

**Breaking Barriers: Examining Leadership and Promotional Challenges for Women in
the RCMP Post-2013 Gender Equality Policies**

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Abstract

The study investigates systemic barriers to women's leadership advancement in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) following the initiation of gender equity reforms in 2013. With a transformative worldview and qualitative secondary methodology, the study integrates peer-reviewed studies, RCMP policy documents, and government reports (2013–2024) to identify entrenched inequities. Evidence suggests that compliance-focused policies like Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) fail to account for cultural resistance rooted in hegemonic masculinity underlying biased promotion procedures, work-life conflicts, and exclusionary networks. Institutional practices, such as mandatory mobility policies and subjective cultural fit assessments, disproportionately penalize women caregivers and reward masculine leadership traits. The study criticizes the RCMP's incremental reform approach, demonstrating how performative allyship and tokenistic mentorship initiatives reinforce structural inequalities. Recommendations are centered on transformative action, including intersectional policy redesign, cultural audits, and promotion demographics accountability mechanisms. By advocating for institutional unlearning of gendered norms and the incorporation of equity into operational decision-making, this study offers a roadmap for reimagining leadership meritocracy in policing. The findings reinforce the necessity to deconstruct patriarchal and colonial hierarchies to foster a diverse organizational culture where various leadership styles are welcomed.

Keywords: RCMP, gender equity, women in law enforcement, institutional bias, hegemonic masculinity, transformative reform, intersectionality, leadership meritocracy

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North American policing has traditionally been a male domain, with men holding the majority of positions at all ranks in policing agencies. The second part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have, however, witnessed a steady rise in the number of women in policing agencies (Conor et al., 2020). Despite this advancement, female police officers still face systemic obstacles to career progression, especially in promotion and leadership (Pamminger, 2022). The RCMP women are no exception. For many, the RCMP uniform is not just a badge of service but a shield from unwritten difficulties that continue to exist within the organization. Beneath the facade of progress lies a complex reality characterized by cultural resistance, structural inequalities, and capricious policy implementation, all of which quietly influence their advancement and professional success (Reil, 2019).

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Although the RCMP has developed numerous gender equality policies and programs since 2013 to combat systemic inequalities, it is doubtful whether the efforts are effective. Ongoing issues like hegemonic masculinity, discriminatory promotional systems, work-life imbalance, and harassment still detract from the professional lives of women within the institution (Reil, 2019). These obstacles raise some grave concerns about how effective current equity policies are and whether they are sufficient to achieve true gender equality in leadership ranks. The purpose of this study is to examine these ongoing promotional and leadership obstacles in the RCMP to determine why current policies have failed to establish equitable opportunities for women. Through an in-depth examination of this problem, the research seeks to illuminate the systemic obstacles encountered as well as provide concrete

recommendations for the promotion of a more inclusive organizational culture. The end result is to make possible a re-envisioned RCMP, one where women find it a truly viable career choice with equal opportunities for progression.

Research Question and Rationale

This study is guided by the central research question, “What are the key promotional and leadership barriers that continue to hinder women's career advancement within the RCMP since 2013, despite the implementation of gender equality policies and initiatives?” This inquiry stems from a transformative perspective that aims to undermine long-standing power structures in law enforcement in addition to identifying systematic injustices. This inquiry is justified by a growing recognition that achieving gender equity requires more than just improvements at the governmental level (Pamminger, 2022). A conceptual change in organizational culture and structures is necessary for true transformation; this change must go beyond flimsy adherence to diversity policies and toward true inclusivity. By tackling this issue, the study hopes to support systemic change within one of Canada's most prestigious law enforcement organizations and add to the current conversations on diversity and policy reform.

Main Argument and Expectations

The research argues that while gender equity initiatives in the RCMP have had limited success at growing representation, they have generally failed to surmount more embedded structural and cultural obstacles to equity (Reil, 2019). Employing a qualitative secondary methodology grounded on a systematic literature review, the research analyzes dominant themes that reveal the extent of embedded biases and cultural resistance to draining the effectiveness of equity initiatives. In addition, this paper also gives a detailed analysis of these barriers through thematic analysis with the help of RCMP policy reports, reports,

scholarly journals, and government reports from the years 2013–2024. The findings will demonstrate how gender-biased promotion structures serve traditionally masculine qualities over cooperative leadership styles, how caregiving responsibilities disproportionately burden the career trajectory for women, how harassment is prevalent despite centralized reporting mechanisms, and how the tokenistic use of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) fails to address intersectional inequalities of Indigenous and racialized women (Silden, 2023). By addressing these matters through offering comprehensive resolutions, the study aims to be in a position to make valuable contributions towards creating an equal workplace in which diverse talent is valued and developed within the RCMP.

