conceptual Framework

Career Growth and Career Development

Career growth relates to the future goals an individual sets and their tangible progression through defined professional stages (Schroeder, 2016). It is typically marked by an external metric, such as a promotion to a higher role, based on performance and accumulated experience (Mueke, 2018). Crucially, the desire for growth is shaped by an employee's personal values, which determine what constitutes a meaningful "step up" (Johri, 2005). In contrast, career development focuses on an internal transformation: the improvement of one's skill set and capacity for self-improvement. The success of this development is heavily influenced by the employee-employer relationship, which can either provide avenues or create barriers (Hirsh & Jackson, 2004).

Women in Law Enforcement

The integration of women into law enforcement has increased since the 1980s, providing a



foundation for empirical study (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Research consistently shows that female officers are essential to modern policing: they are often less reliant on physical force, using strong communication skills to de-escalate situations and preventing potential crises as well as exhibit diplomatic capabilities, a propensity for compromise, and innovative problem-solving approaches that benefit both the police agency and the community (Brown & Lee, 2020). Also, they are instrumental in improving the institutional response to violence against women and they aid in mitigating internal issues like workplace harassment (Lonsway, 2000). Ultimately, integrating women fosters beneficial policy changes for the entire workforce and supports international commitments toward achieving gender equality (United Nations Women et al., 2020). Despite these benefits, global representation of women remains low, particularly in executive leadership roles (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). In many contexts, women are disproportionately assigned to clerical or "office work" rather than operational positions which is rooted in traditional patriarchal institutional structures (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008).

Motherhood and Career

While a slight decline in employed women leaving the Philippine workforce for family duties suggests policies that aid retention (Tomacruz, 2018), a distinct challenge persists in professions like law enforcement, where there is a dearth of study on the experiences of working mothers despite the clear performance benefits they bring. Though modern society acknowledges that mothers should grow professionally and this is even supported by labor laws, a significant gender difference in the effect of motherhood on career advancement persists. The need for career development is universally recognized as essential for both employee growth and organizational effectiveness (Kadarko et al., 2016). For mothers, the motivation to work stems from financial necessity, personal fulfillment, or the need to supplement family income for a better living standard (Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Wilson, 2006). However, the responsibilities of motherhood invariably impact career goals. Challenges such as time management, achieving work-life balance, and managing health issues for both mother and child are heightened, especially when the mother is the sole provider. These factors significantly influence a mother's perspective on career

progression, whether measured by tangible rewards (like financial compensation) or intangible rewards (like promotion, stability, and job satisfaction).

Problems Encountered by Working Mothers

Working mothers in law enforcement encounter a complex interplay of internal and external obstacles that impede their career growth underscoring their marginalized position relative to men in professional and domestic spheres (Parker & Reckdenwald, 2008). A significant barrier is the condescending attitude and egoistic threat men may feel regarding women's professional competence, often viewing the demonstration of traditionally "masculine" skills (like handling firearms) as abnormal or unacceptable. Consequently, female officers feel compelled to work harder and obtain higher education merely to prove competence when seeking advancement (Wilson, 2016). Finally, maternal health is a critical factor, as the association of mothers with the nurturing role can conflict with work-related stress. A mother's post-childbirth health depends on physiological and psychological factors, requiring supportive laws for recuperation.

Spill Theory of Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a contemporary concept defined as a state of equilibrium where an individual equally prioritizes the demands of their career and personal life (Sanfilippo, 2020). When employees face dilemmas and conflicts in balancing these two domains, the result is stress and low performance. This suggests an inverse relationship between work-life conflict and employee performance, which limits an organization's ability to achieve optimal output. The Spillover Theory explains this dynamic by positing that employees carry feelings, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors from one domain (work) into the other (family life), and vice versa (Vijayakumar & Janakiram, 2017). This spillover is generally categorized as either positive (where success in one domain fosters positive outcomes in the other) or negative (where problems or despair in one domain create similar negative emotions in the other) (Xu, 2009). For this research, the negative spillover perspective is applied: the struggles working mothers encounter at home, such as managing childcare needs, persist as a continued conflict during work duties.



Development Self-Concept Theory

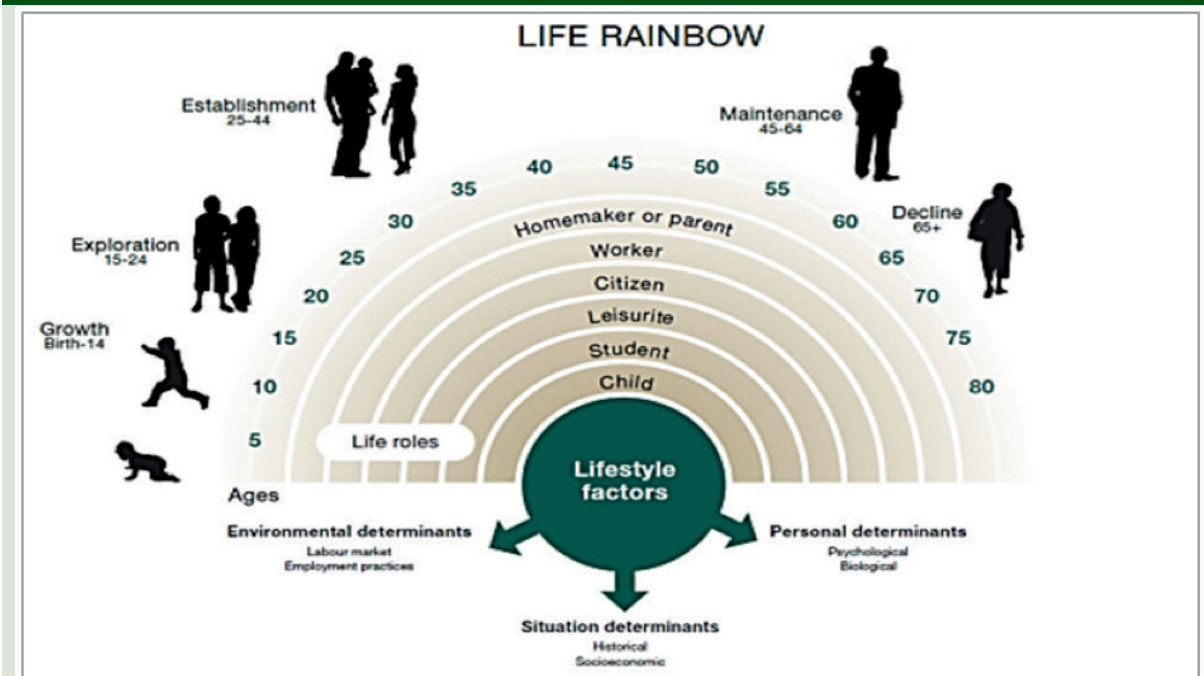
Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory provides the foundational framework for understanding career progression, positing that career development is a continuous, life-long process influenced by complex biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors (McDaniel & Johnson, 2016). The theory's core tenet is that an individual's self-concept evolves through experience, causing a person's occupational preferences and competencies to shift over time. This process culminates in vocational maturity, which measures an individual's readiness to cope with career tasks, allowing people to cycle through developmental stages during career transitions regardless of their chronological age (Careers New Zealand, 2019; Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory (Figure 1) models the career life-span process through five distinct stages. The first is the development of self-concept, where the initial idea of work is established based on personal expectations. This leads to exploration; an experimental phase focused on identifying personal skills and values relevant to career objectives. The

