

## SECTION 6

### DISSERTATION SYNTHESIS

The following synthesis of dissertations have obtained a First Class Honours degree in Work and Human Resources.

#### SECTION 6.1



## Caroline Zammit

### TITLE

The uphill struggle of Maltese women to top management posts: Exploring the gendered hurdles

### THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This qualitative research seeks to explore the visible and the invisible hurdles that may be holding women from making it to top management positions in private organisations in Malta. The study uses the gender lens to look into the organisational demands within private firms and family expectations that may encumber women from climbing the corporate career ladder. It builds on Joan's Acker Theory of Gendered Organisation and the notion of the "ideal worker" (1990).

### METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was captured through eight semi-structured qualitative interviews. These were conducted with four male and four female participants who all held a top management position in private organisations. All participants were married or were in a relationship, and had children who still reside with them. These informants were purposely chosen from different business sectors and hold different responsibilities within their organisations.

A Thematic Analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted in order to analyse the data and to identify emerging themes (Karin, 2008; Attride-Stirling, 2001).

## KEY FINDINGS

The research highlights three major hurdles that are hindering women in Malta from making it to the top management positions of private organisations. These are: 1) the gendered division of labour at home, 2) gendered organisations and 3) work-family conflict.

The research conducted suggests that socially constructed gender roles and gender stereotypes create strong expectations that lead to the belief that women should be responsible for the care of children and domestic tasks. On the other hand, there is a similar strong message that for men, paid work comes first and foremost. These gendered roles and gendered expectations create an imbalanced division of labour at home which benefits men and penalises women, who often feel obliged to take on the lion's share of the family care needs and the chores at home.

These gendered expectations continue to linger in the minds of the gatekeepers in private organisations who tend to form biases that often discriminate against women and are beneficial to men. These gendered biases are built around the assumption that women may be unable to meet the job expectations associated with high ranking jobs due to the heavier family burdens which they assume. In contrast, gatekeepers tend to associate men with positions that entail power and decision making and in the process they assume that men's attention, time and energy will not be affected negatively by family commitments or house chores. Due to the overwhelmingly male dominance in decision making positions within private organisations, these assumptions about women's and men's roles are firmly ingrained in their psyche.

Jobs in top management typically come along with specific expectations, such as long working hours including weekends and business related travel. These commitments clash with other family-related obligations. For example, long term absences in relation to maternity or parental leave are frowned upon and are deemed to have a negative impact on those who use them.

Another organisational factor that seems to be acting as a brake to women's career advancements is the recruitment process and its link to social networks. Organisations seldom advertise vacant within top management because they tend to prefer to head-hunt a specific candidate or consider people referred to them by others and those who promote themselves during networking events. This research

show that, since these events are more likely to be organised outside working hours, women tend to be in a minority because their family commitments often makes it challenging for them to participate in these networking events. This often means that women are losing out on opportunities to promote themselves whilst reducing their chances of becoming aware of vacant roles which are communicated through the grapevine. Therefore, although organisations claim that job positions are gender neutral, it is evident that they are not because top managerial roles are often shaped on the image of the "ideal worker" who is not encumbered with family commitments and family over work priorities (Acker, 1990). This suggests that the combination of gendered family roles and gendered organisations create an invisible barrier to women's career advancements and ambitions.

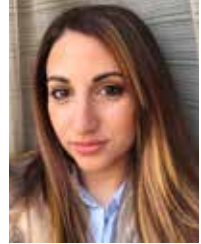
## CONCLUSION

This study highlights how gender roles and gender stereotypes hamper women's journeys as they attempt to climb up the corporate career ladder in private organisations. Notions of gender shape our lives and create expectations at home and at work that often link women with care and domestic responsibilities and men with paid work. This study suggests that Maltese society at large continues to propagate traditional gender roles which seem to be easily accepted and are less likely to be challenged. As a result, women continue to believe that they have the main responsibility for nurturing their families, even if this means giving up their career ambitions or else find ways to juggle and cope between the two distant worlds of work and family.

In order to achieve gender balance in top management positions, gender roles need to be challenged and changed at the personal level, within families and organisations and within the wider society.

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# Lisa Apap

## **TITLE**

Facilitating the retention of mothers in the gaming sector

## **THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of this qualitative study is to explore how the retention of mothers in the labour market, and specifically in the gaming industry, can be facilitated after the birth of a child. The study focuses on factors that facilitate the retention of mothers, namely what leave and support networks they resort to once they have a baby. The study is based on a theoretical framework, using the Time Bind theory of Arlie Hochschild (Stanhope, 1997).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative approach in order to find out from a sample of eight women what factors facilitate the retention of mothers after having a baby and availing themselves from leave, maternal or otherwise. The informants for this study were selected through purposive sampling.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

The results acknowledge that there are several challenges around the experience of motherhood. To fulfil the aim of this study, a number of factors were identified which facilitate the retention of mothers and therefore ensure their return to employment after the birth of a child. The factors that facilitate the retention of mothers emerge from formal and informal policies at the place of work, the family network, and the motivation of the mother herself. This study also provided recommendations that can be taken at family, workplace and state levels to enable mothers to remain in employment.

The findings showed that the informants' managers were very supportive and held an evolved mind-set based on attitudes of trust, respect and responsibility which support mothers during their maternity leave. None of the employees were expected to work, as their manager understood that they needed to focus on their baby. This shows the importance of the manager being able to understand and empathise with mothers during this period (Morris & Jacobs, 2013, pp. 1-31).

The findings also highlighted that employees in higher status positions are more exposed to pressure and higher expectations. Therefore, they experience a higher level of stress which could hinder their focus and dedication to their child (Damaske et al, 2014).

Flexibility also plays an important role for these mothers. Flexible options enabled the employees to settle into a new routine and adjust to new demands which emerged from the birth of a child in conjunction with work responsibilities (Morris & Jacobs, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

On the whole, the findings that emerged from this research study presented a number of possible factors that can facilitate the retention of mothers after the birth of their children. It also showed that mothers wanted to remain in employment after giving birth irrespective of the number of challenges which are linked to this experience, which somehow echoes Hochschild's theory, *The Time Bind*, but for different reasons.

The gaming industry in Malta includes a number of companies which originate from Nordic countries, countries with better family-friendly practices than those available in Malta. The gaming industry is a highly innovative and technological sector. Therefore, it can contribute to the retention of working mothers since it can give them the opportunity to work from different locations. This sector can introduce family-friendly practices in Malta, which can lead to a change in the culture around the type of support that companies should offer to working mothers.

One needs to consider that Malta currently has the lowest unemployment rate in the European Union (Eurostat, 2016) and therefore employers must ensure that they retain mothers given the limited supply of workers in the labour market. On the other hand, the labour market can benefit from the contribution of women to the place of work, which is as important as the contribution given by men.

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