

# **POLICEWOMEN IN MALTA**

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A 'policewoman is a sworn female member of a police department with full police powers' (Horne, 1980:51). Policing was traditionally considered as crime control: work conducted by males. Crime prevention and rehabilitation became important in the 1800s - the same period policewomen entered the scene. Even now, police officers still regard their role as suppressers of crime, depicting policing as a male domain (Horne, 1980:52). Cultivated male and female attitudes within the general public and the police have contributed to the construction of hurdles that aspiring policewomen must either crash into, overcome or learn to cope with.

## **1. THE RESEARCH**

The author conducted a research to determine whether Maltese policewomen suffer gender discrimination. Radical feminists believe that females are exploited by organisations and that the acceptance of females within workplaces does not automatically eliminate the subordination of women, inequality being the result of male domination. Even when employed, they remain prisoners of male oppression, carrying out their traditional servile roles (Bryson, 1992:197) as 'personal assistants, secretaries, typists, cleaners and cooks!' (Clarke, 1992:134) satisfying men's needs also at the workplace. The Maltese Police Force is no exception: from a population of 200 policewomen, 133 perform office work at the General Head Quarters (GHQ) whereas 67 are posted in districts and are sporadically assigned outside jobs.

The researcher conducted interviews with 40 of the 200 policewomen in Malta on the basis of quota sampling. In this research, the interviewer wanted to ensure that the sample consisted of representatives from the policewomen who worked on the outside (the 33.5% who work in districts) and those who worked in offices (the 66.5% who work in the GHQ). So, the 40 interviewees included ten outsiders and 30 insiders. Results indicated that policing hindered women; from recruitment, throughout mid-career and to the higher levels of promotion. Maltese policewomen are subject to sexual harassment and fear to speak up because they usually get the blame. As a result of the additional gender-related stress, many policewomen get disheartened. They either accept the situation or leave the Police Force.

## **2. RECRUITMENT, MID-CAREER AND PROMOTION**

Engels (1978 cited in Bryson, 1992:240) predicted that employment freed women from oppression. Carrier (1988:xxi) instead argued that the entry of women in policing was '...far from liberating women from the traditional female stereotype...'. In fact, within the Maltese Police Force, gender discrimination is marked even at recruitment level: the height requirement (5'6") matches the average height of Maltese males but not that of females, putting the latter at a disadvantage.

When a woman enters the Police Force, she faces the myth which stipulates that 'the man's world is the "real world"' (Clarke, 1992:127) which she has to either accept or be branded as inferior. Equality of opportunity has started to signify the ability of females to prove that they are as good as any man in occupations traditionally performed by men. Few people acknowledge the wealth of female skills such as co-operation, sensitivity and empathy, which would enhance organisational performance. Hence, female values would enhance policing.

Reiner (1992:124) claimed that the Police Force is full ‘of old fashioned machismo’. Police culture oblige policemen to oppose sexual deviance by habitual ‘sexual boasting and horseplay’, often at the expense of policewomen (PSI, 1983, volume IV: pp. 91-7 quoted in Reiner, 1992:124). Alcohol and sex are ingrained within the police culture. It ‘has always been tough for women police officers to gain acceptance’ Reiner (1992:125). Although today females have been officially accepted in the Police Force, they certainly have not been freed from gender discrimination (Heidensohn, 1992:117).

Martin and Jurik (1996:64) claimed that males conceive policing as ‘action-oriented, violent and uncertain.’ Policemen link these objectives to masculinity. They view ‘real police-work’ as crime fighting (Martin and Jurik 1996:64). Consequently, outside ‘real police-work’ is performed by males, whereas inside, clerical duties are left to females (Martin and Jurik, 1996:64). Policewomen become victims of stereotyping and are confined to a desk. To avoid the tokenism faced by those on patrol, policewomen opt for assignments considered adequate to their gender.

