

Gender Equity: From Matron to Mattering

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Abstract

Times are changing in correctional leadership as more women are taking their seat at the table. The call for review of gender equity in correctional organizations has been a hot topic in the public safety arena across the nation. Jails of various size throughout the state were asked to respond to a survey to establish a baseline. Although, gender equity issues will undoubtedly continue to exist and attention will need to be given when they surface; it appears the state of Florida is heeding the call and survey results are in and so are women in correctional leadership roles.

Introduction

Up until approximately thirty years ago females in law enforcement would have been viewed as a rarity in the profession as males were dominating the workforce. The culture of the profession was one of valor and heroism and thought by the good ole' boys to be for the strongest of men. Much has changed over the years and today, women working in law enforcement is not a new concept however, they are a very slowly increasing demographic. Research denotes there are a variety of reasons for this. Among some rationales are the differences in treatment of women and men and the roles they are assigned as well as the difference in workplace culture. Although, women have taken more interest in the profession there still seems to be a reasonable amount of disparity in how they are assigned in the workforce. Which is why many leaders in the field have taken interest in looking into gender equity as it relates to women across the public safety professions.

Gender equity as it pertains to the research in this paper represents the opportunities that exist for males and females in leadership roles within corrections. Equity is specific to the needs of an individual and their fair treatment and is not to be confused with equality. Research has shown that women and men have different needs in the workforce and different qualities which make them unique in their abilities to perform these duties. All too often when equity is not applied appropriately this can lead to disparagement in opportunities. Therefore, it is important to understand while women and men will not be equal in this lifetime, it is important for the opportunities among them to be fair or at least available. In order for this to occur we must research the gender bias in existence and help educate on the benefit of increasing opportunities in order to ensure we are enabling the future generations of women to find their opportunity.

In a recent conference of the American Jails Association held in Louisville, Kentucky; President Elias Diggins announced a challenge among corrections professionals to respond to gender equity in the profession. During this training some distinguished women in corrections spoke on behalf of this initiative and the consensus among them was to: create opportunities by demonstrating they exist, offer training to a

majority versus the select few, and to ensure there is safety and that it is felt when you reach the seat at the table (American Jails, 2019). Why this is important today more than ever is because statistically women live longer than men which in turn means they will need to secure income for themselves and their children throughout life and well beyond retirement. Additionally, women are often the sole provider for families with children under the age of eighteen (Roy, 2017). Therefore, if access to growth in leadership and the ability to obtain higher wages are deferred women get hit a lot harder based on these facts.

So the challenge presented in seeking to research gender equity in leadership in the field of corrections is to review the history of women in corrections and the current statistics to engage the growth or disparity in opportunity. Where there is a lack we must ask the important questions: Do opportunities exist for both women and men? What roles do women currently hold in Corrections? What are some of the issues presented which deter women from promotion to leadership roles? How can correctional organizations encourage women to participate in leadership?

Literature Review

The History:

Very few women originally worked in the field of corrections with less than seven percent documented as Correctional Officers in the 1970's after almost forty years of leadership groups and organizations working to influence participation in this line of work (MTC Institute, 2008). It has been thought that women in corrections originally began via a band of volunteers who sought to better female prisoners and teach them foundational skills to improve their lives. This group of women was referred to as "prison matrons" and began the very first jobs women were allowed in the male dominant profession. The roles given to the women were in caring for other females and was at the time considered to be socially acceptable to the male dominated workforce as it did not jeopardize the borders of the once strictly defined roles of women (caretakers) and men (providers) (Kakar, 2002).

It wasn't until roughly 1972 when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 expanded to include state and local governments in the prohibition of discrimination in the workforce on the basis of sex. The response to this reformation allowed correctional entities to begin the hiring of women in roles as correctional officers. Subsequently, there were cases such as *Everson V. MDOC* in which class action suits were filed amidst sexual assault of female prisoners in the prison system which created more opportunities for women's roles in supervising female prisoners. Women were beginning to speak up and let their voices be heard for their rights to respect and fair treatment (Labelle & Kubiak, 2004).