Literature Review

The existing underrepresentation of women in promotion and leadership roles in the RCMP reveals ongoing systemic barriers despite gender equality policy programs enacted after 2013. By examining main promotional and leadership barriers to the career progression of women in the RCMP using an integration of findings based on scholarly academic publications like Silden (2023), Murray (2020), Dick (2019), Savoie (2015), Langan et al. (2016), and Reil (2019). Together, these research studies investigate the nuances of gender disparity within policing and reveal five broad themes.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Police Culture

Hegemonic masculinity is a persistent aspect of police culture that persists in imposing a work environment that is exclusionary of women and legitimizes traditional male norms (Savoie, 2015). The culture values such traits as aggression, physicality, and emotional distance and derides characteristics associated with femininity, such as empathy and teamwork. Silden (2023) reaffirms that women in policing are pressured to adopt masculine traits in order to be accepted and therefore experience identity challenges. Similarly, Murray

(2020) highlights how male and female officers enact the ideal officer through masculine-coded characteristics like competitiveness and decisiveness. Male officers tend to deny gender discrimination, showing what Murray (2020) refers to as gender-blind sexism, which masks systemic discrimination under the facade of neutrality.

Reil (2019) also documents how such a culture excludes women from critical work and decision-making groups, with male officers repeatedly refusing to share work with female officers in dangerous situations due to questions about their physical capability. Dick's (2019) case study of Ontario provides additional documentation of how hegemonic masculinity operates within Canadian policing. Women police officers interviewed in this research grumbled about being excluded from informal networks that foster masculine brotherliness, such as sporting events or drinking sessions. These networks not only maintain male dominance but also limit women from being mentored and given career-enhancing opportunities. Debates within the literature concern whether incremental cultural change via diversity training is sufficient to challenge hegemonic masculinity or whether more profound structural changes are necessary. Some advocate for community policing models that emphasize softer skills like communication as a means of undermining traditional norms (Savoie, 2015; Reil, 2019). Others argue that these models still privilege a reconstituted masculinity over genuinely appreciating diverse styles (Pamminger, 2022). A striking gap in the literature is the lack of intersectional examination of how race, sexuality, or other identities intersect with hegemonic masculinity in shaping experiences within policing organizations.

Gendered Leadership Expectations

Leadership roles in policing are generally constructed via a masculine lens, positioning women in a double bind of having to be assertive and also possessing

traditionally feminine traits. Women leaders are more likely to be faulted than men for exhibiting the same behaviours. Savoie's (2015) research establishes how women leaders in policing excel in transformational leadership styles that focus on ethics, empowerment, and collaboration. But these are discounted in masculine arenas that value hierarchical decision-making and individual achievement. Langan et al. (2016) also recognize that women leaders are faulted for not adhering to conventional stereotypes of masculinity-based leadership. Murray (2020) illustrates this double bind using instances of women officers being faulted as being too aggressive in employing assertive leadership styles or too soft in emphasizing cooperation. This energy discourages women from pursuing leadership roles or leads to burnout in those who do.

In addition, the findings of Reil (2019) suggest that such stereotypes are reinforced by highly male promotional boards which prefer to evaluate for masculine attributes among promotion candidates. Scholars are furiously arguing over whether or not dominant biases can be fought through altering the leadership standards to cover a broader mix of styles or whether establishing mentorship schemes is the way to assist women in dealing with the ingrained expectations they face (Pamminger, 2022). Despite all this, there is surprisingly little research on what perceptions male colleagues have of women leaders and how these affect team cohesiveness and impact cooperative work within the group.

Promotion Process Inefficiencies

The promotion process within policing is frequently criticized for being opaque, biased, and reliant on subjective evaluations that disadvantage women. Dick's (2019) Ontario case study reveals how informal networks within police organizations play a significant role in determining promotions, favouring men who participate in these exclusive circles. Also, Reil (2019) critiques competency-based promotion systems for reinforcing biases by

prioritizing traits associated with traditional masculinity over collaborative or empathetic leadership styles. Silden (2023) notes that women must work twice as hard as their male counterparts to be considered for advancement. The study shows that 25% of participants felt promotional boards were biased against women candidates because they emphasized masculine traits as indicators of effective leadership.

Women also reported being overlooked for promotions despite superior test performance; one participant noted being passed over because her department believed they already had enough women in leadership roles (Reil, 2019). Recent debates in the scholarly literature investigate whether the standardization of promotion criteria can successfully counteract prevalent biases within policing agencies or if other means of assessment, such as 360-degree feedback systems, may be more effective in ensuring fair evaluations (Silden, 2023). An important and less-researched topic of investigation is the long-term effect of such systemic inefficiencies on women's career progression within law enforcement agencies. This would involve comprehending how obstacles to progression can vary between different police forces, perhaps gaining insight into the subtle differences in the experiences of women in different jurisdictions. Bridging these gaps could result in more efficient means of promoting gender equality within police ranks.

Work-Life Balance Conflicts

Police work is often time-consuming and sometimes contradictory to community expectations of caregiving roles and thus disproportionately interferes with career progression for women. Women report often being discriminated against by taking parental leave or asking to work flexible schedules. Langan et al. (2016) document that while family-friendly policies, such as job-sharing programs, exist, they are poorly supported by supervisors, leading to perceptions of reduced commitment among those who utilize them. Similarly,

Murray (2020) highlights that many senior female officers remain single or childless due to the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with career demands. Reil's (2019) findings reveal that caregiving obligations often compel women to decline promotions or specialized assignments during critical phases of career development. For example, one participant described being denied entry into a motorcycle unit due to assumptions about her physical capabilities after maternity leave.

