Women in Peacekeeping Operations:
Challenges of Integration

Shilpi Nanglu Bharati

Abstract

Integration of women in peacekeeping operations is imperative for inspiring new solutions and resolving conflicts. Men, women, boys and girls are affected differently by armed conflict. This calls for a gendered approach to peacekeeping to adequately respond to their needs. The study explores the challenges faced by deployed women peacekeepers which impact their effective integration into peacekeeping operations, and proposes strategies to deal with them. Data was collected from 13 women military officers from different countries who were undergoing pre-deployment training in the female military officer course at the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in Delhi. The study identified challenges such as family responsibilities, motherhood, cultural sensitivity, sexual abuse and gender prejudices, and examined their impact on the performance of occupational tasks. It suggested organizational infrastructural support, top-down female support and a pro-active stance against harassment and bullying to overcome challenges.

Author Profile

Shilpi Nanglu Bharati is Scientist 'E' in the Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) and a recipient of several awards. She has collaborated on defence research projects with international defense agencies including Defense Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom on a project on 'Integration of women and gender issues in extraterritorial military operations. Her 'Gender Sensitization Module' and 'Manual on Women as Leaders' have been incorporated into various training courses by Defense Research and Development Organization, Indian Army and Paramilitary Forces.

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Introduction

United Nations launched a major exercise to analyze its peacekeeping experiences in 2000 and subsequently introduced a series of reforms to strengthen its capacity to manage and sustain field operations. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established a High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations on October 31, 2014, to make a comprehensive assessment of the state of UN peace operations and the emerging needs of the future. This led the UN to shift its peacekeeping mission mandate beyond exclusive military operations to multidimensional missions. The expanded mandate covered various key priorities like helping countries in the transition from war to lasting peace, restructuring state institutions, reorganizing the judiciary, rebuilding societal norms, and helping sexual abuse and violence victims.

This reorientation resulted in an increasing recognition that a gendered approach to peacekeeping was essential to shape new security policies in line with the needs of men, women, boys and girls who have been affected differently by armed conflict. The approach acknowledged differences in women and men's experiences, and the importance of ensuring that women's interests and needs are met. Also, it recognized the key role that women play in peace building and conflict resolution and the importance of facilitating those roles wherever feasible (UNSC 2000).

The likely risk involved in not integrating a gender perspective was that the mission could overlook important issues of inclusive security that could jeopardize agreements and threaten a fragile peace. Applied at the mission level, gender mainstreaming is one tool for understanding complex situations, reaching a broader consensus, inspiring new solutions and resolving conflicts by incorporating new approaches and viewpoints. By following and implementing gender-sensitive policies and procedures, a peacekeeping operation can provide a good example to national and local institutions.
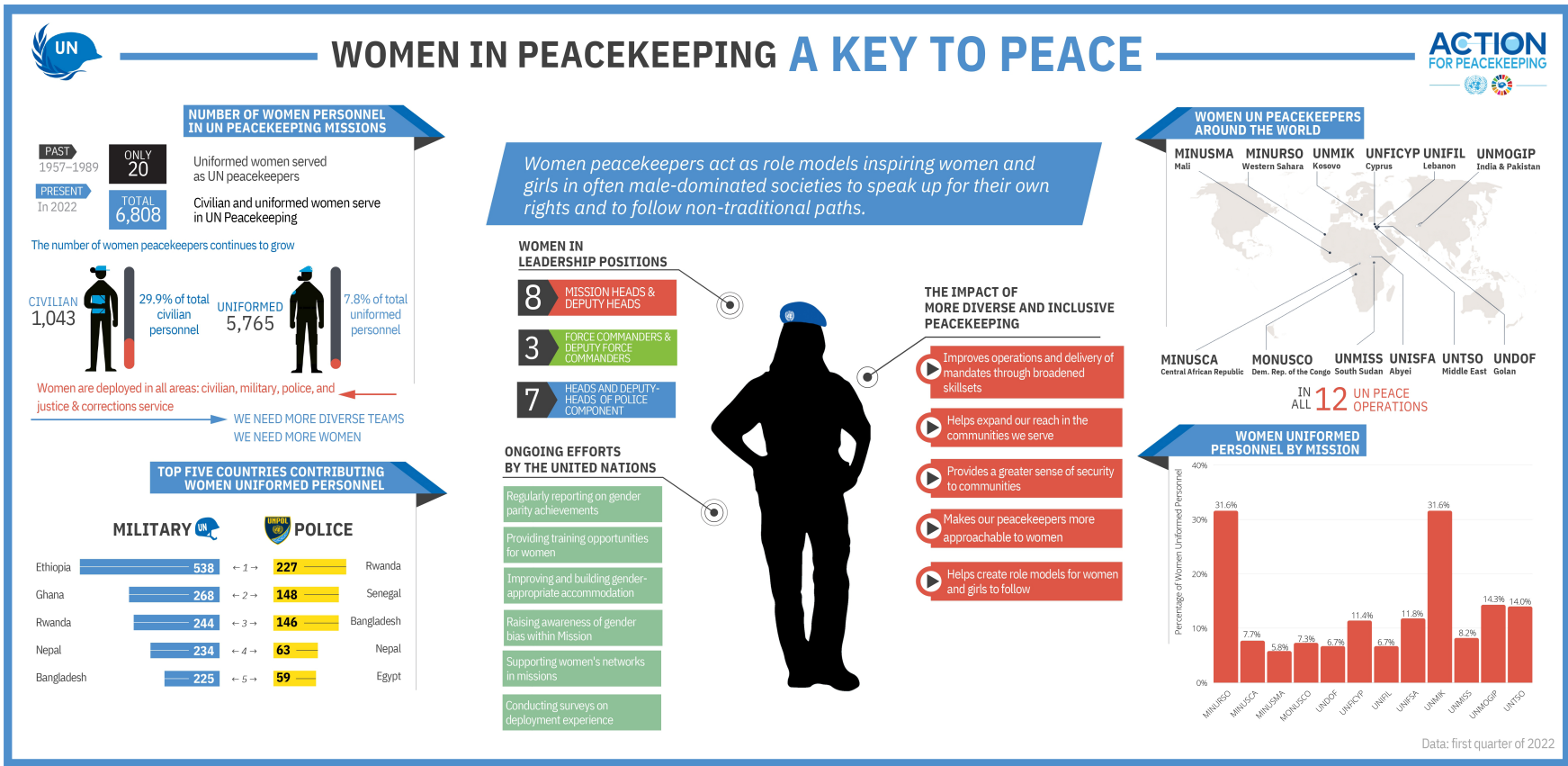
International Peacekeeping Perspective