When it comes to promotions, Maltese policewomen face the highest hurdle: the ‘glass ceiling’ (Martin 1991 quoted in Burn 1996:73). A high police official explained that one cannot expect policewomen to acquire key positions as, despite of their qualifications, women are prone to marry and bear children. Consequently, once a Maltese policewoman manages to reach inspector level, her career advancement is halted.

|                   | <b>Females</b> | <b>Males</b> | <b>women:men</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| Constables        | 165            | 1,264        | 10:77            |
| Sergeants         | 31             | 255          | 10 :82           |
| Sergeant Majors   | ----           | 9            | -----            |
| Inspectors        | 4              | 65           | 10:163           |
| Higher Ranks      | ----           | 21           | -----            |
| Police Population | 200            | 1,614        | 10:81            |

Raggins and Sundstrom (1989 cited in Burn 1996:74) claimed that ‘gender is actually a better predictor of a person’s rank in the organisation than length of time in the organisation’. This explains why, out of the 200 policewomen in Malta, only 67 operate in districts and even these are generally restricted to routine office work. The remaining 133 perform office duties in the GHQ. Job satisfaction seems to be high. In fact, all respondents claimed that they were satisfied with their position. This can also be

explained by Raggins and Sundstrom’s belief that gender is the better predictor of rank. In fact, the reasons respondents gave for job satisfaction were quite preoccupying: 60% of the district policewomen appear ambitious whereas only 36.6% from those in the GHQ want to move on. 10% of the district policewomen and 30% of the GHQ policewomen claimed that their job was already as tough as they could handle. 30% (district) and 33.3% (GHQ) believed that they had already done as well as any women could ever aspire to.

In Malta, for there are ten policewomen for every 77 policemen (Table 1). The numbers show that there are a proportionate number of female sergeants, but this could only be a superficial display of equal opportunities within the Maltese Police

Force. An investigation could show that although females are proportionately represented in the rank of sergeant, they are still performing gender-specific work-roles. Women are clearly under-represented within the rank of inspector. However, besides showing a lack of opportunity for women, it could be the result of the poor ambition. Yet, this lack of motivation may well be indicative of Maltese policewomen's 'learned helplessness' (Brehm and Kassin, 1993:648).

Paradoxically, all respondents claimed that women should have high-ranking positions in the Police Force. The researcher interpreted this as an indication that although the majority of Maltese policewomen choose to behave passively, they *do* believe that women would prove to be as capable as men in high-rank positions. In fact, 80% of the GHQ policewomen believed that one day, Malta will have a female police commissioner, as opposed to only 30% of the district policewomen. Possibly, the later are more exposed to gender-related degradation and are more pessimistic.

| <b>Policewomen</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Favouritism</b> | <b>Competition</b> |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>District</b>    | 25%           | 75%                | --                 |
| <b>GHQ</b>         | 30%           | 30%                | 40%                |

Table 2 shows that although policewomen often feel discriminated against, only 25% of district and 30% of GHQ policewomen blamed

their gender. However, the interviewer was regularly reminded that sexual harassment comes with the job and those who comply receive favours. Thus, even favouritism might be a consequence of women's subordination to men within the Police Force. Therefore, agreeing with Bryson (1992:240) the author believes that females enter the world of work already at a disadvantage and as inferiors. Indeed, when a woman decides to pursue a career in policing she braves an invisible barricade which guards this traditionally 'male dominated occupation' (Muraskin and Roberts, 1996:341).

Policing has remained exclusively 'masculine' and vociferously resistant to females (Martin and Jurik, 1996:63). At the point of entering into the Police Force, women encounter an extremely hostile culture that isolates and marginalises them. Females 'enter a police organisation with rules, policies, and practices that are far from gender-neutral' (Martin and Jurik, 1996:73). Consequently, women are held in positions with little or no prestige allowing them scarce opportunities for career advancement. Muraskin and Roberts (1996:352) claimed that only if 'fair and equal' promotional testing methods are adopted will policewomen 'finally attain the number of higher ranking positions that should have been offered to them years ago'.