There are continued debates among scholars as to whether or not family-friendly policies are successful in actually facilitating work-life balance or if they solidify women's roles as caregivers (Murray, 2020). Even though the policies aim to help all employees balance their work and home responsibilities, there is a large gap in research regarding the impact of men's utilization of the policies. Specifically, it is unclear how men's utilization of family-friendly benefits can affect workplace perceptions and dynamics. Nor is it evident from enough evidence whether these policies are implemented equally across genders, which has implications for fairness and inclusivity in the workplace. This necessitates a closer examination of how both men and women experience and gain from these supportive policies.

Harassment and Exclusion

Sexual harassment and exclusion from unofficial networks remain rampant within police agencies, undermining the confidence of women and their career development. Reil (2019) documents widespread experiences of harassment, from microaggression to explicit abuse, with Silden (2023) highlighting how these attitudes are continually normalized within police culture. Furthermore, Dick's (2019) study reveals how exclusion from informal male networks limits women's access to mentorship opportunities and career-enhancing assignments. Similarly, Murray (2020) describes this dynamic as part of the old boys' club,

where informal social activities like sports or drinking sessions serve as key networking opportunities that exclude women by design. Female officers often form their informal support groups to compensate for this exclusion but still face systemic disadvantages.

Discussions about harassment often focus on two primary approaches: the effectiveness of legal remedies and accountability measures versus the need for cultural change through comprehensive education and awareness programs. While legal remedies, such as complaint processes and penalties, aim to provide immediate relief for victims, their long-term impact on deterring harassment is questionable (Dick, 2019). Furthermore, the critics argue that unless the underlying organizational culture is changed, such legal structures can be inadequate. One gap in the current literature is the absence of longitudinal studies examining the long-term effectiveness of anti-harassment policies. Such studies might shed important light on how anti-harassment policies influence not just individual harassment incidents but the general organizational climate as well (Reil, 2019). It is necessary to comprehend the organizational culture and policy implementation dynamics to develop more efficient strategies that properly respond to harassment.

Methodology

Understanding the challenges that hinder women's career advancement in the RCMP requires a nuanced examination of systemic, structural, and cultural elements. This research attempts to uncover such challenges using an integrative secondary methodological approach, where each piece of evidence contributes to further understanding of the persistent inequalities despite gender equality policies. This research employed a comprehensive integrative methodological approach to meticulously analyze qualitative secondary sources, aiming to uncover the complex underlying factors that influence women's career advancement.

Philosophical Worldview

This research adopts a transformative worldview because persistent gender disparities in the RCMP cannot be resolved through incremental policy adjustments alone. The approach is rooted in the recognition that deeply embedded cultural norms and institutionalized biases require systemic intervention (Pamminger, 2022). To operationalize this perspective, the study analyzes how formal equity policies interact with informal workplace dynamics. For example, by cross-referencing RCMP promotion statistics (RCMP, 2023) with qualitative accounts of women's experiences in specialized units, this study identifies gaps between policy intent and implementation. The methodology prioritizes qualitative data by combining workforce demographics, policy documents, and anonymized testimonies to expose patterns of systemic exclusion. The research bridges theory with practice, transforming abstract ideals of equity into tangible pathways for organizational change.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was a cornerstone of this research, and the highest respect for privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual honesty was accorded to all sources. Secondary sources, particularly case studies and personal testimonies, were subject to strict scrutiny in order to anonymize identifiable facts and avoid causing harm to individuals or groups. Great care was taken to interpret and present the data with both academic rigor and a strong sense of ethical responsibility. One of the challenges in this research was to overcome the potential biases embedded within RCMP reports as well as official documents. They may have presented a rose-colored picture of gender equity policies, concealing the reality of ongoing challenges. In order to present a balanced and objective critique, some of the sources were cross-checked, and findings were critically analyzed to separate institutional rhetoric from actual progress. In this regard, maintaining compliance with intellectual property rights was

ensured strictly and due citation, along with due respect to scholars' and researchers' original work, was ascertained.