There are various benefits as well as challenges in the incorporation of women into mission roles. Some of the many positives include building better relationships and contacts with local women to normalize and de-escalate tensions that may have risen between locals and their male peacekeeping colleagues. Women peacekeepers may have greater sympathetic awareness and

sensitivity to local female needs and situations. However, women peacekeepers continue to face multiple challenges as their participation in peacekeeping roles has a relatively short history. Primarily, at the global level, there is an overall lack of adequate training given to female peacekeepers. Additionally, most female peacekeepers are from developing countries and are likely shouldering additional family responsibilities with weak networks of extended family support. Not only do they balance dual responsibilities of work and family but some are burdened by a lack of resources and access to basic education, as well as lack of familiarity with the English language. Further, many women still struggle to be included in peacekeeping missions because there is a lack of global political will to integrate them. Many national defense services do not actively encourage women in the military or state-based forces (Ghimire 2017).
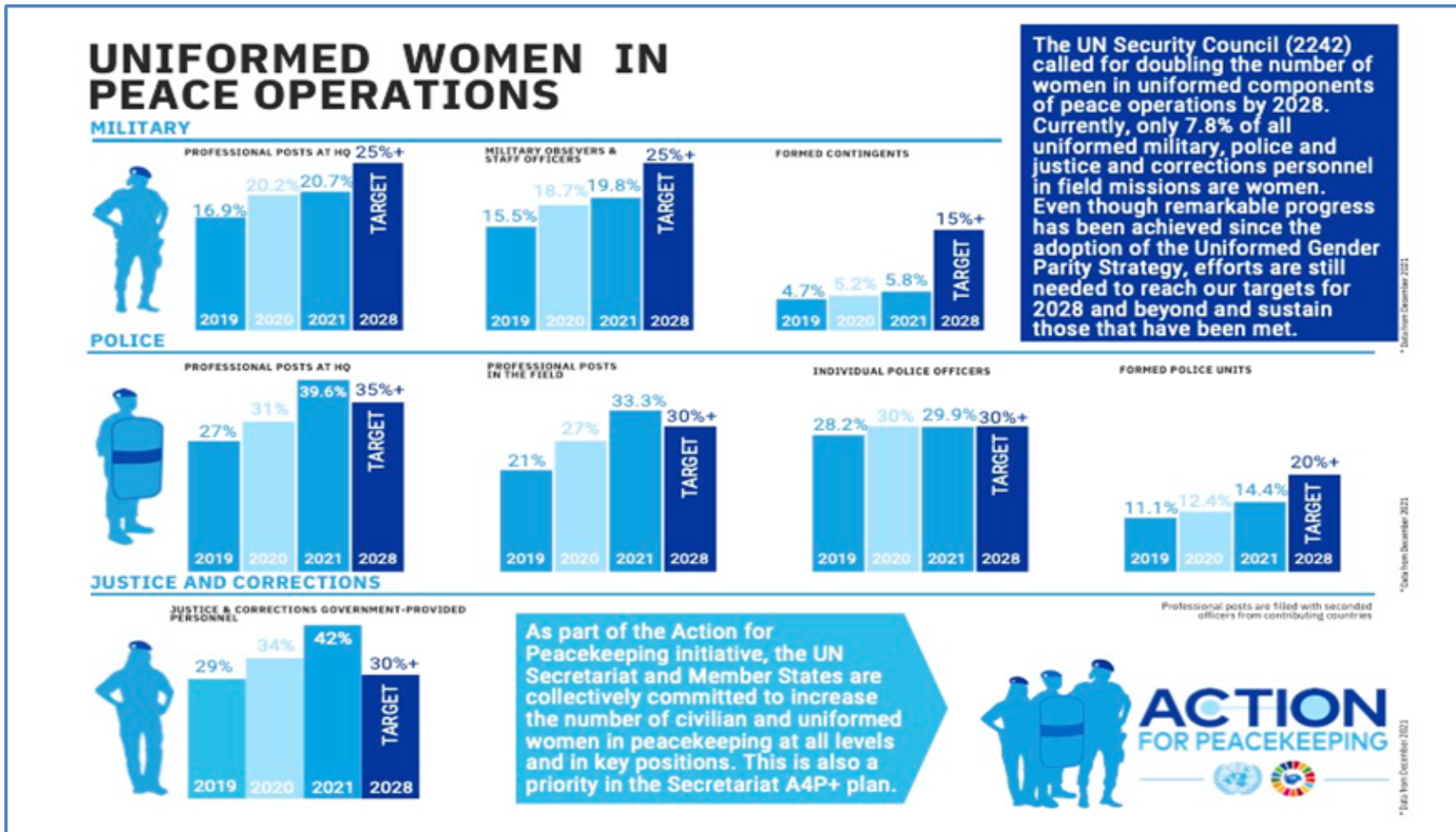
UN Perspective on Women in Peacekeeping