### 3. TRAINING

Once a woman manages to be accepted in the brotherhood of policing, she still has to face her baptism of fire: training for the job. Bryson (1992:5) argued that 'men are innately competitive, aggressive and sexually predatory', while females are tranquil, caring and co-operative and hence considered as weak. Within the Police Force it is the male culture that reigns supreme. Consequently, there seems to be a not-so-hidden agenda to 'make men of' female recruits (Heidensohn, 1992:136). The local training programme is replete with male values. Instructors bombard recruits with values emphasising action, control and personal detachment. The vast majority (76%) of Maltese policewomen interviewed complained that they were constantly bombarded with promises that they would be made 'real men'. Their training programme focuses on physical and technical abilities, which naturally put males at an advantage.

Whereas interpersonal skills, in which women are considered to be proficient, are given secondary importance (Martin and Jurik, 1996:76).

Heidensohn (1992:137) claimed that female recruits lacked 'a proper course at training school'. Thus, policewomen had to improvise methods of coping with the alien culture of the Police Force. Evidently, no female recruit is prepared for the masculine world of policing. Admittedly, mixed-gender classes may be a step in the right direction, but certainly not enough. Training programmes are still replete with machismo. In fact, the older Maltese policewomen who attended women-only classes (10%) believed that they were made to follow such programmes because, being females, they had to perform specific, gender-related duties. Younger Maltese policewomen claim that female recruits are being trained for posts that very rarely are they allowed to occupy.

The physical disparity between males and females has been a central argument in policing. It is claimed that the use of physical force is a common occurrence in a police officer's career. Thus, women become conspicuous since men are usually physically stronger (Martin and Jurik, 1996:77). Hence, policewomen are often judged as weak and inferior. Focusing training on the physical side would thus single out women and highlight their difficulties. Thus, Maltese female recruits fall prey to chauvinism and the predominant sexist attitude, which is perpetrated by stereotypical jokes and the media. Female recruits undergo a flirting and teasing trial, which clearly indicates that they are regarded as sex objects (Pike, 1992 quoted in Martin and Jurik, 1996:78).

The justification for such misdoing lies in the traditional concept of policing. Hence, a better future for Maltese policewomen may be secured by redefining this idea of policing to include female values, thus altering the very nature of police-work. Walklate (1995:130) suggested replacing discipline by conciliation. She reiterated that, if all females are to be allowed to prove their worth, the emphasis should be removed from the requirement of extraordinary physical strength. Benyon and Bourn (1986:7) described the 1950s as the 'Golden Age' of policing. Local constables were described as wise, amicable and helpful individuals. Public support was at its best when police officers were considered as friends and guardians. The modern trend to specialise policing has reduced this humane factor. Hard policing techniques might be of benefit to the macho image of policemen, however, its adverse effects have contributed to the distancing of the community from the Police Force (Benyon and Bourn, 1986).

In view of all this, perhaps the time is ripe for a change in the concept of policing. In accordance with Walklate (1995:130) 'the notion of a police service rather than a Police Force', should be seriously considered. This change would imply an alteration in the entry requirements for policing, training programmes and police performance evaluation. The author agrees with Clarke (1992:151) that the ideal solution for the future would be a marriage between male and female values. In the event of this change, training programmes would have to be restructured, giving female values the same importance as male values.

#### **4. POLICEMEN – POLICEWOMEN RELATIONSHIP**

Females have to determine the limit to which they are willing to adhere to the values of the Police Force while preserving their own. Clarke (1992:126) held that most

workplaces still resemble a male clique. The Maltese Police Force permits women to join it, as long as they follow male rules. The attitude of Maltese policemen towards their female counterparts may be the after-shocks of the clash of two worlds: the male and female ones.

Maltese policewomen are constantly bombarded with sexist remarks from male colleagues. Most policewomen judged the Malta Police Force as highly chauvinistic. 20% of GHQ policewomen believed that chauvinism is on its way out of the Police Force. Those who claimed that the Police Force was only 25% chauvinistic put the blame on policewomen, stating that most policewomen do not project a positive image of themselves. 40% claimed that Police Force chauvinism was decreasing, attributed this to the younger Maltese generations.