third stage, establishment, involves career stabilization through work experience and the development of strategies for managing work pressure. Following this is Maintenance, a continuous effort to improve or sustain one's professional position and satisfaction. Finally, the decline stage is oriented toward retirement or turnover. This research utilizes Super's framework by connecting it with work-life balance theories to analyze the career experiences of working mothers in law enforcement. The study's paradigm (Figure 2) is based on the working mothers' career experiences, the specific issues/challenges they encounter, and their subsequent coping/career management strategies, gathered through interviews, archival document analysis, and journal entries. The ultimate Output is the formulation of human resource development policies specifically designed to mitigate the unique obstacles faced by working mothers, thereby improving their career growth and progression within the police force.

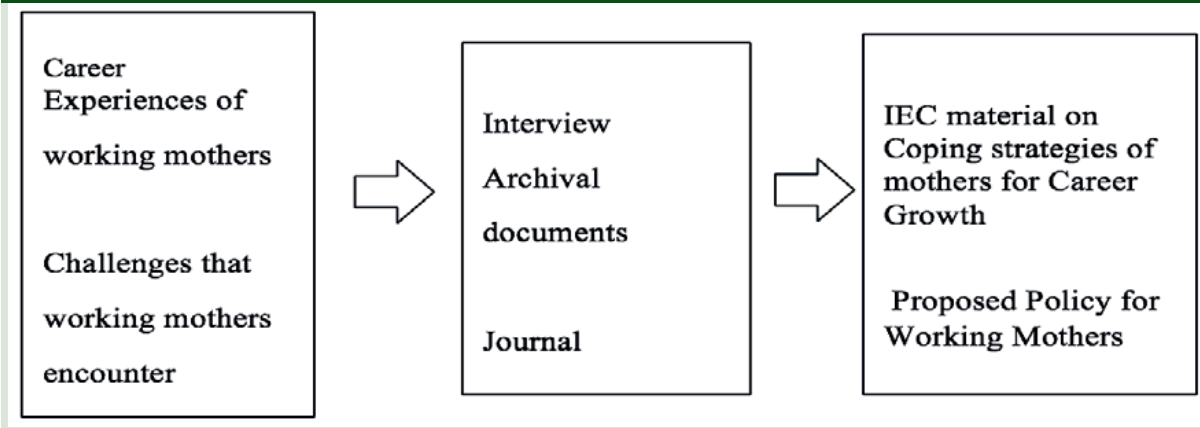
Figure 1

Donald Super's Career Model



Source: <https://www.careers.gov.nz>



Figure 2*Paradigm of the Study*Source: <https://www.careers.gov.nz>

Methodology

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative design to explore the career growth experiences of working mothers in law enforcement. It aligns with public administration, defined as a social science dealing with human behavior in organizations (Sarker, 2019). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed the exploration of complex social phenomena from the firsthand perspectives of those who experience them (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Unlike quantitative methods, this methodology is uniquely suited for capturing the nuances, complexities, and contextual factors that shape individual experiences (Merriam, 2009), enabling the researcher to delve into the mothers' values, feelings, and motivations, which is essential given the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential for bias in interpretation. The study employed an instrumental case study approach to explore the issues of working mothers in law enforcement and surface the detailed understanding that emerged from examining their case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was deemed appropriate because it allowed the exploration of key characteristics, meanings, and implications of the case (McCombes, 2019). Further, the instrumental case study approach is fitting because, as stated by Stake (1995), the experiences of working mothers in law enforcement served as a means to understand the broader

phenomenon of career growth within a specific organizational and social context. A case study is particularly useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

Population and Locale of the Study

The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling due to its inherent nature as a process of choosing samples based on the criteria. Purposive sampling is a technique that allows the researchers to access a specific subset of individuals possessing characteristics relevant to the research question (Patton, 2015). The criteria included that participants must be: (1) mothers (regardless of marital status); (2) experienced in operational field tasks (law enforcement); (3) employed in a law enforcement agency or organization for at least two years; and (4) willing to participate. The two-year experience requirement was critical to guarantee that participants had sufficient exposure to the work environment to provide meaningful insights into its culture, policies, and practices. The seven participants were working mothers within the organization. Law enforcement officers are the agency's uniformed, operational personnel responsible for the active enforcement of anti-drug laws, including surveillance, investigation, and conducting buy-bust operations. The sample size was finalized at seven upon reaching data saturation. Recurring themes were observed, where the same ideas were repeated across interviews, and no new information were noted



after interviewing the seventh participant. Data saturation, defined as the point where new information or themes ceased to emerge (Guest et al., 2006).

The demographic profile of the participants included a range of married and solo parents and professional service in law enforcement agency spanning from two to five years. All participants were law enforcement officers and were mothers with at least one dependent child. The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1. Due to the sensitive nature of law enforcement work and the potential for participants to share confidential experiences, strict ethical measures were implemented to protect participant safety and privacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Additionally, all data were stored securely on an encrypted computer, with access limited to the researcher and advisor. The study was conducted within the regional and provincial law enforcement offices in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). The regional office is located in La Trinidad, Benguet, while the provincial offices are located in each of the provinces of CAR- Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and Mountain Province.