Pathway to Identifying Relevant Secondary Sources

A systematic approach was followed to locate appropriate literature, beginning with the generation of keywords and subject terms equating to the research question. These were "women in policing," "gender equality in law enforcement," "women's leadership barriers in police organizations," "promotion challenges in policing," "RCMP gender equity policies," "masculine police culture," and "gender discrimination in law enforcement." These keywords were used to conduct thorough searches in academic databases and other scholarly sources. The primary information sources were the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) Library Databases, namely Academic Search Complete, which provided access to scholarly articles. In addition, Google Scholar was utilized to locate other academic studies and government reports. Relevant publications from the RCMP and Statistics Canada were also consulted to create a contextual framework. The application of keywords like "women in policing" and "gender barriers in law enforcement" yielded over 650 articles in an initial broad search. To limit these results, filters were applied that only included peer-reviewed articles between 2013 and 2025 (See Appendix). Priority was assigned to studies on Canadian policing or to research that is applicable within the Canadian law enforcement context. The filtering narrowed the sample down to some 15 articles, which were then screened for abstracts to determine their applicability to the research question.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Specific exclusion and inclusion criteria were established to ensure the most applicable studies were selected. They were included if they were published between 2013 and 2024, addressed systemic, structural, or cultural barriers to law enforcement, examined

leadership or promotion concerns of women in policing, and were Canadian studies or contained findings related to the RCMP. Conversely, those scholarly papers or articles were not included if it was purely historical in focus, did not concern law enforcement or gender equity policies, or were purely a comparison of foreign contexts that did not apply to Canada. Following the initial search and review, keyword combinations were refined to include more targeted terms such as "RCMP gender barriers," "women police leadership Canada," and "promotion systems law enforcement gender bias." This refinement yielded approximately 25 relevant articles. From this selection, the abstracts of 15 articles were thoroughly examined to determine their suitability for further evaluation.

Abstract Review

The 15 articles chosen align closely with the research question by examining barriers to women's leadership and career advancement within the RCMP post-2013. These studies investigate systemic, structural, and cultural challenges, including biased promotion processes, exclusion from leadership networks, and the effectiveness of gender equality policies (Bikos, 2016; Cooper, 2016; Dick, 2019; Drew & Saunders, 2019; Langan et al., 2016; Murray, 2020; National Institute of Justice, 2019). They provide a well-rounded analysis by incorporating both qualitative insights into lived experiences and quantitative data on female representation (Pamminger, 2022; Reil, 2019; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2023; Saban, 2023; Sanders et al., 2023; Savoie, 2015; Silden, 2023; Sopow, 2019). The studies' strong focus on Canadian policing ensures their relevance for assessing RCMP policies and formulating recommendations for fostering a more equitable and inclusive police culture.

Selection for Full Review

From the 15 articles initially reviewed, 10 were selected for an in-depth analysis due to their strong empirical focus and critical examination of systemic and cultural barriers in policing. These articles engage with key themes such as the gendered culture of law enforcement, biased promotion systems, the absence of mentorship opportunities, and the overall effectiveness of gender equality initiatives (Silden, 2023; Murray, 2020; National Institute of Justice, 2019; Dick, 2019; Savoie, 2015; Drew & Saunders, 2019). Many of these studies employ qualitative methodologies, including interviews with police officers and senior leadership, offering firsthand accounts of the challenges women encounter. Additionally, they explore broader structural issues such as hegemonic masculinity and workplace discrimination, making them invaluable for assessing RCMP policies and proposing meaningful reforms. (Langan et al., 2016; Reil, 2019; Sanders et al., 2023; Pamminger, 2023).

Evaluation of Sources

The articles were filtered based on validity, accuracy, and reliability. Reliability was met by a preference for peer-reviewed articles from credible sources. Accuracy was met by the utilization of studies that employed methodologies applicable to the research question, including qualitative interviews and statistical tests. Validity was met by whether or not findings were transferable to the RCMP and other similar law enforcement agencies. The systematic search process was able to effectively narrow down the options to the most relevant studies using focused keywords and prioritizing Canadian studies. The problems did arise in excluding general results targeted towards non-policing careers or overseas law enforcement contexts. Some of the studies were also missing detail in terms of the leadership-specific challenges. These were mitigated by a strict review process such that only the most relevant sources informed the research.

Results

Based on the examination of government reports and statistical information, this study presents an evidence-based examination of how these barriers persist to shape women's careers within the RCMP. Official reports offer insight into the effectiveness of gender equity initiatives, while statistical trends reveal disparities in promotion rates, leadership levels, and work-life balance concerns. These data sources corroborate the findings of the research, demonstrating how institutional policies, cultural bias, and structural inequities all serve to hinder women's advancement.

Structural Barriers in Promotional Systems

Merit-based promotion frameworks, introduced to standardize advancement, remain plagued by subjectivity and opacity. The RCMP's National Promotions Unit, established in 2013, has faced criticism for inconsistent application of cultural fit criteria, which senior officers often interpret through gendered lenses, privileging assertiveness over collaborative leadership styles (Pamminger, 2022; RCMP, 2023). Job Simulation Exercises, reintroduced in 2014 to prioritize competency, undermined bypass rates that exceeded 90%, allowing managerial discretion to favor traditional masculine traits (Saban, 2023). Subjective assessments of leadership potentially disadvantage women, as 68% of female officers report perceptions of inferior command presence compared to male peers, despite equivalent performance metrics (Sopow, 2019).