In keeping with the theory, history is a good predictor of future outcomes, it is important to understand that although males were dominant among the correctional profession, especially in leadership roles, statistics were showing there was a need for change. Studies of these traits are helping to improve demographics and women are beginning to receive their place. Studies suggest when compared to males women

receive higher education, support the rules, and handle stress through better means and as such statistics will undoubtedly increase in the future (Winters, 2019).

The Current Statistics:

In the category of Correctional officer there is data from a 2007 source validating women in corrections currently make up roughly forty-two percent of the workforce (Winters, 2019). These numbers seem high compared to a more recent 2010 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics showing females in law enforcement continue to lack representation with somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent of the workforce (Langton, 2010). Additionally, the Federal Bureau of prisons data denotes on average women make up to twenty seven percent of the workforce as recently as 2019 (Campbell, 2019). So it appears these demographics may in fact be growing although these notably vary agency to agency and across different roles in the profession.

A subsequent study revealed women in corrections leadership have increased in at least fourteen states and make up somewhere around twenty percent of employees in leadership positions (MTC Institute, 2008). These numbers do not include the rural departments who rarely employ females as well as the many agencies who report they have no women in their top level positions and in some cases do not receive female applicants. The research in this source also suggests there is a lull or stagnancy in the hiring of females which is the cause for concern driving this research and in order to understand this more fully we can look at the opportunities which currently exist (Shelly, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011).

The Opportunities and current roles:

Research from the MTC Institute suggests women will continue to increase in the workforce in both first line and leadership positions by at least ten percent which unfortunately only takes into account the seven states who provided data in their research sampling. Therefore, there is a greater likelihood these numbers are already higher or will be much higher in the years to come. "The workforce numbers and demographics support the fact that women are playing a much larger role in the workplace, in general, and in criminal justice specifically, and they will be a more significant human resources asset in the future" (MTC Institute, 2008). Based on the desire for women in the field of corrections it is important to acknowledge the opportunities that could exist.

Women have been known to be skilled communicators and there is a thought process in which disturbances can be quelled where one is willing to take the time to listen. Therefore, almost naturally women have been able to seek opportunity in social service related positions in the field of corrections. Additionally, opportunities for women in positions which require interaction with offenders has demonstrated when focusing on re-entry of offenders into the community; women have qualities that allow offenders to be "more likely to discuss medical and educational concerns with female officers" (MTC Institute, 2008). So while some may see women having no place in the corrections field others see women as a resource tool where brains are needed over brawns. These traits can be beneficial in the leadership role as the goal in these positions is in influencing others which often requires seeing less of oneself and building others. Lastly, as it

pertains to positions of leadership women are obtaining higher education at a faster rate than the male counterparts and research suggests women bring a different outlook and perspective which can create positive change in the surrounding environment (MTC Institute, 2008).

Undoubtedly, there are cases in which women have been accepted in the profession from more progressive and responsive agencies. There, have been noted instances in which women became leaders because other female leaders saw them fit to endure the tasks of leadership. But, one thing remains certain and it is necessary to promote this ideology to keep opportunities for women in corrections leadership progressing. The ideology is simple and entails understanding the women who get selected and promoted to these leadership positions do not get the opportunity due to their gender. The opportunities are offered to these individuals because they “exceed the job requirements, possessed exceptional knowledge, skills and abilities, and during the interview surpassed the male applicants” (Campbell, 2019). Which is why it is important to take a look at the issues which hinder the opportunities.

The issues:

To start off women are only averaging between twenty to thirty percent of the workforce and continuing to have a majority male workforce creates a disparity in acceptance. The culture of dominance and masculinity among male officers and administrators continue on the ‘good ole boy’ antics and separate the workforce. Although, we have discussed above that these statistics are being improved through awareness and support of women’s rights it still reflects an ongoing issue in adversity to women achieving leadership potential (Campbell, 2019).

While women are surpassing males in educational achievement and public safety is largely sit back and wait type work which has a large administrative backings; it is interesting to note that one of the issues in the acceptance of females is the term “hegemonic masculinity”. The profession has long been known for its masculine valor and thus the culture is fantasized to be not for the feminine or faint of heart. Women endure cultures of harassment ranging from abuse of language to over-sexualization and even worse (Shelley, Morabito & Tobin-Gurley, 2011).