Horne (1980) believed that the paramount reason for opposition lies in the fact that males feel threatened when females demand the same occupations, duties and rights. Consequently, policemen hinder females from achieving them. Emotional and physical weakness has always been associated with females. Hence this myth, coupled with the sexist attitudes of policemen, has served as an impediment to the introduction of women within the Police Force. Policemen tend to be chauvinistic and treat females as sex tokens and this often led to scandals.

The predominant masculine culture within the Police Force requires policewomen to either be 'deprofessionalised' or 'defeminised' (Lunneborg, 1989:113). Hence, if a policewoman retains her self-identity and female values, she automatically becomes a subordinate, the gentle/weak gender, carrying out traditional female roles and duties. If a female officer sacrifices her female values and attempts going about police-work like a man, she would most probably find herself more respected and accepted as an equal by her male colleagues.

Lunneborg (1989:13) argued that, in the past, policemen maintained that females were not physically and emotionally strong enough for traditional police-work. Lunneborg claimed that such men may prefer to support the idea that policewomen are only suitable to deal with cases which require care-related skills, which are generally associated with women. These persons may be considered as specialists. Others, such as Horne (1980:60-63) believed that like male recruits, female recruits should be trained as generalists, exposing them to as many aspects of policing as possible. Horne sees no justification in treating policewomen differently than policemen. The usual process is for police officers to gain experience in all police-work, then decide whether to specialise and in what area to excel. Policewomen should be no exception. Assigning policewomen only to specific areas in turn bars them from achieving supervisory positions as they fail to acquire the necessary skills.

Entrusting Maltese policewomen only with certain duties may, as Horne (1980:60) observed, evoke negative feelings between male and female police officers. Maltese policemen resent the fact that policewomen get what they consider as easy tasks. They argue that if policewomen get equal wages, they should also perform equal jobs. Maltese Policemen may believe that if they have to gain specialist roles by proving their worth, so should policewomen. Gender should be no excuse.

## 5. POLICEWOMEN – COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

Maltese policewomen also face the prejudice of society whose attitude towards policewomen is the product of ‘myths *about* the nature of policing’ (Heidensohn, 1992:99), so efficiently created and perpetuated by the media. Reiner (1992:184) claimed that television gives the impression that law-enforcers always ‘solve or foil crime(s)...through the exercise of remarkable personal skill and daring’ - certainly not a reflection of real policing. Hence policing is depicted as a job for persons who possess brawn but not necessarily brains. Even when it includes policewomen, the media generally depicts them as either ‘supermasculine’ officers or as ‘brash, sexy, plainclothes, specialist’ detectives (Horne, 1980:73). This remains a sexist representation of policewomen; an image that remains ingrained in the minds of spectators including future police officers. The Police Force and the general public exaggerate the violent aspect of crime control in policing. This concept of police-work does little to justify the employment of policewomen.

Consequently, Maltese policewomen are rarely taken seriously indicating that the general public has not yet accepted policewomen. Another symptom of the low esteem suffered by Maltese policewomen is the extent of sexist remarks thrown at them while on duty. The majority (60%) of district policewomen claimed that they received sexist remarks whereas a much lesser portion (37%) of GHQ policewomen endured sexist remarks. However, one must remember that the officers at the GHQ only come in contact with the public on their way to and from work. Some GHQ policewomen confessed that they now put on their uniforms at work to avoid the unbearable remarks.

All district policewomen were convinced that the Maltese general public tended to be very chauvinistic. Whereas, the GHQ policewomen had a better opinion of Maltese society having a mere 17% stating that it was completely chauvinistic, 43% claiming that it was quite chauvinistic and 40% believing that machismo was on its way out. The latter held that younger generations were more receptive of policewomen. Thus, the relationship between policewomen and the Maltese general public is not ideal. The public’s perception of police-work and policewomen constitute yet another impediment for Maltese policewomen..

## 6. SEXUAL HARASSMENT

MacKinnon (1995:297) defined sexual harassment as a term that encompasses sexist remarks, degrading comments, undesired fondling, requests for sexual favours, rape and sexual blackmail. MacKinnon stressed that males dominate females by exercising sexual harassment. The result is the intimidation of women. Sexual harassment leaves indelible psychological scars, which negatively affect the work-performance of victims. In turn, sexual harassment may be the cause for the victims’ loss of jobs or promotions and personal reputations. MacKinnon (1995:297) reiterated that sexual harassment is suffered by women of all calibre and may be induced by juniors, equals and superiors. The Police Force is certainly no exception.

