



# A Comparison of Female Police Officer Representation in U.S. Municipal Police Departments

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## Abstract

The National Center for Women and Policing surveyed 176 law enforcement agencies in 1998 and 141 law enforcement agencies in 2018. Matched pairs were created for 73 municipal police departments that responded in both years to conduct a comparison of the representation of female officers. Results showed that over the past 20 years, female officer representation has only increased one percent.

## Introduction

With rising levels of tension between law enforcement and the public, popular media has turned its focus to the structure and make up of local police departments. There are concerns regarding the police force not being representative of the community they are serving and the need to hire more minority officers. However, the lack of female representation in the police force has received relatively little attention.

An analysis of data collected by the National Center for Women and Policing regarding women's representation in municipal police departments in 2018 was conducted. These data indicate how many sworn officers in each agency are women. A comparison of the 1998 and 2018 National Center for Women and Policing's data was conducted by the current author to determine whether there have been significant improvements in women's representation in municipal police departments over a twenty year span.

## Participants

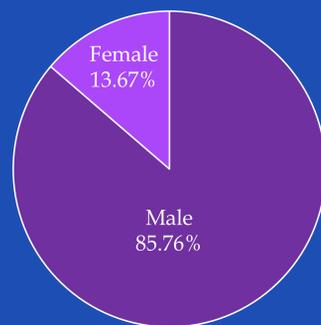
In 1998, the National Center for Women and Policing conducted a survey of 176 law enforcement agencies nationwide, which included state and municipal departments (Harrington, Smeal, & Spillar, 1999). With the goal of focusing on municipal police departments and comparing 1998 data to 2018 data, the list of 176 agencies from 1998 was narrowed down to 141 municipal police departments.

In 2018 from June to August, research interns for the National Center and Women Policing, including the current author, called the 141 police departments. Of the 141 municipal police departments, 73 responded.

## Procedure

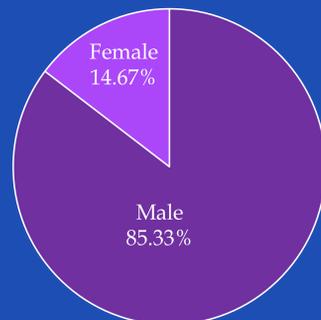
The municipal police departments contacted were provided a digital survey or faxed a hard copy of the survey, based on their preference, inquiring about the representation of women on their police force. Examples of questions on the survey included, "How many sworn officers are in your department?", "How many of the sworn officers in your department are women?", "How many of the sworn officers in your department are people of color?", and "How many of the sworn officers in your department are women of color?" This series of questions was asked regarding sworn officers in various leadership positions.

### Figure 1 & Table 1 – NCWP Data from 1998



Category	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency
Male	45,716	26,652
Female	7,288	26,652

### Figure 2 & Table 2 – NCWP Data from 2018



Category	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency
Male	52,278	30,633.5
Female	8,989	30,633.5

### Figure 3 & Table 3 – 1998 & 2018 Comparison



Category	Male	Female
1998	45,716	7,288
2018	52,278	8,989
Totals	97,994	16,277

## Results

Two chi square goodness of fit tests were used to assess the gender differences – one for each of the two years of data collection. In both cases, the null hypothesis was that there was no difference (or a 50:50 ratio) between the male and female officers.

The chi square goodness of fit, for the 1998 data, indicated that the gender difference, in that year, was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=53,304) = 27,703.82, P < .0001$ . As seen in Figure 1 and Table 1 the number of male officers (85.76%) was considerably larger than the number of female officers (13.67%).

The chi square goodness of fit, for the 2018 data, indicated that the gender difference, in that year, was, once again, significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=61,267) = 30,585, p < .0001$ . As seen in Figure 2 and Table 2, in 2018, the number of male officers (85.33%) was considerably larger than the number of female officers (14.67%).

A separate chi square, a test of independence, was used to compare the number of men and women in 1998 to the number of men and women in 2018. The chi square indicated that the gender difference in 1998 compared to the gender difference in 2018 was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=114,571) = 19.7, P < .0001$ . However, the effect size was miniscule,  $V = .0132$ . As seen in Figure 3 and Table 3, the proportion of change in women officers from 1998 to 2018 was extremely small.

## Discussion

In summary, chi square goodness of fit analyses found that there were significant differences between the number of male and female officers in both 1998 and 2018. Over twenty years, the overall representation of women in municipal police departments increased only one percent. Overall, there has been almost no change in the representation of female officers in municipal police departments across the United States over the past twenty years.

Limitations for this project included a small sample size, bureaucratic resistance, and time constraints.

To increase the representation and promotion of women on the police force, future goals of law enforcement agencies should include creating strategic recruiting and retention strategies targeted at women officers, changing from a military style of policing to one more focused on the community, and encouraging higher education in recruits as well as current officers.