These inappropriate cultures create stressors that can affect those involved and has possibly led to a piece of the high turnover rate in the correctional profession. It has been said women are leaving the workforce in large numbers but it is not due to the bearing of children (Roy, 2017). Women who do endure the stress and continue on in employment have another issue presented which is an overly protective peer group who can deter their growth and advancement through protection which inadvertently denies opportunity (Winters, 2019). When women have been successful in achieving acceptance amongst their peers, the males find it natural to take on chivalrous roles and sometimes do the work for them keeping them from achieving success without even realizing it is occurring.

Additionally, some other issues affecting females in the workforce were revealed in a study conducted by Forbes. These issues include the fact in application pools in which there is a single female applicant statistics reveal there is no chance the job will be offered. Furthermore, if she were to receive the job she would progress at a much slower

rate than her male coworkers. This research also revealed men are promoted thirty percent faster early on in their careers (Roy, 2017). So it appears, while there are opportunities and there are women being accepted into the field and even in leadership there is still a lack in equity amongst gender and males continue to supersede. This leads us to look at how we can encourage participation to continue to work towards gender equity.

Encouraging Participation:

In an effort to increase women's participation in corrections leadership it has been suggested there be mentorship or a female protégé in the positions who demonstrates the ability to do the job successfully. There is a school of thought women often "go along to get along" with the environment they are in. When they do not have the proper role models leading the way or offering guidance there is a great potential for remaining stagnant or falling into the routine of things without self-interest or concern (Winters, 2019).

Training is another area in which correctional organizations can strive to encourage participation among women in leadership. First and foremost, training should be utilized in the department to ensure there is an understanding on how to promote a culture of inclusion. Most organizations already have relative training such as human diversity, sexual harassment, employee conduct reviews and so forth (Campbell, 2019). However, it is important to self-evaluate as a department in order to be certain gender-bias is discussed. This topic should not only be discussed but encouraged so that diversity management practices are implemented to ensure demographics in the workforce who go without representation such as women are included. It is through these studies evidence exists there is a positive effect on the performance of the business as a whole (Park & Liang, 2019).

In addition to implementing training of the department it has also been suggested the employees in the workforce should receive access to training and these opportunities should be fair and equitable. The more employees with access to these opportunities will create a larger pool of individuals who will be qualified to promote when the opportunities avail themselves. It is an essential responsibility of supervisors and managers to coach and mentor the staff for succession planning into leadership (Campbell, 2019).

Furthermore, in an effort to increase women's participation in leadership it is important to ensure they are met with acceptance by their peers. It can be difficult for women to initiate growth when they feel they are moving against the grain and studies suggest there is a high turnover rate in the corrections profession due to the stress that can often exist when women are subjected to a culture of bias among other leaders. It is important to recognize women who have entered the profession and continued to work hard despite the odds, promoting into leadership roles. These trailblazers will be important strength to inspire other officers to make their way to "the table" as well as important safety measure to build the confidence to do so (Campbell, 2019).

Lastly, the use of gender mainstreaming in an organization has been noted as a successful strategy in helping to eliminate the gender bias and to broaden the acceptance of women in leadership positions (Roy, 2017). These strategies are utilized across the world and entail gender perspectives and reaching equity and eventually equality are

included in the central mapping of the organization to include: policies and procedures, research, projects and future planning. Therefore, having more women in leadership roles will assist in executing these initiatives and in ultimately progressing the field of corrections as a whole (Roy, 2017).

Methods

The purpose of this research was to identify whether or not there has been growth in respect to gender equity in leadership positions amongst the Correctional profession. In addition, this research serves to develop an understanding of growth opportunities in existence and how to overcome them.

Data was gathered through surveys sent to Correctional Facilities with variability in size and population across the state of Florida. Survey questions were designed to determine gender statistics in leadership as well as opportunities for advancement within an agency. Questions were also designed to identify educational levels, training opportunities, as well as promotional opportunities for staff.

Information regarding agency demographics in leadership roles as well as longevity, promotional methods and training opportunities was sought in order to distinguish whether or not there is a variance among the genders causing for a review of the needs associated with each respective group.