Data Collection Instrument

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview method, which facilitated exploration of the subject matter as the discussion progressed. The interviews consisted of two parts: profile questions (for demographic/professional data) and open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies related to career growth. Data were collected using a mobile phone as the audio recording device (with the participants' permission). The researcher also reviewed official agency guidelines and policies on promotion and gender equity, and she utilized a journal to record observations and responses of the participants. Although the average interview length was 30-60 minutes, no strict time limit was imposed to ensure full expression of experiences. Due to COVID-19 protocols, two participants were interviewed remotely via phone calls and video conferencing.

Data Collection Procedure

A letter of consent to participate, prepared by the researcher, was duly signed by the researcher and the research adviser, and noted by the Dean of the College of Public Administration and Governance. This letter was sent to the

Table 1

Profile of Participants

Code Name of Research Participants	Item/Position	Civil Status	No. of Child Children	Years of Service
Officer A	Law enforcement Officer	Married	2	5
Officer B	Law enforcement Officer	Married	3	4
Officer C	Law enforcement Officer	Single/Solo Parent	1	4
Officer D	Law enforcement Officer	Single/Solo Parent	1	4
Officer E	Law enforcement Officer	Single/Solo Parent	1	2
Officer F	Law enforcement Officer	Married	1	4
Officer G	Law enforcement Officer	Single/Solo Parent	1	5



participants, and the researcher then contacted each one individually to explain the contents and ensure full understanding of the study's purpose and participants' rights. Participation was confirmed by the signing of a consent form. Individual, one-on-one interview sessions were then scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participant. Most interviews were conducted in the regional and provincial offices of the law enforcement agency in CAR. Due to COVID-19 protocols, however, two interviews were conducted remotely via phone calls and video conference. These sessions were designed to be extensive to allow ample time for in-depth discussions. The raw data obtained was transcribed in a journal. Photographs and audio recordings were taken only with the explicit consent of the participants. To ensure confidentiality and ethics, all digital and print data were encrypted and stored securely.

Treatment of Data

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data (Mortensen, 2020). The researcher employed a combination of inductive and deductive coding. The process began with inductive (open) coding to identify key concepts in the transcripts, which were then grouped into broader categories. As the analysis progressed, deductive coding was used to refine themes by leveraging existing literature and theoretical frameworks wherein similar codes are grouped under a theme. To ensure a rigorous approach within the case study context, the study adopted Yin's Data Analysis method. Yin's 5-step approach involving compiling, disassembling (breaking down the interview transcripts and notes through an initial, comprehensive coding process to catalog key concepts), reassembling (synthesizing initial codes and categories into broader, cohesive themes that directly addressed the study's research questions), interpreting, and concluding the data (Yin, 2018). The identified themes were contextualized by comparing them with existing literature. Throughout the research, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging potential biases to ensure the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The English statements of participants in "quotation" are already English translations of their verbatim responses.

Results and Discussion

Career Growth Experiences

Career growth experience is operationally defined in this study as the experiences of mothers in law enforcement, especially the participants in this study who are law enforcement officers. As law enforcement officers, they were tasked to produce actionable intelligence information that could directly lead to arrests, dismantling of drug networks, and prevention of drug-related crimes. The experiences shared were about their professional milestones such as promotions and lateral movement; new skills developed, such as leadership skills, technical skills, and communication skills; and opportunities such as seminars and trainings within and outside the workplace, that advanced their career, increased their competence, and expanded their influence. The findings consistently demonstrate that working mothers in law enforcement experienced career growth through enhanced financial stability, extensive work experience, and developed work competencies. The study highlights women's remarkable resilience and adaptability, which enable the participants to thrive despite organizational and societal challenges.

Enhanced Financial Stability

The responses of participants of this study experienced enhanced financial stability as a common theme for career growth. Financial security is a paramount consideration for working mothers when making career decisions, as employees generally seek balanced compensation to meet their needs (Hakim, 2020). The participants confirmed that choosing a government position was a strategic decision driven by the promise of a stable salary and tenure. Officer E stated, "*Idi nag alis ak ti government ket naitedannak ti stable nga trabaho, meaning adaanak ti seguridad ken mayat a biag para iti familyak*" (Transferring to a government office provides me a stable job that gives security and a better life for my family). One participant, Officer F also said, "*Dakdakel ti sweldo kaysa idi ada ak ti private*" (The salary was higher than what I received when I was working in a private institution). This means that having regular pay helped them become more financially smart, as their salary was given on time and



financial discrepancies could be tracked easily. Moreover, this also means that the mothers' careers in law enforcement gave them economic freedom, better life choices, and personal development than in their previous employment in private organizations. The salary of a law enforcer also includes social services such as health assistance, which can provide immediate solutions to monetary problems caused by health issues, hospitalization, death, and loan options for education, housing, and other needs. As a result, making ends meet is manageable when employed in a public office, an attractive career choice for mothers. Also, a participant mentioned that their stable income made them invest in opportunities. Specifically, Officer B stated that "*Gapu ta regular ti sweldok ket ada bassit naipundar ko*" (Having a stable income gave me more opportunities to invest). The participant declared that the investments were: 'business, housing, and savings.' For mothers, investment means additional sources of income, aside from the regular monthly income they receive. They are able to afford a house on their own. They can develop an entrepreneurial mindset in investing their money and they can have savings for the future or any emergency. Thus, these mothers increased their assets from the salary they received. In spending their money, they prioritized their child's medical needs, daily necessities, entertainment, and future plans. This proactive approach suggests a strong desire to secure families' future. The participants of the study confirmed that one of the significant career choices they had was to opt for a position in the government, a turning point of their career. This was because being employed in the government is one of the most desirable career choices due to the stability in salary and tenure it offers. This job security is particularly salient for working mothers due to their role as primary caregivers, making family finances manageable and allowing them to meet essential needs before pursuing higher-level career goals (Pew Research Center, 2013; Poduval & Poduval, 2009).

The participants noted that motherhood itself spurred them to become more critical and conscious of their financial contribution to the family considering the rising cost of living that necessitates both parents to contribute to the family's financial well-being. As participants (Officers B and F) explained, "*Gapu ta nagbalinak nga ina, napilitanak nga simpaen ti finances ko*." (Being a mother pushed me to work better for my finances). Officers E and G also stated that "*addan*

ti umanay nga masapol ko para iti kasapulan ti anak ko." (I have enough money to sustain my child's needs). This aligns with the findings of Stack and Meridith (2018), who observed that mothers often prioritize their children's needs above all else. These findings suggest that the need to provide for their children is a key factor in the career decisions of working mothers in law enforcement agencies. Enhancing their financial stability not only strengthened their financial stability but it also brought satisfaction from contributing to the family's financial needs, helping their spouse and children meet their financial needs. Mothers' experiences working in law enforcement provided stable salary and tenure.

Extensive Work Experience

The study revealed that extensive work experience in law enforcement for at least two years and above significantly contributed to the career growth of working mothers, providing them with valuable skills, knowledge, and networks. Extensive work experience is operationally defined as having worked in a relevant field for sufficient time to ensure the ability to control and advise on the full range of activities involved (Law Insider, n.d.). As participants (Officers B, D, E, and G) shared "*nu ag field kami adu ti maamamu nga daduma nga tao ken inmadu met lng ti koneksyon*" (Fieldwork allowed us to meet lots of people and expand our network). Participants C and F echoed this sentiment, stating that they enjoyed being in the field because they could deal with different kinds of people. The agency encourages interoperability and cooperation amongst law enforcement agencies and other stakeholder organizations. There is a vast pool of individuals to interact with, which means that in every encounter or meeting, mothers thoroughly adjust themselves to the people they meet. The experiences highlight the importance of social capital in career development, where networks and relationships can provide access to opportunities and resources.

Furthermore, participants consistently expressed that they were not exempted from fieldwork assignments, demonstrating that women are openly accepted and integrated into all aspects of law enforcement. In fact, Officer A vividly shared how she contributed to the case build-up of a high-profile case in one of the most difficult and dangerous areas in the Philippines. "*Nabayag nga sinursurot mi ti maysa nga lugan ken*



nag ururay kami met lng ti nabayag engana rinumwar jay tao nga ururayen mi" (We had been following for a long time a certain vehicle and stayed for the subject to appear). She also added that this experience left a good impression on her career, as she was also recognized for this accomplishment. A high-profile case involves a highly influential individual and a high amount of cash. Officer A gathered evidence and filed a case against the subject. Her successful arrest of the person under surveillance was a great accomplishment for her and her team. This clearly illustrates how women, as part of the drug enforcement team, contribute to the agency's goals by actively participating in the arrest of high-value targets and conducting successful buy-bust operations, which directly impact the drug-free community. This also shows bravery among women and recognition of achievements. Further, Officers E, D, and G emphasized that *"nabanor kami nga babae idjay field ken han kami nga exempted ti field work uray babai kami"*. (A woman is valued in the fieldwork and there is no exception). This collective sentiment further reinforces the notion that gender is not a barrier to success in law enforcement. This finding aligns with research by Lonsway (2000), which suggests that male and female police officers are equally capable of meeting the demands of the profession. However, it is important to acknowledge that this perception may not reflect all the experiences of all women in law enforcement, and further research is needed to explore more. Career growth is recognized if there is an improvement in knowledge. In addition, female officers often gravitate to or pushed toward "soft skill" assignments such as juvenile, crime prevention, a school resource officer, and other related tasks. These are necessary and valuable jobs, however female officers are also encouraged for "hard skill" specialties such as SWAT, hostage negotiations, underscore operations, firearms and defensive tactics (Perry, 2019). Participants B and C shared that practical training gave them so many memorable learning experiences that were unique in law enforcement, including training and learning how to use firearms, arresting suspects, climbing mountainous areas, laborious paperwork, and filing cases. Decision-making skills were also tested during field work because there were compromising situations that might affect personal lives. This diversification of skills and experience aligns with the principles of human capital theory, which suggests that individuals can increase their value in the labor market by investing in their knowledge and abilities.

Enhanced Work Competencies

For working mothers who must balance work demands and their familial obligations, being a law enforcer helps boost skills needed in parenting, such as time management, critical thinking, security, decision-making, and communication. This highlights the spillover effect between work and family life, where skills and experiences gained in one domain can benefit the other. The demanding and unpredictable nature of operational tasks can make it difficult for working mothers to maintain a stable timeline, especially given the on-call nature of the job. The work competencies that emerged from the participants' stories are presented in Table 2.

Juggling schedules as a mother and law enforcement officer requires time management skills. Officer A shared that it is difficult to have a stable timeline for what to do at a specific time and day. This is supported by Rose (2017), who revealed that employed mothers endured high levels of time pressure related to time poverty. There was insufficient time for necessary or discretionary activities, which involved multitasking, merging work and home boundaries, and time density that included familial emotion and organization of work. The participants in this study highlighted several ways in which their work as law enforcement officers enhanced their competencies. The participants added that self-education, exposure to hearings, and scenario-based learnings honed their skills and knowledge with legal proceedings. Officers C and G shared, *"... adu ti criticisms idjay korte ngem nakatulong daytoy ken naadal mi mas ag an nad ti panag sungbat nu maayaban nga ag testigo lalo nu adda pressure"* (The criticisms observed in the court helped us to be more aware of our answers when we testify, even under pressure). This exposure also made them aware of the interpretation of the law and how it really is in the practical world.

Emotional toughness was another area of growth. Officer D shared that, *"idi naging officer ak ket nakatulong ti panagpanunot ko pay nga usto bago ak nga agdesisyon panggep ti biag ken trabahok"* (Being a law enforcer helped me to make rational decisions about my career and life). This suggests that the challenges and high-pressure situations encountered in law enforcement fostered a great sense of resilience and ability to make sound judgments. Officers A,



Table 2*Work Competencies that Emerged from the Participants' Stories*

Enhanced Competencies	Sample Quotes
Mental scheduling	"<i>Idi damu ket nagrigat gapu ta on call kanayun ti field operations mi, it takes nga ag practice ti mental scheduling nga masapo iadjust ko ti routine ko ken schedule ko tapnu maisimpa ti schedule ko</i>" (Officer A) (It was difficult at first because field operations were always on call. IT took time for me to get used mentally to the schedule, since I had to adjust my routine and my own schedule.)
Improved knowledge	"<i>nag-improve ti knowledge ko ti civil and legal proceedings.</i>" (Officers A,B, (My knowledge of civil and legal proceedings has improved.)
Emotional toughness	"<i>kayang kayak nga ikontrol ti riknak lalo nu ada ak trabaho.</i>" (I can control my emotions very well, especially when I am at work).
Improved security awareness	"<i>Kanayun nga awit ko ti paltog ko lalo nu amuk nga ada kabutbuteng nga sitwasyon.</i>" (Officers B and F) (I always carry my firearm with me, particularly when I know I may be facing a dangerous situation.) "<i>Na annad ak nga ag ited ti impormasyon</i>" (Officers A and D) (I am more conscious and cirtical in divulging information.)
Enhanced communication skills	"<i>Mariknak nga linmaka ti agsao ti sanga ti tao ken nanayunan ti confidence ko</i>" (officers C and G) (It feels easier to talk in front, and I have higher confidence.)