Women are deployed in all areas – police, military and civilian roles and have made a positive impact on peacekeeping environments, including in supporting the role of local women in building peace and protecting women's rights. Current statistics of UN deployment show that women account for 7.8 percent of uniformed personnel in field missions. In 2023, there were 68,333 civil and uniformed women serving in UN peacekeeping. The highest number of women peacekeepers in the forces are from Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, Nepal and Bangladesh. There have been 8 women who have served as mission heads and deputy heads, 3 force commanders and deputy force commanders (UN Women in Peacekeeping 2023)

In 1993, women made up 1 percent of deployed uniformed personnel. In 2020, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women constituted 4.8 percent of military contingents, 10.9 percent of armed police units and 34 percent of justice and corrections of government-provided personnel in UN peacekeeping missions. Statistics from UN peacekeeping website, show that women's participation has increased over the years. Currently 20 percent of military women, 37 percent women police personnel and 42 percent women from justice and government serve in peacekeeping. In order to achieve a higher percentage of women in peacekeeping roles it is essential that the overall recruitment of women in Troop Contributing countries is increased.

WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING A KEY TO PEACE

ACTION FOR PEACEKEEPING

NUMBER OF WOMEN PERSONNEL IN UN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

PAST 1957–1989 — **ONLY 20** Uniformed women served as UN peacekeepers

PRESENT In 2022 — **TOTAL 6,808** Civilian and uniformed women serve in UN Peacekeeping

The number of women peacekeepers continues to grow

CIVILIAN 1,043 — 29.9% of total civilian personnel

UNIFORMED 5,765 — 7.8% of total uniformed personnel

Women are deployed in all areas: civilian, military, police, and justice & corrections service

WE NEED MORE DIVERSE TEAMS
WE NEED MORE WOMEN

TOP FIVE COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTING WOMEN UNIFORMED PERSONNEL

MILITARY			POLICE
Ethiopia	538	← 1 → 227	Rwanda
Ghana	268	← 2 → 148	Senegal
Rwanda	244	← 3 → 146	Bangladesh
Nepal	234	← 4 → 63	Nepal
Bangladesh	225	← 5 → 59	Egypt

Women peacekeepers act as role models inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to speak up for their own rights and to follow non-traditional paths.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

8 MISSION HEADS & DEPUTY HEADS

3 FORCE COMMANDERS & DEPUTY FORCE COMMANDERS

7 HEADS AND DEPUTY-HEADS OF POLICE COMPONENT

ONGOING EFFORTS BY THE UNITED NATIONS

- Regularly reporting on gender parity achievements
- Providing training opportunities for women
- Improving and building gender-appropriate accommodation
- Raising awareness of gender bias within Mission
- Supporting women's networks in missions
- Conducting surveys on deployment experience

THE IMPACT OF MORE DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE PEACEKEEPING

- ▶ Improves operations and delivery of mandates through broadened skillsets
- ▶ Helps expand our reach in the communities we serve
- ▶ Provides a greater sense of security to communities
- ▶ Makes our peacekeepers more approachable to women
- ▶ Helps create role models for women and girls to follow