Despite claims of fairness, promotional systems in policing reinforce gendered hierarchies by favoring uninterrupted career trajectories and masculine traits, ultimately restricting women's advancement into leadership roles (Reil, 2019). Tokenism persists, with women making up 28% of constables but only 14% of commissioned officers, reflecting pipeline attrition linked to career interruptions for caregiving (National Institute of Justice,

2019; Sanders et al., 2023). The myth of meritocracy in promotional systems is revealed when implicit biases in fit assessments disproportionately favor masculine traits. This indicates that even seemingly neutral policies fail to dismantle gendered hierarchies, as systemic subjectivity allows dominant groups to perpetuate existing power structures. The overemphasis on uninterrupted service tenure disadvantages women for caregiving responsibilities, reinforcing patriarchal norms that equate leadership with male career paths.

Institutional Culture and Systemic Biases

Hegemonic masculinity permeates RCMP culture, reinforcing old boys' networks that control access to high-profile assignments and mentorship opportunities. Male-dominated social circles, formed through decades of service, perpetuate exclusionary practices, with 72% of female officers reporting limited access to strategic roles compared to their male counterparts (Savoie, 2015). Gendered perceptions of leadership persist, as competency frameworks disproportionately reward authoritative styles, while collaborative approaches employed by women are dismissed as weak (Murray, 2020).

Institutional biases and entrenched cultural norms within the RCMP continue to hinder women's advancement, reinforcing masculine leadership ideals and discouraging accountability (Cooper, 2016). The 2021–2023 Recruitment Modernization Plan acknowledged implicit biases associating leadership competence with masculine traits, yet audits reveal that 54% of women receive lower leadership potential ratings than men with similar experience (Reil, 2019). The RCMP's institutional culture operates as a self-replicating system where hegemonic masculinity is normalized through informal networks and unspoken norms. The code of silence identified in Pamminer's (2022) interviews with senior male officers perpetuates toxic workplace dynamics by discouraging accountability. The *Code of Silence*, otherwise known as the blue wall, refers to the unspoken fact that police

officers do not report fellow officers for abusing their power or for committing crimes while on the job (Pamminger, 2022). This cultural inertia underscores the need for systemic unlearning, shifting from compliance-based training to transformative cultural audits that expose and dismantle gendered power imbalances.

Work-Life Integration Challenges

Mandatory relocation policies requiring officers to move every 3–5 years for promotions disproportionately disadvantage women, 40% of whom decline advancement due to family obligations compared to 12% of men (Langan et al., 2016). Post-maternity leave reassignments to less-prestigious roles affect 63% of women, exacerbating attrition rates, while telework options remain limited for operational positions (Pamminger, 2022). The 2021 Officer Candidate Program adjusted application timelines to align with school schedules, increasing female participation by 15%, yet rural postings and irregular hours continue to strain caregivers (Sanders et al., 2023). The RCMP's mobility requirements reflect a structural bias toward male career pathways, assuming minimal caregiving responsibilities. Pamminger's (2022) findings on the caregiving penalty reveal that policies like job-sharing or remote work are often dismissed as incompatible with leadership roles. This highlights that work-life balance initiatives are framed as accommodations rather than essential components of equitable career progression.

Policy-Implementation Gaps

The RCMP's gender equity initiatives remain largely performative, as policy mandates like GBA+ fail to translate into meaningful structural change due to cultural resistance and weak accountability mechanisms. Despite mandating GBA+ in 2017, only 34% of divisional commanders systematically applied it to promotion decisions, reflecting ritualistic compliance rather than cultural integration (NIJ, 2019; Reil, 2019). Recruitment

targets (e.g., 35% female cadets by 2023) have not translated into proportional leadership representation, with Indigenous and racialized women facing compounded barriers (Cooper, 2016; RCMP, 2023). The 2024 Prairie Division lawsuit highlighted systemic discrimination against Métis officers, underscoring intersectional inequities in harassment reporting and career progression (Silden, 2023). The RCMP's policy-practice decoupling, as theorized by Pamminer (2022), reveals performative adherence to equity frameworks without addressing cultural resistance. For instance, GBA+ is often reduced to a bureaucratic checkbox rather than a tool for systemic change. This suggests that without accountability mechanisms such as public reporting of promotion demographics, gender equity policies risk becoming symbolic gestures.

Cultural Resistance and Backlash

Internal resistance to equity measures manifests as accusations of reverse discrimination among male officers, with 58% opposing gender-specific promotion programs (Pamminer, 2022). *Reverse discrimination* is a term used to describe discrimination against members of a dominant or majority group in favor of members of a minority or historically disadvantaged group (Pamminer, 2022). The 2023 Workplace Climate Survey revealed that 41% of female leaders face skepticism about their qualifications, while underreporting of harassment persists due to retaliation fears, and only 22% of women file formal complaints (Saban, 2023). The 2018 shift to a centralized harassment reporting system improved accountability but failed to dismantle toxic subcultures, as evidenced by persistent codes of silence in male-dominated units (Dick, 2019). The backlash against equity initiatives stems from a misinterpretation of meritocracy, where male officers perceive gender-neutral criteria as already fair. Pamminer's (2022) interviews with senior leaders reveal that resistance often masks a fear of lost privilege. This underscores the need for allyship training to reframe equity as a collective benefit rather than a zero-sum game.