F, and G echoed this sentiment, "*dagijay adu nga experiences iti trabaho ken field ket mas pinatibker na ti riknak*". (Experiences made me tougher at work). Officer G supplemented this saying, "*naipakitak ti tattao nga habang bumaybayagak ti trabahok mas nag mature ak emotionally*" (I have shown people that I have grown emotionally stronger through time). The participant mentioned that she felt her emotions hardened through time when dealing with tricky suspects. Identifying and validating facts is also one of the key skills that develops through time. To add, when mothers are told to interview and book arrested suspects, it usually becomes emotional, especially when the arrested suspects are children or women. As Officers A and D expressed, "*ti amu ti tao ket nalaka da kami nga maluko nu ada agpupukaw ken agsangit.*" (Many people think that mothers can be coaxed with an emotional outburst and crying). Opposite to this, they can connect emotionally to the suspects while gathering information. Likewise, this is also observed in other countries as discovered by the United Nations et al. (2020), where female officers are eager to contribute to preventing and investigating

different crime types in the ASEAN region, including in counter- insurgency operations and cybercrime.

Improved security awareness was also a significant outcome. Officer A emphasized that, "*han lang nga idjay trabaho ket na annad, uray idjay balay nu maipanggep ti security ket na annad ak met lng.*" (I became very keen on safety and security at work and at home). Indicating that their professional training had a spillover effect on their personal lives. These demonstrate a heightened awareness of discretion and the potential consequences of working in law enforcement. These experiences also reveal that the participants mastered their skills so that wherever they go, they can apply the skills they learned. The more they practice it, the better they become as law enforcers and as mothers as well, since these skills are also necessary in motherhood. This is also a clear application of the spillover theory where employees carry feelings, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors from one domain (work) into the other (family life).



Finally, the participants reported enhanced communication skills. Officer B stated, *"na overcome ko ti stage fright ko ta adu ti naited nga gundaway nga agaso iti sangu iti nadumaduma nga tao kaysa idjay dati nga trabahok"* (I overcome my stage fright because I had more opportunities to talk with various people than when I was in my previous job). This suggests that their work in law enforcement provided opportunities to develop public speaking and presentation skills. Communication skills are vital during law enforcers community involvement tasks as they are required to coordinate with government officials, community leaders, and the general public as a whole. Enhanced communication skills would leave a great impact on mothers in the law enforcement. These career growth experiences of mothers are aligned with the Developmental Self Concept Theory which is the foundational framework for understanding career progression, positing that career development is a continuous, life-long process influenced by complex biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors.

Career Challenges of Working Mothers

Organizational Behavior Challenges

Participants reported facing a range of organizational behavior challenges that act as significant barriers within the authoritative, militaristic culture of their agencies. Organizational culture, defined as the collective behaviors and norms developed by employees, reflects the overall character of an organization. Law enforcement agencies often exhibit an authoritative structure, characterized by a militaristic style of management. This suggests that the hierarchical and often rigid structure of law enforcement agencies can create a challenging environment for working mothers.

Seniority Gap. Working mothers in law enforcement often experience limitations due to a seniority gap, where established hierarchies and practices disadvantage them. This is supported by feedbacks from Officers D and G, who stated that *"umanay nga mang hinder ti Seniority iti planom ti career mo"* (Seniority can hinder you from pursuing your career choices). Additionally, Officers A, B, E, and G reported that *"jay daduma nga seniors mi ket han nga nasayaat ti panagsasao da ken iwaras da pay iti daduma nga senior officials"* (Some senior officers badmouth and spread rumors to others).

Furthermore, Officers B, F, and G shared that "I don't understand why they cannot understand fellow women like us," while Officers A, B, D, and F noted that *"Most of the senior officers are not open to change and do not like to be corrected."* These experiences illustrate the real-world impact of the seniority gap, showing how established hierarchies create barriers to career advancement. Certain organizations strictly adhere to the chain of command, most of which are those of the military and police forces due to the nature of their work. Senior officials often hold the power since this is needed in their line of work. This principle has to be understood by the subordinates. No matter how difficult it is, they have to hold it together. This is even more difficult on the part of a law enforcer at the same time a mother. This difficulty is consistent with research findings that bureaucracy can fail in preventing bullying (Hodson et al., 2006), often resulting in power imbalances where those in authority interpret rules selfishly (Keltner, 2007). This behavior aligns with the "destination myth" (Kheswa, 2016), which assumes leadership is inherent in senior positions, leading to a disregard for the potential of subordinates.

Preferencing. Participants indicated that superiors often engage in preferencing, favoring individuals they trust and who are endorsed by those in power. This practice aligns with cronyism (Turhan, 2014) and often results in working mothers being assigned heavier workloads with less appreciation, leading to feelings of demotion. Specifically, Officers s A and F stated, *"Many criticize me when I ask for considerations like leave or flexibility in working hours."* Moreover, Officers s C and G shared, *"I am not favored because my boss thinks I am not committed to my job."* Motherhood is often associated with patronization and the assumption that mothers cannot handle certain tasks, resulting in a "motherhood penalty" (Savat, 2021). Officer F reported that "Opportunities were not given to us simply because we are 'mothers'," and Officer D explained, *"I am assigned to desk jobs because many people assume I have many complaints."* This penalty, which reflects societal stereotypes, leads to mothers being passed over for promotions or given fewer desirable assignments, severely hindering their career progression (Lee, 2021).

Difficult Work Relations. Participants described difficult work relations characterized by



negative gossip and uncomfortable interactions with male officers. Regarding gossip, Officers A and D shared that *"Some colleagues like to make a big deal out of personal lives,"* and Officer D noted that *"Gossip sometimes pressure me to question my own decisions."* Furthermore, Officers A, D, and F reported that *"Having a bad reputation will lessen your chance to be recognized."* This negative gossip creates a hostile environment that undermines confidence and capabilities, aligning with research where malicious gossip is used as a tool in organizational power struggles (Kong, 2018; Grosser et al., 2012) and it can lead to gaslighting (Kerridge, 2019). Workplace gossip, as experienced by the participants, is inevitable in a workplace. By nature, human beings interact with each other sometimes, forgetting that they are gossiping about their colleagues. Some individuals deliberately tell stories behind one's back. Even worse, they post negative feedback on social media.

