



EXPERIENCES, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF FEMALE PRISON OFFICERS

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It is universally known that life in prison has never been easy, but what about the life of female prison officers? What are their experiences, challenges and needs? With long working hours and shifts that may begin one morning and end the next, scheduling family outings and household chores while at the same time performing well at work may not be easy for these women in uniform.

Earning the same respect as their male counterparts

The first issue normally brought up by female prisons staff is earning respect.

“Many female officers deal with less supportive work colleagues, inmates, friends and family members who don’t understand their career choice,” says the Hon. Monica Amoding, the Kumi Woman Member of Parliament. “So they enter the force with the stigma that they are weak and easily converted. This makes them greater targets for many forms of



intolerable disrespect and misconduct. It also means that they must work extra hard to convey a strong, firm and unwavering disciplinary tactic, yet remain professional and reasonably approachable because of the need to gain the respect of both inmates and fellow staff, as well as friends and family," she adds.

"Others," Anna Ebaju Adeke, the National Female Member of Parliament, adds, "come back home to spouses who

are resentful of the long hours spent away from home and the inevitable changes in attitude or demeanour that officers experience."

The unique problem of sexual harassment

As recent revelations have shown, women in numerous industries have experienced sexual harassment on the job, often at the hands of more powerful colleagues. But many female corrections officers say they are in a

unique position: not only do they endure abuse from supervisors or co-workers; they are also dealing with it from inmates over whom they wield power.

Harassment of female prison guards by inmates represents only a narrow sliver of the predatory sexual behavior that takes place in most workplaces in Uganda and the world over.

Managing work and family life

The struggle for women, in any field, is to juggle home and work life. In prisons, it may be even more difficult because of the nature of the work that the women do.

Matron Rachel Asiyo, a wardress in the Uganda Prisons Service, who has been married for over 18 years shares that “leaving work at work is a problem for females in corrections. A female in corrections gives orders all day. The stress level is high and to leave work at work can be a problem. It is difficult to relax at home to let go of that ‘take charge mind’ with the husband, kids and other family. Most of us are still the primary caregivers of children and often take the lead on domestic chores. So, if both partners in the home are working, it still may be up to the female to take over the primary responsibilities of the household. Personally, I try as much as possible to spare time for my family, and when I am at home, I try not to talk about work issues, and instead have as much family-related conversation as possible.”

Matron Asiyo says knowing and understanding ones partner is one of the ways that have enabled her to have a successful marriage as a serving prisons officer.

Additionally, the role that teamwork plays at the workplace cannot be understated. “I make sure that I have a good working relationship with my bosses and colleagues at work so that in case of an urgent need at home, I can easily tell one to sit in for me as I attend to the emergency at home.”

Fellow officer or civilian spouse?

Whether your spouse is a civilian

or a uniformed officer, it takes the balancing of work and family and an understanding spouse to have a good marriage,” female officers contend. “I may not be earning much but I endeavour to contribute to the family’s finances so that my husband does not only value me but my job,” says Lillian Ekikoze, a Uganda Prisons wardress. Ekikoze has since joined a women’s savings group to improve her financial situation.

“My husband is a civilian and he has no problem with my job. I have briefed him on all the demands of my job and he is used to the nature of my work,” says Gloria Ingabire, Principal Officer II in the Uganda Prisons Service. “For example,” she illustrates, “there are times when I leave him in bed at 3 a.m. to go and keep watch on the situation at the women’s prison, and he has no problem with it.”

Rachael Asio has not regretted the day she got engaged to a fellow prisons officer. “He completely understands whatever I do and the demands of my job, and supports me whenever and wherever possible. I doubt a civilian would be as understanding as a fellow uniformed officer. I call myself lucky,” Asio says.

How the Uganda Prisons Service is addressing the challenges

Institutional policies

Frank Baine, the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) publicist, says UPS supports officers’ professional and personal lives through good policies. “The UPS works to ensure that all workers, especially those facing intersecting forms of discrimination like women, have equal access to employment free from gender discrimination,

including discrimination based on sex stereotypes, pregnancy, and parenting. Our policies also support family life. For instance, when an officer informs us officially about his or her relationship, we try to make sure that s/he is posted to a station near the spouse. If they are both uniformed officers, we make sure that they are transferred together.”

Lillian Ekikoze attests to this. “We have paid maternity leave of 90 days and prior to giving birth, at seven months, for example, we are allowed to put on lighter, casual clothes rather than the tight uniforms. We also have tribunals where we can front issues of abuse either from a colleague or inmate.”

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