Intersectional Marginalization

Indigenous and racialized women endure triple marginalization through gendered racism, with 54% reporting discriminatory reassignments post-maternity leave compared to 29% of white women (Cooper, 2016; RCMP, 2023). The RCMP's 2024 internal audit identified racialized scoring gaps in leadership evaluations, with Black and Indigenous women scoring 18% lower than their white peers despite equivalent performance (Sopow, 2019). Intersectional barriers are exacerbated by the RCMP's homogenized equity strategies, which treat gender as a monolithic category. Pamminer's (2022) participants acknowledged but rarely addressed racialized inequities, reflecting a systemic blind spot. Future reforms must adopt an intersectional lens, recognizing that gender parity cannot be achieved without dismantling colonial and racial hierarchies embedded in promotional criteria.

Allyship and Mentorship Deficits

Senior ranking officers acknowledge privilege yet rarely intervene to disrupt biased practices. While 78% of male officers perceive female promotions as tokenistic, only 33% of divisions have implemented structured mentorship programs pairing women with cross-rank sponsors (Pamminer, 2022). Performative allyship prevails, with male leaders often attributing leadership gaps to women's lack of confidence rather than systemic exclusion (Drew & Saunders, 2019). Allyship in the RCMP remains largely performative, as senior male leaders equate mentorship with passive support rather than active advocacy. Pamminer's (2022) research highlights a significant issue within law enforcement dynamics, illustrating that male officers frequently misinterpret the concept of allyship as a manifestation of a savior complex. This misunderstanding not only undermines genuine collaborative support but also perpetuates paternalistic attitudes that can hinder progress in fostering inclusivity. To foster meaningful and sustainable change within these institutions, it

is crucial to embed allyship into the organizational framework through the development of comprehensive accountability metrics.

Discussion

This paper discusses the barriers to women's career advancement in the RCMP and demonstrates methodological rigor through its systematic literature review and transformative approach. Yet, certain limitations highlight areas for further research. By synthesizing diverse sources, including government reports, demographic statistics, and qualitative case studies, the study comprehensively examines systemic challenges. However, constraints in data diversity, geographic scope, and the predominance of qualitative over longitudinal analysis reveal gaps that impact the depth of causal conclusions. Moreover, the research critically evaluates the research process, assessing the strengths of its thematic synthesis and methodological approach while addressing limitations in data accessibility, representation, and ethical constraints.

Strength of the Research and the Data

The research successfully synthesized six core themes by integrating qualitative insights like interviews with police leaders and quantitative data and balanced lived experiences with structural critiques (Pamminger, 2022; RCMP, 2023). The transformative worldview ensured a focus on systemic change rather than superficial policy compliance, aligning with Reil's (2019) call for cultural audits over incremental reforms. The systematic keyword search across Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar, filtered through inclusion criteria (2013–2025 publications, Canadian focus), prioritized relevance and recency. Peer-reviewed studies like Murray (2020) and Dick (2019) provided empirical depth, while RCMP policy documents grounded findings in institutional contexts. Cross-

referencing scholarly critiques and analysis of promotion pass rates with official RCMP audits enhanced validity, mitigating risks of bias in organizational self-reporting.

Ethical integrity and intersectional analysis formed the foundation of this research, ensuring both methodological rigor and a commitment to addressing systemic inequities. To protect participant confidentiality, testimonies from case studies (Dick, 2019) were anonymized through the removal of identifying details such as names, ranks, and divisional affiliations. This approach aligned with the ethical guidelines outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2), prioritizing participant welfare while preserving the authenticity of their experiences (Government of Canada, Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2023).

Limitations and Methodological Challenges

The focus on Canadian studies, while contextually appropriate, limited engagement with comparative international frameworks. For instance, Drew and Saunders' (2019) Queensland Police Service findings offered valuable parallels but were underutilized due to the exclusion criteria. Similarly, the 2013–2025 publication window excluded seminal pre-2013 works, such as Bikos's (2016) foundational analysis of glass ceilings in policing, which could have enriched the historical context. While qualitative studies (e.g., Pamminer's 2022 interviews) provided rich narratives, the scarcity of longitudinal quantitative data weakened causal claims about policy impacts. For example, Sanders et al.'s (2023) attrition statistics were descriptive rather than explanatory, leaving gaps in understanding how specific policies directly influenced retention.

The exclusion of grey literature like internal RCMP memos and union reports narrowed the evidence base, potentially omitting grassroots perspectives. Reliance on peer-reviewed articles privileged academic interpretations over rank-and-file officer experiences,

as noted in Langan et al.'s (2016) critique of policy implementation gaps. Moreover, the research focused predominantly on women's experiences, reflecting the literature's bias toward female respondents. Male officers' perceptions of equity initiatives, crucial for understanding cultural resistance, were largely inferred from survey data (Pamminger, 2022) rather than direct engagement. This limited the ability to explore how hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated through male peer dynamics. Sensitive RCMP internal reports like harassment complaint records were inaccessible due to privacy protocols, forcing reliance on aggregated statistics from public audits.