Sexual harassment humiliates and marginalises women. Clearly, the nature of this abuse makes it very embarrassing for the policewomen interviewed to report - even to a researcher. In accordance to Gomez-Preston and Trescott (1995:402) interviews claimed that in cases of sexual abuse, it is the victim who most frequently gets blamed and consequently, they are the ones who are most frequently penalised by getting

transferred - also perhaps because they are the least indispensable. As a result, the majority of sexual harassment cases remain unknown and victims suffer in silence. Maltese policewomen are afraid to complain because as an interviewee stated, 'real police officers can take kicks'. Several respondents implied that sexual molestation came with the job and those who resisted it suffered.

Clarke (1992:103) claimed that victims of sexual harassment might be identified by marked symptoms such as: decrease in job performance and job satisfaction; absenteeism; anxiety, tension, irritation, depression; increased alcohol, cigarette and drug use; sleeplessness and tiredness; problems with weight and diet; migraine; coronary heart disease; difficulty with family and personal relationships; physical and mental illness. One may clearly note that such effects could have adverse consequences on persons involved in police-work, their colleagues and the general public. Sexual harassment reduces women to mere sex objects and as a result, they are disregarded (Bryson, 1992:192). It is a show of policemen's opposition to women rather than their uncontrollable lust.

Policewomen face a greater predicament than other females at work as in policing, members are expected to comply. Any objections meet the disapproval of the Police Force and may be considered as insubordination. Consequently victims of sexual harassment face further humiliation in front of the general public. As a result policewomen are viewed as sex objects and are not taken seriously by other members of the Police Force and the general public. Sexual harassment is a huge impediment that dampens the development rate of Police Forces around the world and should thus be devoted the attention it deserves.

## 7. STRESS

Stress is the uneasy feeling one experiences when faced by overwhelming demands. The very character of policing and its culture causes stress for all police officers (Cox, 1996:170). All female officers share primary stressors that may fall under four categories: external, organisational, task-related and personal (Wexler and Logan, 1983 cited in Lunneborg, 1989:94). Wexler and Logan identified other female-related stressors. Martin and Jurik (1996:95) agreed that the numerous barriers they met within the Police Force caused policewomen's stress. Morash and Haarr (1995 cited in Martin and Jurik, 1996:95) noted that sexual and language harassment constituted two sources of stress. However, living up to gender roles remains a major source of stress. Policewomen are thus in a constant internal struggle to choose between maintaining their values or surrendering them to adopt male ones. Research supports the hypothesis that excessive stress has adverse effects on employees' work performance (Brown and Campbell, 1994:1). This could be detrimental to the Police Force and the community.

| <b>policewomen</b> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>District</b>    | 100%       | ----      |
| <b>GHQ</b>         | 93%        | 7%        |

The Maltese Police Force does not recognise the destructive effects of stress and the consequent need to monitor and treat afflicted police officers. Policewomen suffer additional home/family-related stress (Table 3) because in Malta, working women are also expected to perform domestic responsibilities on their own. Thus, becoming a policewoman requires numerous adjustments to one's life. Policewomen are commonly regarded as eccentrics (Horne, 1980:171) consequently, one's social and family life may be negatively effected. They are constantly either paternalised or looked down upon. Their work is frequently

considered as unimportant and consequently, their career prospects appear very dim. Inadequate working environments and equipment, overcrowding and overwhelming workloads of paperwork also contribute to escalating stress levels in policewomen’s lives.