WOMEN UN PEACEKEEPERS AROUND THE WORLD

MINUSMA Mali | **MINURSO** Western Sahara | **UNMIK** Kosovo | **UNFICYP** Cyprus | **UNIFIL** Lebanon | **UNMOGIP** India & Pakistan

MINUSCA Central African Republic | **MONUSCO** Dem. Rep. of the Congo | **UNMISS** South Sudan | **UNISFA** Abyei | **UNTSO** Middle East | **UNDOF** Golan

IN ALL **12** UN PEACE OPERATIONS

WOMEN UNIFORMED PERSONNEL BY MISSION

Percentage of Women Uniformed Personnel

- MINURSO: 31.6%
- MINUSCA: 7.7%
- MINUSMA: 5.8%
- MONUSCO: 7.3%
- UNDOF: 6.7%
- UNFICYP: 11.4%
- UNIFIL: 6.7%
- UNISFA: 11.8%
- UNMIK: 31.6%
- UNMISS: 8.2%
- UNMOGIP: 14.3%
- UNTSO: 14.0%

Data: first quarter of 2022

Source: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed_women_in_pk_2022_stats_updated.pdf

Military Perspective on Inclusion of Women

The benefit of female presence in military units has been recognized by senior officers across the globe. The head of recruiting for the Royal Air Force (RAF) in an interview to *The Telegraph*, UK is quoted as stating that having mixed genders in close combat roles would improve operational effectiveness because women bring a different perspective to the environment, and their emotional intelligence gives them a leadership style that may not be available in an all-male team (Rudgard 2017). Having a diverse armed force also reflects the complexities of the areas peacekeeping forces operate in. For instance, insurgent groups frequently use female soldiers and suicide bombers, who have higher success rates owing to the perception of women as non-combatants (BBC 2017). Familiarity with the inclusion of women in state and international peacekeeping forces will make for a more complex and realistic response.

The integration of men and women is also beneficial for the culture of the military units and instills non-discriminatory attitudes. Excluding women from roles considered more demanding reinforces the assumption that women as a collective body should be treated and managed differently from male colleagues (Basham 2009, 734). Increasingly, the introduction of a more inclusive policy is thought by several decision makers in the military to be a welcome improvement for military capability (Rudgard 2017).

Resistance within and outside the military has been a critical challenge for women to join combat units in all branches of the armed forces, especially since women and men are socialized into military culture through a masculinist basic training ethos. Military culture is dominated by a model of military masculinity which is hostile towards the idea of gender integration and cooperation (Woodward 2000; Duncanson and Woodward 2016). Women peacekeepers who are socialized into the highly masculine culture of these institutions, have internalized notions of 'boys will be boys'. As a consequence, these peacekeepers are less likely to report sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) offences committed by their male colleagues against locals (Jennings 2008). This may compromise the trust of the local women towards them.

As evidenced in the militaries of countries with significant experience of gender integration in the forces, the performance of women is not a barrier to inclusion. These barriers lie at organizational level and also in the day-to-day working level wherein informal exclusionary practices and attitudes breed prejudice, hampering the professional growth of the women (Bakshi 2006). Women struggle with personal challenges besides organizational and operational ones. Capt. Bakshi (retd.) in a harsh assessment of the experiences of the early batches of military women in the Indian armed forces in *In the Line of Fire* (2006) observed that women officers were generally appraised as performing at par with men based on the feedback from the Service Headquarters, personal observation and interviews of commanding officers. However, their professional availability was greatly limited by the domestic constraints placed on them as caregivers, compared to their male

counterparts who enjoyed more flexibility in the domestic sphere. Also, some women, in order to gain acceptance in the predominantly masculine environment of the forces rejected their traditional feminine roles, but even then, they were unlikely to be considered 'one of the boys'. Instead, they were seen as rejecting feminine values and embracing traditionally masculine values reaffirming as it were societal gendered norms and reinforcing the stereotype that women's 'naturally softer' personalities simply do not 'fit' the typical mold of the hegemonic, masculine soldier (Arkin and Dobrofsky 1978).

Interviews with servicewomen showed that females who took on traditionally male roles in the forces struggled to get on with male colleagues as opposed to those who took on administrative roles (Basham 2009, 734). Equally, a key problem with women as a minority in the forces is that each individual is often treated like a model for that minority.

Aims and Research Methodology

In order to explore the challenges faced by deployed women peacekeepers, which impact their effective integration into peacekeeping operations and to propose strategies to overcome the challenges, data was collected in 2016 from 13 women military officers with deployment experience on UN missions. The officers came from six different countries - India, Sweden, UK, South Africa, Malawi, and Fiji, and were undergoing pre-deployment training in the female military officer course at Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in Delhi. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview questionnaire and analyzed using qualitative content analysis method. The age range of the officers interviewed was 32 years to 46 years and they had served in the military or police force between 12 to 28 years. The ranks of the participants ranged from Major to Lieutenant Colonel or the equivalent level. Informed consent was obtained from the officers.

