



# WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Arise Reporter

**T**he integration of women into law enforcement positions can be considered a large social change. A century ago, there were few jobs open to women in law enforcement. A small number of women worked as police officers and/or security guards, and their assignments were usually limited to peripheral tasks. Women traditionally worked in juvenile facilities, handled crimes involving female offenders, or performed clerical tasks. In those early days,



women were not considered as capable as men in law enforcement. Recently, however, many options have opened up, creating new possible careers, so much so that it is easy to run into a police officer or security guard who is female. In this article, we bring to you stories of some female law enforcement officers, who shared their experience with us.

### **Being a female law enforcement officer is not an easy job – Sgt Esther Namaganda, Traffic Police Officer**

I joined the police in 1988 as a police constable after my brother, who was then the defence secretary of our village in Bugiri, encouraged me to. It was the time they were recruiting people to join the forces. At 20, I was a bubbly vibrant young girl who had just completed my O' levels.

I have grown through the ranks to my current rank of sergeant. In 2012, I was moved to the traffic department and I was first deployed to work at Kampala CPS, before being transferred

to Kawempe, Naggalama, Mukono and currently Seeta.

My job has not been a bad one. Serving as a police officer has been a fulfilling job as it has given me opportunity to serve my country. My good character has helped me overcome many bad times that would have ruined my life as a police officer. However, like any other job, this job too has its occupational hazards.

A normal day is characterised by standing in the sweltering sun, directing vehicles on the road, stopping some, arguing with drivers and boda boda cyclists, and sometimes coming hard on those who break traffic laws by issuing express penalty tickets or arresting and detaining them at the police station.

Some days, I encounter incidents that make a day seem not normal. You can, for example, stop an individual that has broken the traffic rules but talks to you disrespectfully because you are a woman. Those are isolated cases, however; I cannot dwell on them.

The Kyaligonza incident is an incident I will live to remember. His bodyguards manhandled and slapped me. It was a total show of disrespect to not only my profession as a police officer, but also as a woman. It is the worst experience I have had since I joined the police force 30 years ago. I have not stopped wondering how a grown-up and respectable military officer at the rank of Major General could conduct himself in such a horrific manner.

### **Balancing family and professional work is difficult – Sylvia Anek, security guard**

I became a security guard in 2011 after dropping out of school in S.3 due to lack of school fees. After wandering around the village doing nothing, a friend tipped me of the available opportunity to join a security firm that was recruiting at the time. With no job, I seized the opportunity. Fortunately, I was taken on. We underwent training.



Thereafter, I was deployed to guard at a bank in Kampala.

I can say the job has been of great help financially. I am able to look after myself and my family. This, however, does not mean the pay is good; it is not. We are paid very little money and after the unavoidable expenditures, I end up remaining with nothing. It is not possible to take care of all my needs.

We work in shifts and I dread the cold nights. Though we have guns, the fear of being attacked by a gang of rapists is real, but that does not stop me from doing my job as expected.

For the six years I have worked as a security guard, I have not had any nasty encounter. There are, however, times when I meet people who underrate me; they show it in my face and this can be disheartening. Some

don't want to be checked as they enter the bank because they think they are very important. There is also a tendency of men hitting on us all the time because they think we are cheap and loose.

It is not easy to be someone's wife and at the same time a security guard. This is because our work schedules many a time don't support a happy married life. One day you will work on the day shift, the next day, you are on night shift. You need to be blessed with an understanding husband to have a happy marriage.

Conceiving is also indirectly prohibited. Though it is not written anywhere in the rules, the fact is when your pregnancy becomes noticeable, you are told to first give birth and then come back after. But there is no guarantee that you will find your job. For the sake of the job, therefore, you think twice about your need to be a mother.

“Peer acceptance is one of the greatest pressures we face as female law enforcers. The desire to be known as a “good officer” is a strong motivating factor, and failure to achieve that status can be very demoralizing and devastating. Unlike our male counterparts, we must overcome the societal prejudice of being known as the “weaker sex.” Many of my colleagues express feeling they have to work twice as hard to prove themselves and to be accepted, whereas male officers can just show up and gain acceptance.