Table 4 Shows Maltese policewomen’s major stressors:

**Table 4: How would you define stress?**

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 30% claim that stress is caused by: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple roles (work + domestic responsibilities), no adequate resources, sexual harassment</li> </ul>   |
| 30% claim that stress is caused by: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple roles (work + domestic responsibilities), long working hours</li> <li>• sexual harassment</li> <li>• no respect, recognition, appreciation from male colleagues, superiors and the general public</li> </ul>                |
| 40% claim that stress is caused by: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple roles (work + domestic responsibilities)</li> <li>• no adequate resources, no support, sexual harassment</li> <li>• no respect, recognition, appreciation from male colleagues, superiors and the general public</li> </ul> |

Multiple roles and sexual harassment may be the main stressors of Maltese policewomen since all respondents have mentioned them (Table 4). The over-burdening of policewomen may create and perpetrate the idea that policing may only be a job suitable for single women. These constraints may have adverse consequences on married Maltese policewomen and may have even worse impact on those who are mothers. Whereas most policemen may enjoy the support of their wives, many policewomen have multiple roles: law-enforcers, wives and mothers (Horne, 1980:174). Most female officers become ‘Superwomen’ (Clarke, 1992:56) and fall under immense strain to optimally satisfy all their perceived responsibilities. They may thus choose to abandon their police career and dedicate their lives to traditional domestic roles. It may be for this reason that the majority of Maltese policewomen are single.

Most Maltese policewomen may not consider their occupation as a career but as an ordinary job - to be abandoned on marriage. This may also be the reason why the majority of Maltese policewomen are single and younger than 40 years. As a result, Maltese policewomen may not be interested in giving their utmost to the detriment of all policewomen. They leave prior to acquiring the necessary experience, skills and seniority thus ruining their chances for promotion. This proves Bryson’s (1992:197) point that females will never achieve equal status to males if they continue to have to satisfy all domestic responsibilities.

Different individuals have different ways of dealing with stress. Some officers quit policing. Others face up to the challenge it presents. Maltese policewomen may indeed lack role models, but the majority of them persevere. Lunneborg, (1989:93-98) claimed that female officers may relieve their stress by crying which is frequently interpreted as weakness. Biological findings showed the opposite: males resort to substance-abuse much quicker than females (Lunneborg, 1989:93). Policewomen were judged incompetent as they lack physical prowess yet, Lunneborg maintained that females are equally able to endure the tension of



police-work. In fact, she held that women are even better than men in coping with adverse situations, as they easily confide in loved ones, evoking support (Lunneborg, 1989:93).

## 1. CONCLUSION

In view of the research findings, the author believes that, although most Maltese policewomen are indeed victims of gender discrimination, their future may not be as bleak as their past. Evidently, they have the will and stamina to move the authorities to effect the necessary changes they themselves suggested (Table 5):

**Table 5: The Interviewees' recommendations**

|     | <b>Suggested improvements</b>                                     |     | <b>Suggested improvements</b>   |
|-----|---|-----|---|
| 95% | Child-care provisions   | 45% | Police officers should be penalised for using vulgar and/or sexist language |
| 81% | Improve general working conditions                                | 40% | Free life insurance   |
| 81% | Introduce part-time police officers                               | 36% | Special leave for family care   |
| 76% | Introduction of flexitime   | 33% | Reduction of working hours to 40 hrs  |
| 75% | Less bureaucracy for vacation leave                               | 27% | In-service training   |
| 73% | Clean, hygienic working environments                              | 26% | Better relationship between ranks   |
| 68% | Comfortable uniforms  | 23% | Phone subsidies   |
| 65% | Work Schedule ('detail') given earlier                            | 21% | Male cadets should be taught to respect their female colleagues             |
| 62% | Wage increase   | 18% | Adequate cadet training   |
| 61% | Policewomen utilised according to their abilities not gender      | 17% | Provision of transport for all police officers                              |
| 57% | Ability to take half days off                                     | 16% | Computerisation of police offices   |
| 56% | Greater awareness of on-the-job sexual harassment and its effects | 15% | Good manners and higher educational standards as entry requirements         |
| 55% | Introduction of modern equipment                                  | 13% | Policewomen should carry weapons  |

The author concludes with the thought of a policewoman: every family has its problems but members do not simply abandon their respective families for that. The Police Force is like a family. Its problems should be addressed and not allowed to ruin it.

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