A semi-structured interview schedule: 'Deployment Experience Questionnaire' was developed. The questions elicited information regarding work-life balance, training for peacekeeping missions, women's access to leadership positions, and other challenges to greater integration of women in peacekeeping missions. An initial list of questions was generated and further refined to elicit responses that reflected the personal opinions of the respondents. The questions were embedded with cues that primed the respondents to think about their personal experience before responding to avoid eliciting socially consensual responses. The final interview schedule was sent to five subject matter experts (SMEs) for validation and recommendations were incorporated into it. Participation was voluntary.

The data gathered was analyzed through qualitative content analysis, which involved making valid, replicable, and objective inferences based on explicit rules about the sender, the message or the receiver of the message (Prasad 2008). Responses received in Hindi were translated into English by the author for this report. Mayring's inductive approach was used for category formulation

(Mayring 2014). Initially a selection criterion was established for determining the material for analysis. Responses from the participants were considered for analysis, categories defined and level of abstraction identified. Codes and sub-codes were formulated through content analysis and new categories were formed or subsumed. Codes and sub-codes were grouped to form the basic themes, organizing themes and global themes. Frequencies and percentages were calculated.

Gendered Approaches to Research Analysis

The gender sensitive approach considers that since gender is not a continuum on which men and women are consistently on two opposite ends, one should be sensitive to the experiences of each individual rather than attempting to construct a generalization based upon dominant societal views. In our study, the gender sensitive approach to analysis was adopted by taking into consideration that the research problems, objectives, hypothesis and conclusions are made with the concept of gender prevalent in the culture. The beliefs, practices and behaviors were extracted and a micro culture was constructed, which helped in understanding the data that is valuable for future use. The gender and sociocultural position of the investigator also plays an important role both in data gathering and data analysis. A check list for conducting the gender sensitive approach (Leduc 2009) was referred to while analyzing the data when conducting gender sensitive research.

Results and Analysis

Participant responses were analyzed to understand the challenges faced by deployed women peacekeepers. The questions were categorized into seven broad areas pertaining to the challenges which impact effective integration of the women peacekeepers on missions. These included motivators to join peacekeeping, maintaining work-life balance and family support, gender segregation of the tasks, pre-deployment training, leadership, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and experiences in the host country. The findings in the study only present the views of the individuals involved in it and are not intended to represent the view of the services as a whole. Details of the organizing themes and basic themes which emerged are given in Table (3.1 to 3.6) below:

Table 3.1: Family Responsibilities and Work Life balance

Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (f)		Percentage (in %)		Excerpts (Example)
		BT	OT	BT	OT	
Family Support	1. Role of family / husband's support 2. Emotional turmoil, requirements and predicaments 3. Technology: Bridging distances	9 7 2	11	69.23 53.84 15.38	84.61	*"I used to remember my country, home and children because my children were young. My husband looked after the home and children as well as his work."*
Work-life balance	1. Dilemma of multiple roles 2. Challenges of being a working woman 3. Culturally determined roles of a woman	8 6 6	9	61.53 46.15 46.15	69.23	*"During the UN mission, I had difficulty in supporting my family and children."*
Challenges of a working mother	Expectations from a mother Continued contribution to child's upbringing (even when abroad) Separation from child a major "sacrifice"	9 7 5	9	69.23 53.84 38.46	69.23	*"Some difficulties had to be faced. First, they told us for 6 months, then it increased to 1 year. Felt happy also. At that time, I was not married. Was able to talk on the phone. But those who were married, they had to face a big challenge in being away from their children for 1 year..."*

Table 3.2: Gender as Determinant of Success on Occupational Tasks

Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (*f*) BT	OT	Percentage (in %) BT	OT	Excerpts (Example)
Gendering of peacekeeping roles	1. Perceived Gender Roles in peacekeeping missions	9	9	69.23	69.23	*"Sometimes it is easier for a woman to get information or undertake a search at a check-point and so on. Sometimes it is easier to be a man."*
Gender Stereotype	1. Underlying need for male presence 2. Relatively challenging tasks to be performed by men	5 4	6	38.46 30.76	46.15	*"To some extent yes. However, when I was deployed, I carried similar tasks as men. However, there are some tasks which are more challenging and from another point of view, need to be carried out by men. For instance- combat engineering"*
Gender and Leadership	1. Boldness as criterion for leadership 2. Prototype of ideal leader as male 2. Changing scenario	1 2 2	3	7.69 15.38 15.38	23.07	*"Male leader, female leader both are bold in their own place. But a male leader is perfect."*
Perception about female leaders	1. Same approach as male leaders 2. More understanding	2 2	4	15.38 15.38	30.76	*"To a female commander, we can disclose all. To a male, we cannot disclose everything."*