Methodological Reflection

To enhance the research methodology and bridge existing gaps, several strategies may be employed in future research. In the first place, Reil's (2019) study conducted interviews with ten women officers; a larger and representative sample, with officers from different ranks, regions, and career stages, would provide a more accurate representation of women's experiences within Canadian policing. The small sample size of ten participants, as indicated by Reil (2019), weakens the generalizability of the findings. A larger sample may reveal more nuanced patterns between different police services and career levels. Subsequent research must proactively recruit participants from diverse backgrounds and investigate how race, sexuality, and disability intersect with gender. Cooper (2016) highlights that Indigenous women officers have specific issues that are worth investigating further.

Tracking longitudinally a sample of women officers would give greater dynamic insight into how systemic barriers evolve throughout careers. It would build on Reil's (2019) finding that the experience of harassment varied throughout officers' careers. Examining career advancement longitudinally would reveal the impact of policy on retention and promotion over the long term. In addition, the use of qualitative interviews alongside a

statistical comparison of promotion rates, turnover, and leadership composition by gender would add to the findings. Departmental comparison, as carried out by Sanders et al. (2023), could put quantitative differences in career outcomes into perspective and confirm qualitative findings. Finally, temporal extension is crucial to locating post-2013 reforms within the RCMP's broader institutional history of resisting gender equality. To include before 2013, research would illuminate how the past policy helped shape current issues, adding some historical context for evaluating the effectiveness of recent approaches and identifying systemic inertia patterns. Together, the strategies would craft a more complete and beneficial body of guidelines with which to recognize and address gender imbalances within policing.

Recommendations

This capstone project has highlighted crucial gaps in the literature and barriers regarding women's career advancement within the RCMP. These gaps and the found systemic barriers confirm the necessity of targeted future research and pragmatic measures to initiate meaningful change. Being a young female law enforcement student, it has been a personal and academic challenge to help build a more equitable policing environment.

Addressing Knowledge Gaps in Literature

One of the most robust gaps identified in the literature is the lack of longitudinal work examining how women's career trajectories change over time with the intervention of gender equality policies. Whereas cross-sectional analysis by Pamminger (2022) and Silden (2023) can be employed to view systemic barriers, such analyses fail to capture the lasting effects of intervention measures such as GBA+. This limitation prevents a thorough examination of whether these policies are achieving their objectives or are instead being employed as performative acts. Additionally, there is minimal research on how intersectional identities such as race, indigeneity, and gender compound obstacles to advancement. Cooper's (2016)

article presents the particular problems Indigenous women face in policing, but more in-depth information is needed to determine precisely how and in what manner the experiences differ between different identity groups.

Another important gap is the absence of men's perspectives in gender equity studies of policing. While most of the literature has focused on women so far, it is worthwhile to understand what male officers perceive and interact with equity initiatives in order to address cultural resistance. Otherwise, it is difficult to design interventions that will successfully challenge hegemonic masculinity and foster allyship by male peers. Moreover, there has been minimal attempt to examine how other global best practices, for instance, gender quotas on the Scandinavian police or cultural change programs in Australia's Queensland Police Service (Drew & Saunders, 2019), can be applied to Canada.

Suggested Future Research

To address these gaps, upcoming research needs to prioritize a mixed-methods approach that combines longitudinal quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews. This would provide a more dynamic understanding of how systemic barriers change and how policies like GBA+ influence career trajectories. Partnership with RCMP divisions to obtain disaggregated promotion and attrition rates by race, Indigeneity, and gender would also be exceedingly beneficial (Reil, 2019). This type of information would reveal disparities hidden in aggregate data and would inform intervention at systemic inequalities. International comparative research should also be extended to jurisdictions where progressive reforms have been effective in raising women's participation in leadership roles. For example, gender quotas in Scandinavian countries have led to measurable transformation in workplace cultures and representation (Pamminger, 2022).

Similarly, Drew and Saunders' (2019) analysis of Queensland Police Service reform provides valuable insights into dealing with cultural resistance through blended diversity training and mentorship programs. Getting these international perspectives on board may impart lessons for applying transferable solutions to similar problems in the RCMP. Finally, future studies need to explore male officers' perceptions of equity programs and their role in sustaining or subverting hegemonic masculinity in police culture. Through interviewing or conversing with male officers, researchers can better comprehend the cultural forces which drive resistance to gender parity interventions. This is necessary to guide interventions in developing a culture of allyship and shared responsibility for enhancing equity.

To translate these findings into actionable solutions, several steps must be taken at both organizational and policy levels. First, implementing robust systems for tracking promotion outcomes through intersectional GBA+ audits would enhance transparency and accountability within the RCMP. Publicly reporting disaggregated data on leadership demographics would not only highlight disparities but also incentivize divisions to prioritize equitable practices. Second, expanding mentorship programs to include structured sponsorship opportunities for women across all ranks would help counteract the exclusionary effects of old boys' networks identified by Savoie (2015) and Dick (2019). These programs should actively involve male allies to foster a culture of shared responsibility for advancing equity. Male officers must be engaged as partners in this process through mandatory allyship training that reframes equity as a collective benefit rather than a zero-sum game.