Conventional Expectations. The participants highlighted the extra scrutiny they faced and the perception that they were less committed to their jobs due to conflicting societal expectations about motherhood and work. Officers A and F reported, *"I am often advised to get a nanny so I can leave my child,"* while Officer D stated, *"I am always criticized when I ask for considerations or favors."* These experiences align with research confirming that mothers receive extra scrutiny and are often perceived as less committed, which negatively affects their employability, promotion prospects, and wages (Correll et al., 2007). This is a form of prescriptive stereotyping (Gonzales et al., 2019) that creates a "maternal wall" (Williams et al., 2004), which limits opportunities and reinforces gender inequality. Mothers have multiple roles to play, such as tend to a sick child, attend a school activity of a child, and breastfeed a child such that at times, they need to ask for some adjustment in their work arrangements.

Participants specifically described being denied opportunities due to misconceptions about their abilities and commitment. They were often excluded based on the misconception that they would become emotionally involved in cases (especially those concerning children or women) or could not commit enough time. This is consistent with findings that the most prevalent complaint from female officers is the blatant opinion that they are physically inferior and

cannot execute demanding tasks as well as men, thereby assigning them clerical, social service or desk jobs instead of patrol assignments (Connerley & Wu, 2016). Consequently, women may opt not to apply for challenging or leadership roles due to the fear of failure (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). These discriminatory practices severely limit career progression and underscore the critical need to challenge gender stereotypes.

Health Problems

Participants reported experiencing a range of physical and mental health problems exacerbated by work and family demands. A significant source of distress was the fear of superiors' influence and the belief that complaints wouldn't be supported or heard, with issues often settled privately, causing insecurity and anxiety. Officer A recounted being told by a superior, *"I should just keep quiet about it."* This situation implies that mothers tend to lose trust in the organization's capability to suppress or mediate work issues.

Officers A and D specifically mentioned postpartum stress as a serious, often unaddressed health issue that causes mothers to lose focus at work due to worrying about their newborn. This is dismissed by others, with Officers s A and D stating, *"Many people still think that post-partum is just 'in the mind'."* These challenges are further illustrated by the direct statements from the participants. Regarding physical stress, Officer G stated, *"I got very sickly after I gave birth even when my maternity leave was done"*. Also, Officers s A, E, and G expressed, *"I had fever, chills and headaches whenever I don't breastfeed for a long time."* Addressing mental stress, Officer D shared, *"I do not want to stop breastfeeding because I feel that I am neglecting my baby"*. In addition, Officer B shared, *"I feel the mom 'guilt' and sometimes cannot focus on my work."* These health-related challenges significantly influence women's recovery from childbirth stress and women's ability to resume work and family responsibilities, underscoring the urgent need for organizations to prioritize the well-being of working mothers. Due to the demand at work, the health of mothers is at times compromised, as experienced by the participants, their physical and mental health were put to the test since they had to keep up with their activities and tasks at work despite having just given birth, breastfeeding, or at a postpartum stage.



Work-Life Imbalance

The findings revealed that work-life imbalance is a significant challenge for working mothers in law enforcement, stemming from issues with time management, unsupportive coworkers, and overlapping duties, which creates substantial stress. Participants experienced feelings of time scarcity and neglect. Officer E stated, *"I haven't gone home for months, and nobody seems to care about it."* Officer G noted, *"Sometimes I feel like I neglect my role as a mother because I am not always available for my baby."* Officer B added, *"I haven't had quality time with my child because I am caught up in some work affairs."* Participants also highlighted a profound lack of support from superiors and the organization. Moreover, participants described constant pressure from overlapping duties and the inability to disconnect from work, leading to issues like Officer C being *"often called to do something even when I am on a break."* Officers B and F expressed that, *"It is so difficult to be a mother nowadays because you need to help your child in her education while having work problems."* Officers A, C, E, F, and G also said that *"they are always worried about who will take care of their child when they are away."*

These challenges are severely complicated by the "second shift" phenomenon, where women remain the primary contributors to domestic responsibility and household management, even in law enforcement (Connerley & Wu, 2016). These forces cause working mothers to set aside career opportunities like promotions to meet childcare demands, heavily tipping the balance between being a good mother and a worker (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Underrepresentation

The findings indicated that working mothers in law enforcement experience underrepresentation in leadership positions, which leads to a lack of support and understanding from management. While female representation is vital for empowerment, most executive positions are held by men.

Participants reported significant concerns regarding apathetic management and a lack of support for their needs. Officer F expressed that *"amu da met ken na nange da ti concerns mi ngem han da met nga aramiden ti kayat mi"* (They know and hear our concerns, but they don't listen). Officer G stated, *"dagijay committees nga dapat*

mang suporta kenyami ket han da met nga functional" (Committees that were supposed to support us are non-functional). Officer D quoted, *"Ti panag riknak ket nabaybay an kami iti panag asikaso da ti banbanag"* (I feel that we are left behind because they are preoccupied of other things). This lack of responsiveness stems from minimal support for women and the absence of a representative body for mothers. Since they belong to a male dominated organization, they lack an officer assigned to committees pertaining to women.

Participants highlighted the issue of inconsiderate superiors. Officers A, B, E, F, and G stated, *"Adu ti superiors mi nga han nga considerate"* (Many superiors are not considerate). Officers B and E connected this problem to male dominance and noted, *"kasla han kami nga importante ta lalaki ti bosses mi nga han da maawatan ti sitwasayon mi"* (It seems we are neglected because most bosses are men who cannot understand our circumstances). Officer F also added, *"kasla nagrigat nga makasao ti babai iti opisina nga adaan ti puro lallaki, mas lalo nu ti boss mo ket lalaki ta han da makita ti bagi da iti lugar mi nga babbai"* (I think women cannot speak out well in an office full of men, especially when your boss is a man. He cannot put himself in our shoes.). This occurs despite evidence suggesting women often succeed as much as, or more than, their male colleagues (Wolfe, 2018), yet their capabilities are not proportionate to leadership opportunities. Within law enforcement, this is complicated by the persistent "good ol' boys' network," making career advancement difficult for talented women. Senior female officers often advise accepting the status quo instead of challenging organizational practices. The experiences of the participants show that leadership plays a great role, especially for mothers who have several concerns between being a mother and an officer. Research suggests that addressing underrepresentation requires promoting mentorship, challenging traditional power structures, and fostering an inclusive organizational culture to ensure mothers can excel and succeed in their goals (Schuck, 2014).

Career Stagnation

It is important not only to identify whether there is career growth but also to determine the pace of one's career. The findings also indicated that working mothers in law enforcement experienced career stagnation due to a combination of limited career development opportunities and the prioritization of family



responsibilities. Prolonged stagnation risks leading to burnout and disengagement. For these working mothers who fall into the establishment stage of Donald Super's Career Development Theory, stagnation highlights the complex interplay between individual career aspirations and the reality of balancing work and family life. As Participant E and G stated, "*awan ti trainings ko ti manu nga tawen isunga masapol nagbirukak ti daduma nga training tapnu ada development ko*" (I had no training for years, so I had to look for other alternatives to develop myself). This lack of organizational support forces them to prioritize family, as Officers A, B, D, and F expressed: "*nag ka baby ak pay santo insasikasok ti career ko, ta nu buybuyaek ti anak ko nga dumakdakel ket isu ti kapkapnekak a maysa nga ina*" (I prioritized my baby before my career. Watching your child grow up is the most rewarding part in being a mom). This confirms that parental roles heavily influence career progression. In balancing these demands, participants made significant sacrifices. Officers s A, E, and D noted, "*masapul nga adu nga sakripisyo inaramid ko tapnu lng makadwak anak ko*" (I had to make necessary sacrifices to be with my child). Crucially, none expressed doubts or regrets about their dual roles, suggesting a strong sense of commitment to both their families and their careers. Career development is imperative for organizational effectiveness (Kadarko et al., 2016). However, mothers frequently sacrifice opportunities and rewarding positions to address their children's needs, despite evidence that both men and women enter law enforcement for similar reasons and report comparable job satisfaction (Dodge et al., 2011). Ultimately, most mothers express a strong need to prioritize their personal ambitions alongside their maternal roles to avoid regret.

Career Growth Strategies of Working Mothers

The findings revealed that working mothers in law enforcement employ a range of career growth strategies to navigate their unique challenges and advance in their careers. Career growth strategies are actions with the explicit goal of advancing a profession that include institutionally or organizationally structured actions (e.g., company-sponsored trainings, formal mentorship programs, pursuing accredited certifications, or following a defined promotional track) and unstructured, self-directed, or relationship-driven actions that enhance skills and opportunities without formal oversight (Forret & Dougherty,

2004). In this study, participants seek ways to overcome barriers and achieve their career goals.

Self-Help

Participants emphasized the importance of self-reliance and independence as key strategies for navigating the challenges they faced in their careers. This aligns with the findings of Mhando and Kayuni (2019), who identified coping mechanisms such as building confidence, cultivating a strong work ethic, and adhering to organizational rules and regulations. Officer E stated, "*masapol amu tayo ti privileges tayo tapnu han tayo nga mabully*" (We should be aware of our privileges so that we will not be bullied or taken advantage of), and Officers A and E added, "*maka ad adalak nu agbasbasa ak ken nu ag deng ngeg ak ti experiences ti daduma isu ti pag adalak met lng*" (I educate myself through reading and learning from someone else's experiences). This proactive approach empowers them to manage careers and advocate for their rights. Participants highlighted the role of self-motivation in maintaining a positive mindset and balancing their dual roles. Officer B stated, "*Ibagaak ti bagik nga nasayaat ti araramidek ta dua nga dakkal nga responsibilidad ti igen ko*." (I tell myself that I am doing great because I am doing dual big roles) while Officers C and F shared, "*Kanayun ko ipalagip ti bagik nga agtratabaho ak para ti bagik ken ti pamilyak ken haanak nga naimuot nu mamingsan ket bagik met ti priority*" (I always remind myself that I am working for myself and my family and that I am not being selfish when I sometimes prioritize myself). Ultimately, the core driving force of the mothers is their family, highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, most mothers are currently pursuing higher education degrees, and two are considering continuing studies. They view self-education as a means of protecting themselves and giving themselves more confidence to resist bad organizational habits.

Mothers also need time for self-indulgence as a form of self-help to reduce stress and maintain well-being. Officers s B and G stated: "*Tultulungak ti bagik agited ak ti oras ti bagik nga gumatang ti kayat ko nga bado, makan ken siguraduek nga nasalun atak*" (I help myself by giving myself time to indulge in what I desire, like clothes, food, or making myself healthy).. This helps them distinguish between work and life values. However, unhealthy stress responses, such as



excessive coffee/alcohol consumption, eating junk/sweet food, and over-shopping, which Konttinen (2020) describes as emotional eating, can link depression to obesity, an alarming effect.

Rest and Recreation

Participants emphasized rest and recreation as a key strategy for managing stress and sustaining career growth, highlighting the importance of taking breaks and engaging in relaxing activities. Officers s B and C shared, "*Ag day off ak, ibatik anak ko, ipa awir ko ti sabali apaghiit, iddepek ti phone ko ken aginnanaak laeng iti dayta nga aldaw tapno mangtedak iti aldaw iti bagik nga makapagin-innana iti natalna a panawen*" (I take a day off, leave my child in someone else's care for a while, and turn off my phone and just rest for the day to treat myself with some peaceful time), and Officer D added, "*I treat ko bagik iti paboritok ng merienda or meals*" (I treat myself and buy my favorite snacks or meals). These breaks provide crucial respite from work and family demands, allowing officers s to recharge with renewed energy and highlighting the need to create boundaries for a healthy work-life balance.

Participants highlighted the benefits of connecting with nature and enjoying holidays with loved ones. Officer G stated, "*Mapanak ag walking ken enjoy ko ti fresh air. Mapanak agbisita iti asideg nga banbantay ket mapan ko iappreciate ti nature nu atidog ti break ko*" (I take long walks and just enjoy the air for some time. I visit mountains nearby and appreciate nature when I take long breaks). Officer A shared, "*Agplano ak iti bakasyon or holiday kadtak ti friends ken pamilyak tapnu han ko marikna nga trabaho lng ti rason ti biag. Kaykayat ko nga agkankanta ken ag record ti videos kadtak ti an nak ko just for fun*" (I plan for a vacation or a holiday with friends or family so I can feel that work is not the only thing to be alive for. I like to sing and record videos with my kids to have fun). These activities provide perspective and underscore the importance of life outside of work.