Table 3.3: Training for Peacekeepers

Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (*f*) BT	OT	Percentage (in %) BT	OT	Excerpts (Example)
Gender neutral training	1. Similar training for both men and women	2	2	15.38	15.38	*"I wouldn't want to discriminate against men… so whatever efforts made for women, men also deserve them… so yes both men and women deserve further training than basic training."*
Recommendations for training	2. Language training 3. Dealing with Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)	1 2	2	7.69 15.38	15.38	Training on *"CRSVs & SEAs, sexual violence"*

Table 3.4: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (*f*)		Percentage (in %)		Excerpts (Example)
		Basic Themes (*f*)	Organizing theme (*f*)	Basic Themes	Organizing theme	
Gender based violence	1. Sexual harassment during deployment	2	3	15.38	23.07	*"Liberian women were victimized due to their helplessness, during our work we saw, at some places their population also rapes them, and young girls are also falling prey to sexual exploitation."*
	2. Violence against women	2		15.38		
Recommended Action	1. Need for a strict action against perpetrators	4	4	30.76	30.76	*"Repeating – constantly – that SEA is unacceptable. Many contributing nations do not feel that SEA is so bad in my experience. They need commanders to repeatedly tell them it is not and take action against those who carry it out."*
	2. Need for training	2		15.38		

Table 3.5: Cultural Sensitivity

| Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (*f*)		Percentage (in %)		Excerpts (Example)
		BT	OT	BT	OT	
Lack of Cultural awareness	1. Underlying sense of "Othering"	6	6	46.15	46.15	We saw there that drivers drive cars without a license. Sexual relations are established more there. No one has any family there. Having children outside marriage is allowed. They have children with someone and marry someone else. Drive cars with a lot of speed. There is no electricity there. Poverty is too much."
	2. Culturally determined concept of "being civilized"	4		30.76		
Cultural differences	1. Observed cultural differences	7	7	53.84	53.84	*"At first I was surprised that families wanted to dig up graves of their dead family members (when moving back to Serbia). As a Swede it felt wrong and like a violation to the descended. But after a while I realized that it was the right thing to do for the Serbians. Their actions sprung from love, they wanted to keep their descended family member close – and bring them back home to Serbia. Putting my 'Swedish Glasses' aside this made perfect sense!"*
	2. Moral dissonance due to cultural exposure	6		46.15		

Table 3.6: Motivators to Join Peacekeeping

Organizing Themes (OT)	Basic Themes (BT)	Frequency (*f*)		Percentage (in %)		Excerpts (example)
		BT	OT	BT	OT	
Benefits of Joining peacekeeping	1. Financial support to carry out family responsibilities	3	4	23.07	30.76	*"UN Mission was for women for the first time. Got this chance so felt like going to the UN Mission and the extra money was also a motivator. That money may be of use. At that time the situation at home was not so good, so it came at an opportune time."*
	2. Increased social status	2		15.38		
	3. Exposure to foreign country	2		15.38		

The following global themes recurred through the data. They are representative of the individuals who were participants in the study and not intended to represent the services as a whole.