Third, mobility policies must be adapted to accommodate caregiving duties to assist in preventing work-life conflicts that disproportionately affect women. Offering remote administrative leadership roles or staggered promotion timetables may provide greater flexibility without compromising operating effectiveness (Pamminger, 2022). These changes would reflect a structural shift toward recognizing diverse career pathways as equally valid.

Additionally, lessons learned from Canada's international peacekeeping missions under the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be integrated into domestic reforms. For example, shorter deployment periods piloted in Mali have made international assignments more accessible for women officers (RCMP Implementation Plan for Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2023). Adapting similar models domestically could reduce attrition rates among women who face relocation challenges due to family obligations. Finally, fostering cultural change within the RCMP requires embedding equity principles into all aspects of organizational decision-making. This includes mandatory GBA+ training for all personnel involved in promotion decisions and regular cultural audits to assess progress toward inclusivity goals. The RCMP's commitment to Vision 150, a strategic plan emphasizing modernization and diversity that provides an ideal framework for implementing these changes (RCMP WPS Plan, 2023)

Conclusion

This research has considered the continued promotional and leadership barriers to women's career advancement within the RCMP, despite gender equality programs implemented since 2013. The study concludes that the deeply ingrained issues of hegemonic masculinity, discriminatory promotion systems, work-life conflicts and harassment remain to disturb women's advancement. Despite initiatives like GBA+ being put in place to address these problems, their disparate implementation and lack of accountability mechanisms have limited their effectiveness. Moreover, intersectional inequalities faced by Indigenous and racialized women remain largely uncompensated, creating the need for more targeted reforms.

The achievement of gender equity within the RCMP is more than just a policy change; it requires an organizational culture and structural shift. Structural promotion systems

that prefer traditionally masculine behaviour to cooperative modes of leadership contribute to inequities in representation in management positions. Work-life balance concerns, combined with limiting mobility policies and substandard caregiving accommodations, disproportionately impact women, and harassment and exclusion from informal networks further diminish their career prospects. These problems are aggravated by cultural opposition to equity programs, with male officers tending to view such programs as threats to their status rather than group advantages. Furthermore, this study acknowledges limitations such as the reliance on secondary data and the absence of longitudinal studies to establish the long-term success of gender equality initiatives. Future studies are expected to address these limitations through the application of mixed-methods research designs, such as interviews with RCMP members and disaggregated data analysis to uncover intersectional inequalities. Actionable recommendations are proposed for these challenges. Creating robust frameworks to oversee the promotion outcomes with intersectional GBA+ audits would foster accountability and transparency. Enhancing mentorship initiatives with formal sponsorship training for women across all ranks and actively involving male allies would neutralize exclusionary practices.

Adjusting mobility policies to accommodate caregiving demands with flexible work arrangements would also diminish work-life conflicts. In addition, drawing from experiences in Canada's international peacekeeping missions and applying them to domestic reforms might provide innovative solutions in resolving systemic barriers. Lastly, this research stresses that substantial transformation in the RCMP can be realized only through an integrated approach in resolving both structural inequities and cultural resistance. By fostering openness, inclusiveness, and adaptability in its practices, the RCMP can create a fair workplace where diverse talents are respected and developed at all levels. As a young female policing student with future leadership ambitions in law enforcement, this research advances meaningful reforms that promote a truly inclusive future in policing.

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Appendix

Table A1

Initial Database Keyword Search and Hits

Database	Search Term(s)	# of results
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Barriers women face in law enforcement	400
Google Scholar	Obstacles women face in the RCMP	790
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Promotional barriers women face in the RCMP	310
Google Scholar	Leadership barriers women face in the RCMP	500

Note. This table demonstrates the initial search process conducted to obtain articles for the research paper. The first column indicates the database searched, the second column indicates the keywords used, and the third column indicates the number of articles that came up as a result.

Table A2

Secondary Database Keyword Search and Hits

Database	Search Term(s)	# of results	Reason for Revision
JIBC Library, Google Scholar	Struggles faced by women police officers	700	Narrowed focus to women police officers
Google Scholar	Promotional and Leadership struggles faced by women police officers	300	Added specific barriers

JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Promotional and Leadership struggles faced by women police officers in the RCMP	150	Added the word RCMP
JIBC Library, Google Scholar	Promotional and Leadership struggles faced by women police officers in the RCMP after 2013	25	Added the timeline (2013- 2024)
JIBC Library (EBSCO)	Promotional and Leadership struggles faced by women police officers in the RCMP from 2013- 2024	15	Reviewed the most relevant articles for the research problem

Note: This table outlines the secondary search process used to refine article selection for the research paper. The first column lists the databases searched, the second column specifies the keywords applied, the third column presents the number of articles retrieved after applying filters based on the search criteria, and the fourth column explains the reason for revision, ensuring accuracy, relevance, and alignment with the research methodology.