The survey was anonymous in order to encourage the greatest amount of responses as well as to maintain the integrity of the respondents answers. A weakness in the data collected is that it fails to identify the source of submission and could pose potential bias upon evaluation if the true amount of both male and female respondents were not proportional in order to distinguish equity concerns both in favor of and/ or opposed to any one group of individuals.

Results

The Survey was sent to forty (40) various personnel in a total of seventeen (17) different correctional agencies. I received a total of sixteen (16) anonymous responses, for a response rate of 40%. Of the responses received some respondents chose to omit some of the questions in the survey.

The first three questions of the survey dealt with demographic data of the respondent's organization as well as the respondent as an individual. In the first question respondents were asked to identify the ratio of males/females in leadership roles in their organization. A total of (13) responses were received for a response rate of (33%) with answers varying: from a low 14% male / 9% female led to a high 40% male / 60% female.

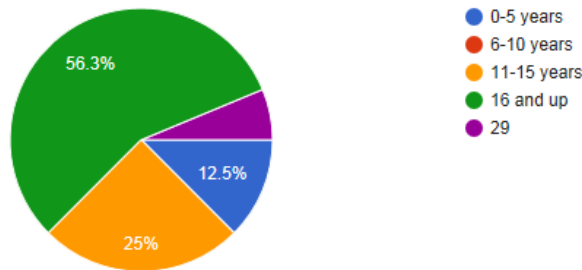
The second question asked the respondents to identify their respective gender. There were a total of 16 responses with males accounting for (50%) and females accounting for (50%).

The third employee demographic question asked the respondent to identify their years of service within the organization they work for. There were 16 responses received:

- Employees 0-5 years of experience (12.5%),
- 6-10 years (0%)
- 11-15 years (25%)
- 16 and up (56.3%)
- Anything above (6.2%).

Table 2: Years of Service:

How many years have you been employed at your organization?
16 responses



The fourth question asked the respondent to identify if they held a position in leadership. 15 responses were received. Of these, (93.3 %) stated yes.

The fifth question asked each respondent if gender equity was an issue at their organization. The results:

- Yes (93.8%)
- No (6.2%)

The sixth through eighth questions identified demographics dealing with the culture of the organization. In the sixth question the respondent was asked whether they had ample opportunity to promote within the organization. The results were: all respondents answered yes (100%). The seventh question asked the respondent whether they or someone they knew has ever experienced some form of gender discrimination or inequality. The results were:

- Yes (25%)
- No (50%)
- Maybe (25%)

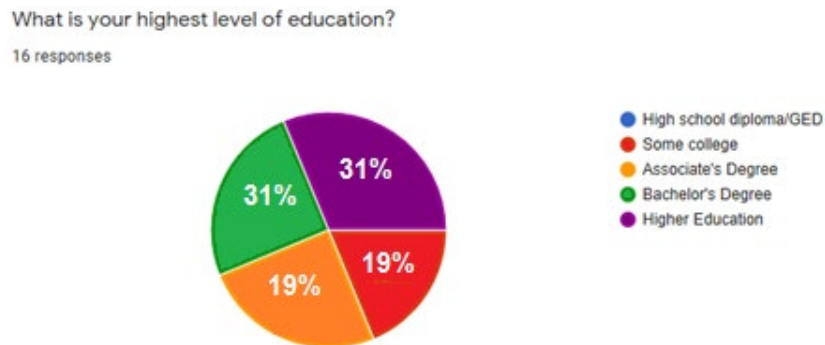
The eighth asked the respondent to identify if the workplace has an inclusive culture. The results were:

- Yes (50%)
- No (38%)
- Maybe (12%)

The ninth question identified the level of education of the respondent. The results were:

- High School/GED (0%)
- Some College (19%)
- Associate's Degree (19%)
- Bachelor's Degree (31%)
- Higher Education (31%)

Table 3: levels of Education:



The last three questions dealt with the organization's development of staff (i.e. training opportunities and mentorship). In question ten a response rate of (40%) was unanimously yes in regards to training opportunity availability. In question eleven the respondents were asked if there is ample support given regardless of gender. The results were the following breakdown:

- Strongly disagree (6%)
- Disagree (12%)
- Neutral (19%)
- Agree (44%)
- Strongly Agree (19%)

Finally, in question 12 the respondents were asked if their organization offers a formal development program and the following breakdown was received:

- Yes (69%)
- No (31%)
- Maybe (0%)

Discussion

In review of the data, it appears there continues to be a variance in the gender among those in leadership positions. As the research suggests, some organizations are already progressing and women have become the forefront. While, in other cases there still seems to be some opportunity for improvement.