The seven global themes are categorized as follows:
1. Family responsibilities
   a. Family Support
   b. Work Life balance
2. Motherhood
   a. Challenges of a working mother
3. SEA
   a. Gender Based Violence
   b. Recommended action
4. Gender Role as a determinant of success on occupational tasks
   a. Gendering of peacekeeping Roles
   b. Presence of men as essential
   c. Gender and leadership
5. Cultural Sensitivity
   a. Lack of Cultural Awareness
   b. Cultural differences
6. Training for peacekeepers
   a. Gender neutral training
   b. Recommendations for training
7. Motivators:
   a. Benefits of joining peacekeeping, social status
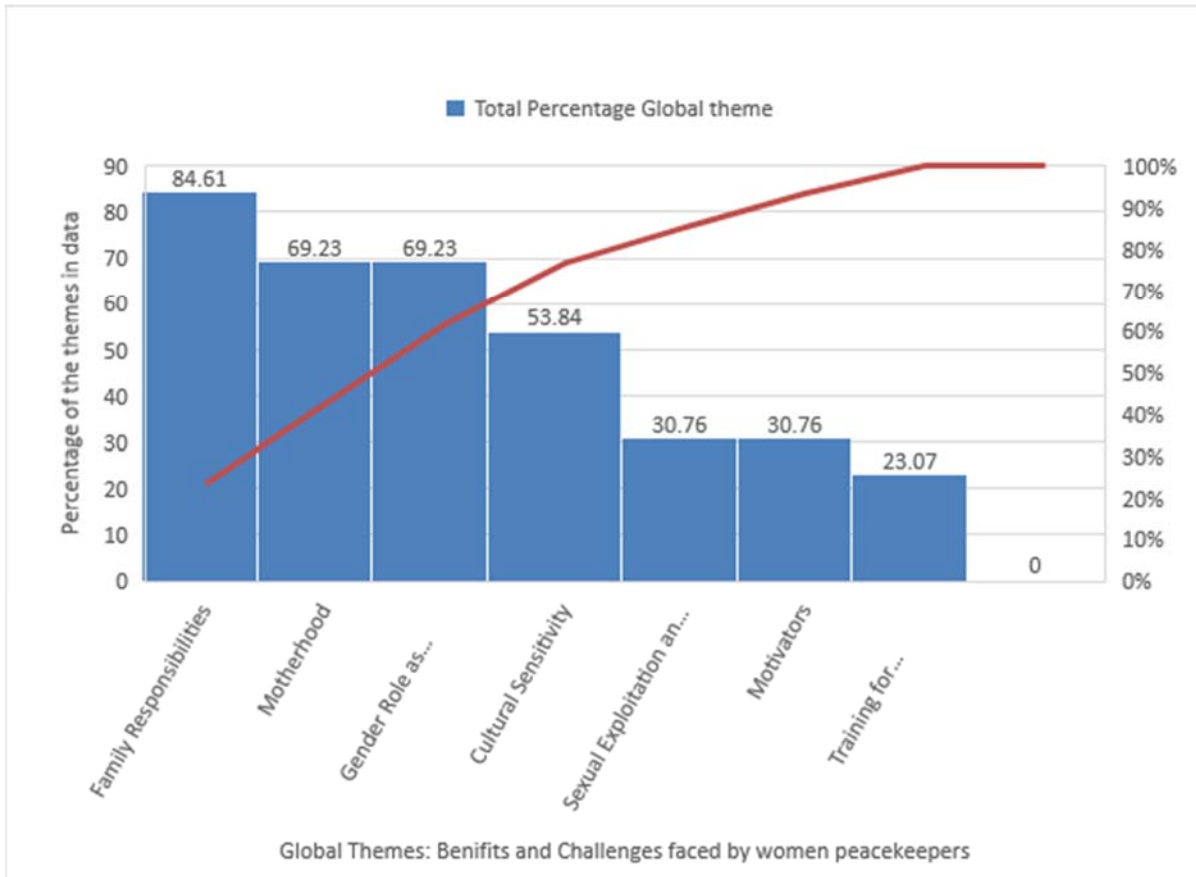
Figure 1: Global Themes: Benefits and Challenges faced by Women Peacekeepers

Discussion

The central cluster of challenges faced by women on peacekeeping missions was approached by questions which addressed what roles and tasks women in peacekeeping missions fulfilled, maintaining work-life balance, organizational support, whether women prefer to work with other women or in mixed teams, and do they have access to positions of authority.

The findings indicate key themes accentuating social and emotional messages. Out of the seven global themes arrived at, five were aligned to the objectives of the current study, which was to investigate the challenges faced by deployed women peacekeepers impacting their effective integration into peacekeeping operations. These were family responsibilities, motherhood, SEA, gender role as determinant of success and occupational tasks and cultural sensitivity. The primary challenge that emerged was family responsibilities, which comprised of 84.61 percent themes highlighting sub-themes family support and work-life balance as crucial for women peacekeepers, followed by motherhood comprising 69.23 percent themes wherein the challenges of working mother has been foregrounded. Besides, gender roles as determinant of success of occupational

tasks were reported in 69.23% themes with the sub themes presence of men as essential in missions and gender and leadership. The lack of cultural sensitivity came out in 53.84 percent of themes as reported by the participants. Since our data set majorly comprised of military women from South Asian and African countries wherein the gender roles are defined, incongruence with the prevalent social norms can pose as a challenge for them as compared to military women from western counties.

The themes that indicate the benefits of women peacekeeper deployment, reveal a particular emphasis on humanitarian values, that is enhancing host-country relationships based on trust and social-reconstruction, as well as expanding the opportunities for women as active role models in promoting world peace. Also, evidenced in the findings was the advantages of women's inclusion in promoting gender equality in the army and women peacekeepers' 'role model' impact in encouraging social change that is commensurate with appropriate local social change processes. There are themes drawn from the findings, which suggest that the concept of women in peacekeeping jobs as "acting role models for other women" is prominent, both in the host country and at home. As with many marginalized groups in society, the presence of someone with similar characteristics to an individual may mean that the individual is more likely to see themselves in that role or follow them. There are socially constructed notions about gender, which can often be a hindrance. However, particularly in peacekeeping operations these pre-conceived ideas can have a positive effect on the use of women in such roles.

The two key themes of motherhood and family responsibilities emerging from the participants' responses depict that there remains a trade-off difficulty between motherhood and career. Women deployed for peacekeeping operations reported lack of means to stay in touch with their children, which made it tough for them to feel connected to their family. A participant elaborated that it was easier for her to carry out her duties because she was unmarried. However, she recognized that it would be challenging for married women as they had to stay away from their children for a year.