Officers s B and C shared that taking long naps helps them relax, emphasizing that health is of utmost importance since an unhealthy mother disadvantages the family. Taking leave for medical check-ups or recuperation is necessary, as full recuperation fosters a happy, content feeling that contributes to a positive work outlook. This prioritization of self-care aligns with findings that

mothers reprioritize life affairs after childbirth, with the child as their main priority (Valizadeh et al., 2017), making planning crucial for stress reduction and performing tasks efficiently.

Support Group

The findings indicated that support groups, both formal and informal, play a crucial role in helping working mothers navigate their challenges and sustain career growth, highlighting the importance of social support and the power of collective action. Mothers actively leverage support systems to manage work-life conflict. In addition, contemporary communication platforms offer accessibility. Officer E, for instance, stated, "*Nag join ak ti group chat tapnu ada pangiruwark ti frustrations ti trabaho wennu haan ket isu pagdamagak about motherhood*". (I joined group chats to vent out my frustrations at work or ask about motherhood). Furthermore, hiring helps when the need is crucial. Family support is also vital. Officer E stated, "*Very supportive ni husband ko ken pareho kami nga ag share iti responsibilidad mi as parents*." (I have a very supportive husband and both of us compromise on parental duties). Officer G added, "*Dumawatak iti tulong iti pamilyak lalo nu naka duty ak iti 24 hours. Ni mother ko ti tumulong most of the time*" (I ask for help to my family, especially when I have to work for a 24-hour duty. My mother helps me out most of the time). Officer D shared, "*Nu ada problemak ti trabaho, han ko nga awiten daytoy idjay balay nu diket dumawatak ti advice manipod ti pamilyak, pati emotional support ken nu mamingsan pati financial support*" (When I have problems at work, I avoid bringing these home and instead turn to my family for advice, emotional support and sometimes even financial support).

Since organizational policies often fall short, mothers rely on individual resources and actively solicit help from spouses and extended family to mitigate time conflicts. This proactive effort to mobilize support is defined as a help-seeking coping style (Rotondo et al., 2003), underscoring that strong social networks are essential strategies for managing work-life conflict and promoting career success. Other participants also seek other ways, as Officer C emphasized the necessity of spiritual health. The officer stated, "*Agkararagak ken papigsaek ti pammatik*." (I pray and strengthen my faith). Mothers compensate for work-life imbalance by filling the lacking aspect with the dominant one. This means when a mother is



dissatisfied with her job, she purposely puts more effort into improving her family life, or vice-versa. This study describes this strategy, used by women to find balance and solve work-life conflicts, as the patching effect.

Women Empowerment

The findings indicated that working mothers in law enforcement actively engage in women empowerment strategies to support their career growth and create a more equitable work environment. The importance of the role of women in building society and even in aspects that are traditionally known to be dominated by men has been proven to be as important as that of men. Participants explain that to succeed, they must first set the example of being capable of independence and being a strong matriarch of the household.

Participants actively employ women's empowerment by demonstrating competence and strength to challenge stereotypes. Officer G stated, *"Ipakitak iti katrabahok nga napigsa ak emotionally and physically ken kayak nga agperform nga nasayaat iti nadumaduma nga aspeto ti trabahok"* (I show my colleagues at work that I can be as emotionally and physically strong and that I can perform well in various aspects). In addition, Officer F said, *"Adda met ti career aspiration mi, han nga gapu da mother kamin ket nalipatan min ti ambisyon mi"* (Mothers have career aspirations too; just because we become mothers doesn't mean we neglect our ambitions). Officer F emphasized the creation of a supportive environment, stating, *"Mothers should be welcomed, encouraged and treated appropriately by other workers."* Officer A focuses on culture change by saying, *"I teach junior officers to break the culture of just blindly following orders with no judgment."* This empowerment provides the confidence to change bad organizational habits, especially that contemporary labor rights and policies increasingly improve conditions for women.

Mothers are both inspired by and inspire others. Officer D stated, *"I feel empowered when I see successful career stories of mothers in other offices,"* and Officer G added, *"I try to inspire other mothers or women to speak up and to fight off discrimination in the workplace."* When mothers are given the right resources and support, they become valuable assets to an organization. The

findings of the United Nations Women et al. (2020) reveal that training on gender and human rights is rarely compulsory, be it at the recruitment level or otherwise. When in-service gender training is not compulsory, men rarely attend, either because they are not invited or due to a lack of interest. Women officers also report fewer opportunities for international training due to factors like language skills or difficulty traveling for extended periods. Since international efforts significantly influence local policy, this puts women at a huge disadvantage, underscoring the need for organizations to invest in inclusive training and development.

Conclusions

Working mothers in law enforcement achieve significant career growth through: enhanced financial stability (stable job, better budgeting and income), extensive work experience (gained from fieldwork and networking), and improved work competencies (including legal knowledge, emotional toughness, security awareness, and communication skills). Moreover, they have limited career development and succession opportunities, which results in career stagnation. Working mothers experience challenges in their career which are: organizational behavior issues (seniority gaps, preferencing, difficult workplace relations, and conventional expectations), health problems (physical and mental stress), work-Life Imbalance (insufficient time, unsupportive coworkers, and overlapping duties), and underrepresentation in leadership positions. To navigate these barriers, mothers employ resilient, proactive career growth strategies: self-help (self-education, self-motivation, self-indulgence), rest and recreation (taking time off, appreciating nature, holidays), seeking support (from support groups, family, and spiritual sources), and engaging in women empowerment initiatives (teaching positive work behavior, competitiveness, and inspiration). These strategies demonstrate their resilience and proactive approach to managing their careers and personal lives.



Recommendations

This study recommends a multi-pronged approach to support working mothers in law enforcement. The study strongly recommends law enforcement agencies to develop a separate and distinct policy for mothers that will support them in their pregnancy, in giving birth, and in child rearing. This shall fit the rules and regulations, be applicable to law enforcement agencies and improve the working conditions of working mothers in law enforcement agencies. Another policy for law enforcers to possibly adopt is one that develops and strengthens gender and development units to address concerns pertaining to women, bias, prejudice, discrimination among others suited to law enforcement officers. Capacity building may also be considered for all women law enforcement officers. This may aid them in balancing their career and life and apply the coping strategies identified in this study. Finally, an IEC material on the coping strategies identified in this research can be crafted and submitted for copyright and then be distributed to law enforcement officers in the country.

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