

1949

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Recommended Citation

J. Roy Leevy, The Role of the Police Matron, 39 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 538 (1948-1949)

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THE ROLE OF THE POLICE MATRON

J. Roy Leevy

The police matron is in many cities becoming an important part of the juvenile delinquency program. Associate Professor J. Roy Leevy of the Sociology Department, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, is certainly qualified to discuss her role in this program. He has served as a Youth Probation Supervisor in Edgar County, Illinois, and as a member of the Board of Control of the Indiana State Crime Commission and has taught and conducted research in state correction institutions. During the recent war he was active in a program of rehabilitating juvenile offenders, an activity which brought him into close association with police matrons and juvenile courts. During the summer of 1947 he was Codirector of the Junior Police and Police Matron's Conference, which was held at Purdue University.—EDITOR.

Today in modern American cities the local governmental officials are attempting to furnish a new type of service, connected with the police department or in some cities with the welfare department. This service is known as the Police Matron. This type of human aid service, as the police matron is sometimes called, is an outgrowth of the demands for a better understanding of youth and their problems connected with the juvenile courts and of the child welfare departments of some public school systems.

Usually when a new service is added to the governmental services of a city, one thinks in terms of a criteria to be used in the selection of the person or persons who carry on the services. When the selection of personnel for city services is based upon a set of criteria, one usually finds that there are certain variables that have to be considered also along with the adopted criteria to be used. This is because nearly every American city has certain specific differences in the occupations of its inhabitants, differences in the mores of the people, and differences in nativity and racial characteristics, let alone such factors as population mobility and unemployment of workers.

Based upon the writer's experience of dealing with police matrons during and since World War II, and dealing with youth and adults, he wishes to suggest factors or criteria which police commissioners and government officials may utilize in the selection of police matrons.

1. A candidate should be a woman who is young mentally; that is, she should be able to continue to learn from other people's association.
2. Formal education should be general with a major in sociology, criminology, and minors psychology, government, economics, speech, and human biology.
3. Some experience as a teacher in either public or parochial schools.

4. Traveled at least in many American cities, but not necessarily abroad.
5. General knowledge of the different occupational levels of the city where she is to be employed.
6. Some experience, say 6 months or a year, as a clerk in a department store.
7. Knowledge of the various courts of the city, county, and state where employed.
8. Knowledge of the physical structure of the city where she is employed—such as the street pattern, the public park location, and the various social agencies.
9. Knowledge of the welfare set-up of public and parochial schools of the city.
10. Knowledge of employment and recreational opportunities for youth in the city.
11. Understanding of the public relations program of the city, radio, newspaper, and all service club information bureaus of the city.

What shall be the duties of the police matron? Now that the writer has suggested the criteria to be used in the selection of the police matron, he wishes to suggest some of her duties. Her duties may vary slightly in different cities but in the main include the following:

1. Cooperative understanding of the entire police department. That is, she should know and understand the functions of all the men personnel of the police department.
2. Not a crime detective of adult women of the city. Serves as an aid to the policemen when so delegated by the chief of police of the department in case of supervision of women who are arrested by policemen. She should not crave police power, but use it when it is delegated to her by her superiors in the police department.
3. She should work with the visiting teacher, the truant officer of the schools when pupils are unnecessarily tardy from school. At all times she is not to replace the visiting teacher in the school system.
4. She should assist the juvenile court judge in matters of records and obtaining information about accused youth, who are brought before the juvenile court judge. She is not prosecutor nor defender in the above case but consultant to all people concerned with youth problems.
5. She is not to replace the county, state, or local parole and probation officers. She is a consultant to these officials.

6. She is not a high grade stenographer for the director of the bureau of records of the police department. She is his consultant.
7. She is not the city editor of the local newspaper nor the commentator of the local news for the local radio station, but an understanding interpreter of human problems.
8. She is not a "public speech maker" but should be able to interpret to the public before all kinds of service clubs, the problems of human beings as diagnosed by this branch of service of the police department.

There is a trend today in most American cities to supply many services to its citizens, hence the usefulness of any service such as a police system or any of its departments depends to a great measure how the citizens of the city cooperate in ways not only of supporting these services through tax paying but in assisting the police of a city in preventing misbehavior of human beings as well as assisting police in the treatment of those persons who are trying to live a useful life.

Simply adding a new service such as the police matron to the police department and then to have citizens ignore its usefulness to youth and adults, relative to constructive behavior is not only a waste of human effort but a means of processing more human behavior problems.

Each and every citizen not only must have respect for the services of the police department but must have a genuine interest in the total usefulness of a city. If this is the case, the "Role of the Police Matron" in the busy American city will be one of helpfulness to all persons who dwell in the city regardless of race, color, or creed.