> *"Some difficulties had to be faced. First, they told us for 6 months, then it increased to 1 year. Felt happy also. At that time, I was not married. Was able to talk on the phone. But those who were married. They had to face a big challenge in being away from their children for 1 year..."* [R12]

Concerns over pregnancy, childcare and family life are frequently mentioned in the accounts of servicewomen. Whilst a lot has been done to mitigate this problem in other professions, the military appears slower in updating its traditional, gendered structure.

In conjunction with lack of familial support, sexual harassment in host country was also reported. During analysis, it was observed that while the women did not share any personal experiences of SEA, they did talk about the need for sensitizing the troops about the seriousness of this issue and for taking strict action against offenders. For instance, one of the participants stated:

"Repeating – constantly – that SEA is unacceptable. Many contributing nations do not feel that SEA is so bad in my experience. They need commanders to repeatedly tell them it is not and take action on those who carry it out". [R3]

This implies that the participants were aware of such incidents. However, they did not disclose any details about them.

Another inference drawn from the analysis was the underlying need of male presence for tasks that were considered to be more challenging. For example, when asked whether women and men should perform different tasks on peacekeeping missions, one of the participants stated:

"To some extent yes. However, when I was deployed, I carried (out) similar tasks as men. However, there are some tasks which are more challenging and from another point of view, need to be carried out by men. For instance – combat engineering". [R2]

Lack of cultural sensitivity is another key challenge that needs to be addressed. Some of the participants' responses reflected their lack of understanding about the culture of the host population. They tend to view actions and behavior of the host population from the lens of their own cultural context rather than that of the host population. For instance, one of the participants said:

"We saw there that drivers drive cars without a license. Physical relations are established more there. No one has any family there. Having children without marriage is allowed. They have children with someone and marry someone else. Drive cars with a lot of speed. There is no electricity there. Poverty is too much". [R10]

It can be seen that peacekeepers tend to judge and compare the host population with their own cultural context without acknowledging and accepting the cultural variations and diversity.

It is therefore important for peacekeepers to adopt a culture-sensitive approach while dealing with populations from various cultural backgrounds. One of the participants narrated her experience when she was deployed to Kosovo. She expressed how adopting a culture-sensitive approach helped her look beyond her own cultural lens and develop a better understanding of the host nation. She shared:

"At first, I was surprised that families wanted to dig up graves of their dead family members (when moving back to Serbia). As a Swede it felt wrong and like a violation to the descended. But after a while I realized that it was the right thing to do for the Serbians. Their actions sprung from love, they wanted to keep their deceased family member close- and bring them back home to Serbia. Putting my 'Swedish Glasses' aside this made perfect sense!" [R5]

Strategies for Effective Integration

Certain strategies need to be adopted to counter the challenges faced by women peacekeepers. Officers need to be trained to adapt and accept the incongruent gender roles that they may be required to perform during the course of their duties. This will ensure optimal utilization of the women peacekeepers. Military organizations can take several measures to facilitate social support to the family members of the deployed women. This may include providing access to child care facilities and making available counselling services to family members of the deployed officers. Also as noted by one of the participants, a proactive stance against sexual harassment and bullying should be adopted so that women are encouraged to report such incidents. This will discourage such acts and promote integration of women officers. Military organizations need to be trained on building cultural intelligence as a part of their pre-deployment course. A lack of cultural sensitivity can result in biased perceptions and judgements, which can undermine the effectiveness of the mission. The key enablers for women peacekeepers were organizational support and top-down female support. If women are given formal organizational support and correct mechanisms are put in place to mitigate or balance the different domestic pressures between men and women, then such issues will no longer inhibit women peacekeepers from achieving the same results as their male counterparts.

Limitations and Future Directions

The small sample size was one of the major limitations of the study. Interview method was used for the purpose of data collection but no follow up was possible because of time constraints on the part of participants. Male participants were not included in the study. The sample comprised women from the Army at officer level, and the paramilitary at soldier level. In an effort to increase women's participation in peacekeeping missions, countries are now inducting women at soldier level within the primary armed forces, although they have been in the paramilitary forces for several decades. In India, women are being inducted at troop level in Indian Women Military Police through the Agniveer scheme with 100 recruited in 2022, and likely to be scaled up to 1700. At present, there are 136 women soldiers. This is a huge step for the forces, since integration of women in all ranks will involve various challenges to their integration considering the cultural values, gender stereotypes and the education level at troop level.

Conclusion

The current study explored the challenges women peacekeepers faced on their deployment in peacekeeping missions, and the impact it has on their effective integration. The research findings showed that women on peacekeeping missions experience marginalization through limited job opportunities as reflected in their exclusion from 'men only' tasks such as leading a contingent, restriction on night patrolling, etc. These gender role constraints are a determinant on women

peacekeepers capacity to succeed in performance of occupational tasks. Challenges identified included lack of cultural sensitivity, SEA and the struggle to cope with family and childcare responsibilities for the families that they leave behind. The result is that globally few women participate in peacekeeping missions, at a time when their presence is needed to address challenges that are better addressed by a diverse force.

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