Additionally, the respondents appear to have tenure in their organizations with 56.3 % having been on the job for at least sixteen years. They all unanimously agreed there is training opportunities available and at least 69% admit there is formal training provided. However, at least 50 % are unsure if their organization has an inclusive culture and another 50% advised they have known or are unsure if someone has been affected by gender discrimination.

Finally, the majority of respondents (63%) advised there is ample support from their peers regardless of gender.

Recommendations

The survey results indicate that organizations seem to be making strides toward addressing gender equity. Unfortunately, the response rate was low at only (40%) and some of the data obtained lends to a continued need for awareness to be raised. However, although the data still shows a variance in the amount of males versus females in leadership this could be related to reasons unable to be determined through the survey data.

With the amount of respondents having tenure in their organizations it seems prudent to address these concerns to ensure prospects are not inadvertently overlooked. The majority of the leaders surveyed were educated and therefore, there is great potential they will seek continued development. Research suggests an organization should create opportunities by demonstrating they exist and the data from the survey results continues to bring this need into focus. It appears organizations could benefit from incorporating gender equity awareness into their training curriculum as all employees are benefiting from this area.

The better news is there was unanimous agreement in the data where training opportunities exist for the majority. The majority of respondents agree there is support among their peers for safety to be felt when they reach the seat at the table. Therefore, it appears President Diggins was on to something when he brought the topic of gender equity to the Correctional forefront and organizations are indeed heeding the call. Research points toward a brighter future for women in the profession and so does the data suggest this to be true.

Lieutenant Melissa B. Maglio has been in law enforcement for 19 years with the Orange County Corrections Department. She began her career in 2002 as a non-certified Correctional recruit and transitioned to Correctional Officer in December of 2002. She has worked at all ranks with the most recent promotion to Lieutenant in 2016 and has had many different assignments to include Field Training Coordinator, Fire Safety and Sanitation supervisor, Work Release Facility Supervisor and Administrative roles. She is currently the Administrative Lieutenant for the Major of Security Operations. Lieutenant Maglio holds an Associate of Science degree in Nursing from Valencia College, an Associate of Arts Degree in General Studies from Valencia College and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a minor in Health Science from the University of Central Florida.

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Appendix A

Introduction: My name is Lieutenant Melissa B. Maglio and I am a student in the Senior leadership program with FDLE. This survey is meant to be anonymous and is part of a research project to identify potential areas of improvement in regards to gender equity in leadership roles (promotional opportunities) within the field of Corrections.

Short Video regarding the topic

Picture of equality versus equity

SURVEY

1. What percentage of males/females hold leadership roles in your organization?
(Fill in the blank) _____

2. What is your gender?
Male or Female

3. How many years have you been employed at your organization?
 - A. 0-5 years
 - B. 6-10 years
 - C. 11-15 years
 - D. 16 and up
 - E. Other

4. Do you hold a position in leadership?
Yes or No

5. Is gender equity an issue for your organization?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe

6. Is there ample opportunity for promotion for everyone?
Yes or No

7. Have you or someone you know ever experienced gender discrimination/gender inequality?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe

8. Do you feel your workplace has an inclusive culture?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe

9. What is your highest level of education?
 - A. High school diploma
 - B. Some college
 - C. Associate's degree
 - D. Bachelor's Degree
 - E. Higher education

10. Are training opportunities available to all employees?
Yes or No

11. If an employee becomes a member of leadership is there ample support provided by peers regardless of gender?
 - A. Strongly disagree
 - B. Disagree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Agree
 - E. Strongly Agree

12. Does your organization have a formal development program?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe