

**Experiences and Perceptions of Gender-based Discrimination at the Malta  
International Airport**

By

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## DECLARATION

I, ISABELLE PISANI, declare that this is an original piece of work, produced entirely by me, and that all source material has been appropriately referenced. In addition, I attest that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of any other course, degree, or qualification at this or any other university or institute of learning.

\_\_\_\_\_*ISABELLE PISANI*\_\_\_\_\_

Student's signature

## **ABSTRACT**

Workforce diversity is an important source enabling the competitive advantage of a company. Numerous studies confirm that diversity in an organizational context produces more innovative, creative, profitable, and flexible teams, who can satisfy rapidly changing global customer demands. This dissertation focuses on gender-based discrimination at the Malta International Airport. By means of conducting 5 structured interviews with managers and heads of department at the Malta International Airport, data relating to gender-based discrimination and information on policies mitigating this phenomenon were collected. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyzing the data providing insights into the contemporary situation of Maltese female employees, as perceived by management. Results and findings are presented after a thorough discussion of existing literature.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and Overview of the Study**

Malta International Airport is in Luqa and is the only means of travelling by air from the island of Malta. This airport was created due to an increase in the number of people using air transport (Livingston, 2020). Furthermore, an increase in the number of international tourists necessitated a speedy construction of this airport. The British government constructed Malta international airport in 1956, with more than 10,000 employees (Barak, 2016). It is an international airport controlled by the Malta international authorities and serves the entire Maltese Islands. This airport has well-dedicated and trained employees who are mandated to address all the requests from their respective customers. Besides, (Barak 2016) states that most airports face various management issues. Airport management challenges include gender diversity, discrimination, and gender equity (Grixti, 2016). According to the human relation theory by Elton Mayo, gender diversity helps to bring new ideas to any business organisation and promotes peace and harmony (Bruce & Nyland, 2011). However, most business companies have feared incorporating this management practice into their operations. Other operational problems identified at this company include frequent discrimination cases and gender equality problems (Grixti, 2016). However, the concept of inclusivity has been adhered to at this organisation. This is because all the employees are involved in the company's operations. This study aims to analyse and evaluate the operations of various international airports, particularly the Malta international airport. The research seeks to establish whether the Malta international airport fulfils the concepts of gender equality in its operations, whether

there are discrimination practices at the airport and whether there is inclusion at the airport.

Notably, gaps in most international airports' operations remain a concern, especially in gender and age gaps. According to the conflict theory of sociology, women are usually seen as disadvantaged by power inequalities between men and women, and this notion is built onto the social structure. This same social issue applies to nearly all airports globally, where women are not given equal opportunities as their male counterparts in the various roles of the airport. Therefore, equality, diversity, inclusion, and discrimination have been the main challenges at different international airports. This problem dates back to 1950, immediately after the Second World War (Barak, 2016). For some time, the aviation industry has been dominated by the male gender, with women getting little attention from the relevant stakeholders. Accordingly, a recent study confirms that most aviation industries are usually reluctant to hire female employees (Ferguson, 2010).

Furthermore, airport surveys have shown that more than 60% of the aviation industry is dominated by men (Livingston, 2020). Besides, most pilots are also engineers and mechanics in various aviation industries, and hence, they are usually given a higher priority (Yanikoğlu, Kılıç & Küçükönel, 2020). Thus, diversity and inequality remain an issue of concern in most international airports.

Gender equality, discrimination, and diversity challenges are also witnessed at the Malta international airport. The problem has been so imminent and rampant that it has received international attention (Malta International Airport, 2019b; Malta International Airport, 2019a). Gender inequality has been an order of the day at the Malta International Airport, especially in the specialisation sector (Lau, 2018). On the other hand, gender parity has been on the rise, mainly in airports. Therefore, in the airport, gender roles are defined in terms of the functions that various people play the airport. However, according to the national policies

primarily associated with the European Union, Malta needs to ensure that the integration of gender equality issues is solved and that gender discrimination is mitigated. According to these reports, females are the most disadvantaged gender at the airport. On the other hand, company reports reveal that the male population is higher than females in the different departments (Malta International Airport, 2019b; and Malta International Airport, 2019a). This situation occurs because the organisation has very ineffective programs and inquiry commissions that are supposed to address these challenges (Malta International Airport, 2019b; and Malta International Airport, 2019a).

Additionally, inadequate national strategies and action plans on gender mainstreaming have made it difficult for the company to implement programs to end gender inequality. Furthermore, gender stratification and sexism that have emerged in Malta have made many societies structured by patriarchy. Patriarchy means that men dominate the societal systems, such as political, economic, and social systems. First and foremost (Barak, 2016) states that this facility has a high rate of gender discrimination, primarily directed toward the female gender. Women are not only discriminated against the due base on the roles they play at the airport but also based on the wages, as most of them are not paid like men. This scenario can be explained in terms of the Human capital Theory, which asserts that human gender differences in wages resulting from the individual characteristics that different types of workers bring to a particular job. The problem of gender discrimination against women dates back to 1980, when the airport's founders, mainly the British, admitted that they could not hire female employees because they were not well equipped for this industry (Barak, 2016). Therefore, this notion has existed at the airport for an extended period. In 1980, however, a report highlighting women's plight at various international airports and the need to incorporate female employees at the airports was published (ICAO, 2015). Therefore, understanding such challenges will be pertinent to the research.



Besides, gender discrimination remains prevalent in this airport. For instance, the company's recent report shows that women only make up about 35.5 per cent of the total workforce as of 2019 compared to 35.6 per cent as of 2018 (Malta International Airport, 2019a). Furthermore, Lau (2018) notes that the rate at which female employees are discriminated against is almost twice that of men. For instance, it is more likely that women are more sexually harassed and intimidated than men at work. According to recent research by Lau (2018), women are twice more likely to be touched indecently, and threatened by their managers and male coworkers at the job. Most specifically, in Malta, where the society is primarily patriarchal, it is more likely that women at the company are sexually harassed due to their expressive roles in society. According to the functionalist theory, men play an instrumental role in society, whereas women play explicit roles (Graham, 2020). This theory is crucial as it explains why there is so much gender discrimination at the Malta International Airport, particularly against women. The problem of female discrimination dated to 1985 when a manager harassed a female employee in the company due to some customers' carelessness at the airport (Williams, 2012). Most female employees were also fired for failing to handle the customers effectively, although investigations revealed no problem on the female employees' side. Besides, ICAO advocates for female employees' rights at various international airports, including Malta (2015). Various gender-based reports have shown that besides gender roles being defined and influenced by factors such as religion and family work experience, the difference in attitudes between men and women also has much influence. Since employees at the airport facility are male, it is more likely that their attitudes toward women working at the same facility contributed to them being discriminated against and fired without any reasonable cause. For a long time, the authorities of Malta International Airport have failed to address this issue due to the nature of the Maltese Society. However, only a few international airports have addressed these challenges. The London Heathrow international airport in London has been excellent at handling some of the difficulties other airports face. In 2016, this international airport received

international recognition as the only airport that addressed all the inclusivity challenges at their respective workplaces (Malta International Airport, 2018). Overall, the airport implemented numerous programs to improve equality and diversity.

Issues of gender discrimination and inequality have contributed to numerous impacts on employees and institutions. Markedly, a report by ICAO (2015) revealed that most employees in most airports had quit their respective jobs due to unfair treatment by the management. With increased gender discrimination, most employees were affected psychologically and physically. The stigmatisation was even too high, which means the employees' performance has also been reduced. Most employees at the Malta International Airport have reported a lack of motivation from the airport management and authorities, which has increased the turnover number of employees from the facility. Most notably, females, the most discriminated gender, have left their respective roles, resulting in a deficiency of the female workforce at the airport. According to a recent report by the Maltese International Airport, there has been approximately 47% turnover of female employees from the facility annually from 1980-to 2011, creating a considerable workforce gap at the company. Every business organisation is entitled to have conflicts in their respective working environments. However, Graham (2020) states that Malta international airport has no effective mechanisms for dealing with such issues in their working environments. According to the report published by the (ICAO, 2015), the Salt Lake City international airport in the US, the Hong Kong international airport, and the Sydney airport in Australia is among the leading airports in terms of female employee turnover in the world. The report suggests that these airports have an annual female employee turnover of about 13% (ICAO, 2015). From 1980 to 2000, female employee turnover cases were very high since most female employees were being ill-treated at various international airports. However, (Livingston, 2020) notes that various international organisations like ICAO have advocated for women's rights at different international airports in the last ten years. Therefore, the cases of female employee

turnover have reduced immensely. According to Livingston (2020), Malta international airport usually records a 5-10% employee turnover yearly, although this trend is expected to drop by 2025. Thus, understanding and mitigating diversity and equality issues in the airport are crucial to the research.

Consequently, diversity and inclusion issues remain challenging to the aviation industry and most business organisations, including the hospitality industry. According to Livingston (2020), the problem of gender inclusion accounts for more than 39% of the world's unemployment cases. Most aviation industries have not always included the interest of female employees in their operations. Besides, aviation reports suggest that only 34% of international airports worldwide have included diversity inclusion in their business operations (ICAO, 2015). Thus, it is understandable that most aviation industries are usually reluctant to embrace gender equality in their operations.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Diversity, discrimination, inclusion, and inequality issues remain problematic in the management of the airport workforce. Besides, scholars observe that various international airports have experienced several management challenges in their operations (Williams, 2012). However, this industry's biggest challenges are gender equity, diversity, inclusion, and employment discrimination. Williams (2012) has established that Malta international airport has been biased in recruiting its employees and that inequalities are evident. More notably, the company has been marred with discrimination against women as they are not allowed to partake in the roles of men. With most of society upholding patriarchy, it is evident that women are discriminated against more than men. Therefore, gender inclusivity and inequality have always been a problem and will remain if measures against this vice are not taken. For instance, women accounted for only 35.5 per cent of the total workforce as of 2019, less than the expected 50 per cent threshold (Malta International Airport, 2019b). Moreover, the research has also established that

there have been several cases of gender discrimination in the last five years at this airport, with the minimum effort taken to solve the problem (Grixti, 2016). Therefore, this research problem will be an eye-opener for Malta international airport and other airports worldwide to address management challenges related to equality, discrimination, and inclusion. It aims to examine this issue using a qualitative perspective and to delve into the reasons why such gender-based discrimination practices are taking place.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

#### *Research Aim*

The study aims to investigate whether the Malta International Airport fulfils the concepts of gender equality in its operations, whether there are discrimination practices at the airport and whether there is inclusion at the airport.

#### *Research objectives*

The following objectives were framed to meet the research aim:

- To understand the gender demographics currently employed at MIA.
- To analyze the factors impacting the career progression at MIA and obstacles faced raised by the management while implementing them.
- To identify the current discrimination policies currently implemented at MIA.

### **1.4 The Significance of the Study**

Institutional discrimination has been one of the main challenges facing many institutions worldwide. For instance, in some more patriarchal aligned countries for example South Korea, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2009; Keddie, 2012; Kim, 2006) females are usually marred from engaging in economic activities that are otherwise thought to be that of men. In most offices,

banks, airports, and other corporate facilities, many employees have also severally complained of being discriminated against by at least one of their colleagues based on their gender. In my experience of being an employee, it is my impression that women have faced a period of long persecution at the facility due to gender discrimination. Due to their gender, some have even been mishandled by the clients and their fellow male employees, resulting in cases of attempted rape and even assault. Therefore, this research will be significant for the Malta International Airport in order to tackle issues of gender discrimination. The study is also essential as it will enable Malta International Airport to find better ways to eradicate such vices from its facilities to create a conducive working environment for its employees. Therefore, this research also will look at the necessary and possible relevant interventions that the government of Malta and the management of the Malta International Airport should take to ensure that a conducive environment is provided at the facility through advocating for equality and inclusivity of women at the workforce system of the airport.

### **1.5 The Limitations of the Study**

One of the significant limitations of this study is the restricted sample size. Most of the employees at the facility, especially women, fear giving out their experiences about the discrimination and prejudices they experience at the facility due to fear of being victimized by the administration (Berndt, 2020).

Another major limitation is the time needed to carry out the entire study from commencement to finalizing the project. Most managers are very busy, and it was very difficult to schedule the time needed to carry out interviews.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

In the current chapter, the researcher has introduced the research background and the significance of conducting the present study as well. Research aims and

objectives were introduced, and the overall limitation of the research was also discussed.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The assessment of the practices of equality of the sexes, gender inclusion and diversity and gender inequality at Malta International Airport will be shown in this section of the dissertation.

In this instance, the literature study will aid in evaluating and examining the numerous equalities between the sexes, diversity, inclusivity, and discrimination procedures at Malta International Airport. This will make it easier to evaluate and analyze the required results. The literature review in this instance will be provided based on established headings: Integration of the literature available, theoretical foundations that will be applied in this research, and previous empirical studies of the subject. Different examples and situations of gender inequality at Malta International Airport, as well as gender inclusion at Malta International Airport, are among the many topics relating to gender equity at Malta International Airport. A review of earlier writing on the subject will be conducted.

#### **2.2 The Concept of Gender**

Feminist academics generally concur that corporations are gendered organisations (Acker, 1990). Even though gender analysis is a crucial component of organisations' policies and practises, these cannot be evaluated independently. As the investigator, I discuss some of the concepts that have influenced how I see and perceive gender in this part. The traditional understanding of gender is that it is a socially and historically constructed system of values and norms based on presumptions and issues around masculine and feminine (Edvardsson, 2012). Social interactions and culture have an impact on how men and women live their personal lives differently depending on their gender (Fine 2010; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) claims that when feminist groups

started to clearly distinguish between the concepts of gender and sex, the definition of gender that read: "the cultural gap of women from males, based on the biological separation between male and female" became quite popular (p. 9). This distinction was made on the grounds that, in contrast to gender, which is a socially and culturally constructed "manufactured" concept, sex is a physiologically deterministic phenomena. The understanding of gender's complexity has subsequently posed a challenge to this oversimplified perspective. There are now more words and phrases that describe gender, including cisgender, transgender, and transgenderism. Currently, it is believed that gender is unstable, fluid, and influenced by the overlapping areas of the social and biological worlds (Hearn and Wray, 2015). The norms of gendered organizations, such as governments, businesses, and organisations, continue to permeate people's lives in reality. Gender is referred to as "an axis of power, an organising force that influences social hierarchy, identities, and knowledge" by (O'Connor (2020). They go on to claim that business organisations, which were primarily founded by and for men, reflect masculine experience and values as well as the circumstances of men's lives, and that gender inequality is "sustained through public and private social practices institutionalised in organisations," including business organisations (O'Connor, 2020).

Undoing gender, or promoting gender equality, is the reverse of doing gender (Deutsch, 2007). When one "undoes gender," they act in a way that defies gender conventions and breaks down all sex-based expectations that people may have of them (Deutsch 2007). According to Deutsch (2007), eradicating gender entails minimising gender inequalities and achieving gender equality. Therefore, a gender-undoing technique equates to gender neutrality. That person does not consider sex, its standards or stereotypes; only people. So, claiming one is sexual identity is equivalent to claiming there is no discrimination (Deutsch, 2007). However, (Kelan (2009) contends that equality is not necessarily realized simply because sexual identity undoing is established. In addition, gender relevance can be extremely prevalent or nearly minimal depending on many factors, according to



Ridgeway and Corell (2004), but it constantly lurks in the background. When defining oneself and others, cultural and institutional roles and identities are taken into account first, but gender is always a background identity in the context of social relationships (Magnusson, Rönnblom, & Silius 2008; Ridgeway & Corell 2004). So, even if a person conforms to expectations (doing gender) or deviates from expectations (undoing gender), their gender is still unimportant. Gender cannot be erased, thus even when businesses claim to be gender-neutral, a person's gender will always play a big part.

According to Kelan (2009), businesses are sick of hearing regarding gender and equality and prefer to present themselves as gender-neutral. Taking a post-feminist stance is equivalent to presuming that the issues are resolved. Lewis (2006) also analyses the gender-blind worldview, which holds that gender is no longer significant and that being gender blind is therefore more progressive. That requires one to disregard the privilege and authority of the dominant gender group in society, nevertheless. Additionally, businesses lose sight of the gender-based discrimination that might occur in the workplace (Kelan 2009; Lewis, 2006; Magnusson, Rönnblom & Silius 2008; Ridgeway & Corell 2004). According to Carlsson (quoted in Magnusson, Rönnblom, & Silius 2008), businesses cannot afford to have hostile work environments; in order for Sweden to compete internationally, there must be safe spaces where everyone can grow. However, Deutsch (2007) highlights that nothing really changes no matter how much is said about gender. It is difficult to achieve unity if businesses do not see themselves as gender-neutral. Starting discourses about distinctions creates differences. Thus, it becomes a conundrum to contemplate one's gender neutrality while issues that are related to someone's gender persist (Kelan, 2009).

### ***2.2.1 Gender neutrality and gender discrimination***

The fact that organisations identify as gender-neutral does not negate the existence of issues based on gender (Kelan, 2009). Although anti-discrimination laws have played a significant part in boosting opportunities for minorities in the

workplace, full equity has not been achieved (Gregory, 2003), and issues still exist. According to Kalpazidou (2022) definition of equality, this study will be related to the idea of equality: "Gender equality means that girls and males have same privileges, responsibilities, and chances in all areas of life." It's probable that inequality continues since gender differences are not taken into account while solving current issues. Declaring gender neutrality may be perceived as a simple approach to demonstrate the eradication of gender inequality, however this does not imply that discrimination has been eradicated (Kelan, 2009).

There could be a case made that a workplace that is gender neutral does not exist. The disadvantage of women is frequently highlighted in discussions of gender inequality, but rarely is the benefit of men (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). We frequently overlook the fact that the disadvantage faced by women stems from the perception of men as better in society. Chances of achieving equality are slim if we hold on to the notion that men are superior. Therefore, companies that claim to be gender neutral may be ignoring these issues rather than trying to solve them. Malta is regarded as one of the most egalitarian nations in the world (Nyman, Reinkainen & Eriksson, 2018). That, however, is based on quantifiable factors. Even while not, everything can be quantified, unmeasurable components can nevertheless be very important. Therefore, despite the increase in sex diversity in the workforce and the entry of both genders into formerly dominating areas, issues persist (Simpson, 2004). As a result, people of both sexes may experience social injustice and rejection from the group in gender-atypical employment where they have become tokens. Therefore, if organisations assert that they are sexual identity and the same issues affect both minority groups, one may infer that the issues are caused by people's token status rather than gender issues. Males in occupations where women are the majority should therefore have similar experiences to females in occupations where men are the majority. Eagly and Karau (2002), for instance, claim that while possessing positional power, women in leadership roles are seen as having less influential power. Females may lose power because of male domination given that the leadership position is

predominately male (Onoyiwe-Baradlai and Fogelström, 2021). Expanding on this notion, men might experience the same issues if they take up a stereotypically female job like nursing. Males may be underrepresented in this context because nursing is typically thought to be a field dominated by women (Granberg et al., 2020). So, would a minority of men likewise have less power? This is because organisations assert that they are genderless, regardless of industry. Therefore, in the present study, it is possible to compare any two sexual preference minorities to determine if employment issues are caused by gender differences or by the fact that the individuals are minorities.

### **2.3 Perceptions of gender-based discrimination**

The perception of discrimination is that a person has received unfair treatment as a result of belonging to a certain social group (Brown, 2011). However, because discrimination is contextual, it is challenging to determine whether a person is discriminated against in the same way that they believe they are (Lewis et al., 2015). Gender discrimination is a complex issue that has been dubbed a "social sickness" since it destroys the lives of millions of women, frequently forcing them to commit suicide or lead terrible lives. According to Osmani & Sen (2003), if girls and boys and men and women were given even nearly equal treatment and opportunities, there would be over 100 million more women alive today than there are at the moment. The fact of "missing" women serves as evidence that women are discriminated against beginning at birth (Osmani & Sen, 2003). When examined in greater detail, discrimination practises affect practically every element of human life, particularly negatively affecting the welfare of women. According to social psychologists, experiencing prejudice and discrimination can have both harmful and beneficial effects on a person's life (Bourguignon et al., 2006). While there is little dispute among social psychologists regarding the harm that prejudice and unequal treatment practices cause to underprivileged groups, there is less agreement regarding the effects of believing that oneself or one's group is the victim of discrimination on psychological well-being. According to one viewpoint,

experiencing prejudice can be advantageous since it aids members of underprivileged groups in discounting their own casual role in causing unfavourable consequences (Weiner,2013). According to another viewpoint, the awareness that one's in-group is ignored by the rest and that its life chances are restricted in a way others that' are not harmful to the psychological health of members of the marginalized people (Smart Richman and Leary, 2009). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the first international document to recognize the many different types of discrimination (1948).

### **2.3 The Concept of Gender Equality**

Given that gender-based discrimination is the main topic of this dissertation, it is important to examine gender equality and to give a definition of how this notion is viewed by both feminist and management experts. I elaborate the feminist and corporate definitions that serve as the foundation for my interpretation of the term in this part. Women and men should have equal opportunities to exercise all of their human rights, contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development. This is what is meant by gender equality. Therefore, considering men and women equally in terms of their similarities and differences as well as the role that they play is what is meant by gender equality. It is predicated on the idea that men and women are equal partners in the family, the community, and society (p. 17). When it comes to determining gender equality, the feminist concept is far from having the same viewpoint. The feminist notion of gender equality, according to Kenney (2012), is complex, multidimensional, and flexible, making it easy to be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on context, the focus, and the goals of studies (Spiro, 2012). Varied feminisms present different theoretical stances on gender equality, such as liberal, cultural, and revolutionary feminism. The majority of feminists, according to Wodak (2005), concur that "men and women ought to have equal rights and equal life opportunities without being valued differently" (p. 520). These feminisms, however, give various perspectives on what these liberties are, as well as what arguments and tactics are necessary

to attain gender equality. The objective of choosing the following viewpoints was to show the variety of feminist interpretations of the idea of gender equality. Liberal feminists contend that equal opportunity and position for men and women are key components of gender equality. Their main discussion topics in global politics and development are the absence of women from positions of power (Burchill et al., 2022). Women, according to cultural feminists, differ from men in that they hold different "female values." These qualities, such as compromise, compassion, and tenderness, are not inborn traits but rather have their origins in cultural notions of gender norms (Samovar et al., 2016). These cultural feminists emphasise the necessity for more women in politics in order to introduce traits that are often associated with women into the political system, which would eventually result in more equality (Herdt, 2020). Marxist (or socialist) feminism is concerned with elucidating the causes of how capitalism and private property systems oppress women. Marxist feminists contend that capitalism and patriarchy are the primary drivers of gender inequality. They contend that women are structurally underprivileged as a result of patriarchal rule and that gender equality can only be realized through a radical reorganization of the existing capitalist system (Samovar et al., 2016). Lastly, post-colonial feminism emphasizes the distinctions between women in the global South and North and includes racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors in the conversation about gender equality. The dominance of Western liberal feminism, according to post-colonial feminists, is detrimental to the equality of women in the South since they have distinct needs and interests to consider as they deal with various life challenges (Spiro, 2012). Large multinational corporations frequently rely on working definition given by multinationals, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN organization that deals with labour issues, rather than developing or providing their own definitions and comprehension of gender equality. The ILO defines gender equality as the possession by men, women, and children of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment in all sectors of life. It maintains that a person's access to resources, social standing, and rights are independent of their gender at birth. [...] According

to the ABC of Women Worker's Rights and Gender Equality (Cole, 2022), gender equality assumes that all men and women are free to create their unique talents and make decisions and choices without being constrained by stereotypes or preconceived notions about gender norms or the character traits of men and women. According to Kleven et al., (2019), companies that are important allies in the cause of gender equality frequently describe it as a rise in the proportion of women working for pay. Businesses reinterpret the phrase to match their own goals, including reputation and profit, by adding their own perceptions and desires (2019). Summarizing the many viewpoints on the causes and roots of gender discrimination, it may be claimed that the concepts discussed above have some characteristics. They all concur that men and masculine ideals are constructed and given preference over feminine values, and that women and the norms that are deemed feminine are given special treatment than men as a group. Social connections are characterized by an uneven power structure, which results in social inequality between men and women as well as between the categories of men and women (Lovas, 2017; Kilgour, 2013). When it comes to tackling gender disparity, it is important to keep in mind that masculine ideals are prioritised above feminine values rather than men as a group. Although it is often believed that males benefit from inequality, it would be incorrect to say that they do so equally (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). Similar to how men are not equally harmed by disparities, women are not equally harmed too. A critical feminist legal theorist named Lindsey (2020) contends that a variety of physiological, social, and cultural categories—including gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation—as well as their resilience—intersect on multiple and frequently concurrent levels and are a major cause of systemic social inequality. Concepts of transversal, which are covered later in this chapter, commonly acknowledge this concept. The argument over whether equality is about uniformity (i.e., true equality) or difference (i.e., equally appreciating difference) is a significant distinction between the multiple perspective of gender equality (Neutens et al., 2010). While the fundamental tenet of sameness is that men and women should be treated equally, the difference approach is

concerned with treating men and women fairly while taking into account their inherent distinctions (Scott, 2018). However, it is commonly understood that because of the complexity of the roles and duties of women and men in society, neither strategy by itself will certainly lead to social and economic equality (Hertz, 2020). There is a need for a more thorough definition that takes into account both the comfortable and diversity perspectives. Beyond the sameness approach, the Council of Europe offers the following well-known institutional definition of gender equality: In all areas of professional and personal life, both sexes must be equally visible, empowered, and involved. [Equality] means acknowledging and valuing equitably the differences between women and men and the varied roles they play in society. It does not mean establishing men, their lifestyle, and conditions as the norm (2020). In other words, men and women should not be treated or valued differently and should have equal access to all chances and resources in life (Scott, 2018). Deeply ingrained societal presumptions arise from the "conventional" socially manufactured traits of overt masculinity (i.e., aggressiveness, strength, and power) and femininity (i.e., passivity, weakness, and emotions) (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017; Scott, 2018; Hertz, 2020). It is not a problem to have unique qualities per se; the issue arises when those features are valued differently. This imbalance results in gender-based disparities that occur in all societies, endure in both public and private settings, and cause girls and women to face discrimination as well as social and economic isolation (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). According to O'Connor (2020), the issue is that what appears "normal" and impartial often privileges characteristics that are culturally associated with men while undervaluing or disregarding those characteristics associated with women. Gender equality is frequently seen as a problem for women because mainstream development discourses and practises sometimes mistake the concept of gender as equal to the concept of women (Hertz, 2020; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017; Kleven et al., 2019). However, feminists acknowledge and underline that although gender applies to both sexes, both men and women must work to achieve gender equality. Therefore, in order to attain gender equality, the problem should affect

both men and women. Therefore, a lot of consideration was given in this analysis to how men were discussed and treated inside the same corporate documents, in addition to how women's roles and features were addressed by Maltese international airport policies. Because of the complex, inter-relational nature of the concept, I purposefully avoid using the term "women's equality" throughout this dissertation. Instead, I use "gender equality."

## **2.4 Gender Inequality in Malta**

According to Livingstone (2020), gender inequality has always been an issue in Malta. The patriarchal nature of Maltese society means that men have historically discriminated against women on economic, social, and political levels. The institutions, however, are one of the most impacted economic sectors. Maltese-born whites make up the majority of the population, although other races have also been introduced to the country because there aren't enough trained workers on the island (Smith, 2006). This indicates that, albeit in lower numbers, the nation also contains some residents who are natives of other nations, including Chinese, Africans, Indians, Americans, and other residents of Eastern Europe and Italy. Since we are island dwellers, road transportation has not been widely adopted throughout the nation. Consequently, the nation has embraced transportation in order to establish economic alliances with other nations. However, of these modes of transportation, air travel has been favoured by the majority of businesspeople and other international investors and corporations. As a result, the nation has made large investments in the construction of airports. The only international airport in Malta is Malta International Airport, which has a large workforce that provides services to customers.

With a poverty rating of 4, it appears that the majority of households struggle to achieve their most basic requirements. This has major implications for households with a single parent, the majority of whom are presumably women, as most of women are unable to cover all of the household's demands because of rising living expenses caused by mortgages and rent. In order to fully and effectively handle



the demands of the household, both parents must be employed. Because of these circumstances, the majority of women have joined men in institutions to work in order to support their families. The Maltese government and the management of the Malta International Airport, however, appear to have done very little to ensure that women in this facility are safeguarded and that equality and inclusivity are preserved, according to study by Bruce and Nyland (2011).

## **2.5 Gender Inequality and discrimination in Airline industry**

The international airports of Manchester, Heathrow, and Hong Kong all underwent significant research by the International Civil Aviation Organization in 2009. ICAO (2015). Certain studies were carried out to examine the efficiency with which these international airports function. The primary variables taken into account in these research investigations were incidents of discrimination, inclusion, and gender diversity as well as gender equality. According to the study's findings, Heathrow International Airport had the best performance, followed by Manchester International Airport and Hong Kong International Airport. Additionally, the Hong Kong international airport has a significant rate of discrimination, according to ICAO (2015). First, according to research, less than 15% of personnel at this airport are hired from outside the country; as a result, local hires are given priority (Veiga et al., 2018). Additionally, the research revealed that female workers at the organisation frequently experience numerous forms of discrimination, such as verbal abuse, wrongful terminations, and poor employment rates. The South China Morning Post (August, 2022), has claimed that discrimination in Hong Kong has become so pervasive that even transgender tourists face prejudice. According to the allegation, immigration agents at the Hong Kong International Airport recently discriminated against two transgender women. The women in question are Thai citizens from Bangkok. It was alleged that when they informed the officials that their objective for visiting the city was for buying and tourism, the officials informed them that they had not accomplished their intended goal of taking a vacation. After the women declined to sign two documents, one of which was intended to indicate

that they had undergone full transgender surgery and the other of which was intended to confirm that they would willingly return to Thailand right away, they were then put back on a flight to Thailand. The Hong Kong government has not done enough, according to this example, to foster an environment that encourages equality for all people without automatically discrimination towards them based on their gender alignment. The survey also showed that similar issues are present at Manchester International Airport, where there is a significant gender gap in the workforce. However, it was discovered that the operations at Heathrow International airport had great services. According to Livingston (2020), the organisation has a 50:50 split of male and female employees, few instances of discrimination, and a high level of inclusivity. Gender diversity is therefore a top priority in this company.

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

### **2.6.1 Social Categorization**

From the very beginning of sociological philosophy, there has been interest in the causes and effects of social classification. When he states that "the first prerequisite of being confronted with anybody... is to know with and who one has to deal," Simmel ([1908] 1950) highlights the significance of this procedure (p. 307). According to Mead's and Schubert (1934) definition of the evolution of the self, for interaction to take place, actors must classify one another and the "generalised other" according to their respective roles. Allport (1954) makes the case in his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice* that the act of categorising others is unavoidable, normal, and required to provide social interaction purpose and structure. Recent sociological analyses of categorization emphasise the importance of using social cognition theory's findings to identify the root causes of a lot of prejudice and injustice (see Risman, 2018; Hitlin, 2015; Tyler, 2021; Sprague, 2016; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2017). In the sense that discriminate on the grounds of categories like race and gender could not emerge if actors did not

regularly categorise one another on these dimensions, social categorization is thought to be an initial cause of discrimination.

Social cognition theory asserts that classifying actors as members of broadly defined groups is "a ubiquitous human predisposition," with a variety of potentially automatic repercussions (Fiske et al., 2018, p. 364). Even when categorization is based on arbitrary and simple criteria that have been experimentally modified, it produces ingroup bias and outgroup disdain (see Jenkins, 2014; Baumeister and Leary, 2017). Actors that exhibit ingroup preference are more at ease with, trust more in, demand equal treatment from, and overall have more positive opinions of their own community (Baron and Pfeffer, 1994; Perdue et al.1990). The ingroup bias that comes along with the typical process of social categorization might result in subtle kinds of gender discrimination in the workplace because white men predominate in many occupational settings (see Risman, 2018; Sprague, 2016; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017).

Among even actors who actively reject stereotypes, categorising someone as a part of a social unit also prime lenses stereotypical thoughts about the group (Amis et al., 2018). Observers are predisposed to pay attention to information that confirms stereotypes while being ignorant to information that contradicts them because stereotypes explain the behaviours that can be expected of a person of a certain category (Fiske et al., 2018). Actors emphasise between-group differences and downplay within-group differences because of stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2018). According to Sprague (2016) and Alvesson and Sköldberg (2017), the relatively simple act of intimate relations someone makes preconceptions about differences between the sexes salient enough to lead to discernible errors in an actor's perceptions and judgments. Once categorization has taken place, study has shown that it is quite challenging to convince individuals to focus on individuating facts rather than stereotypes. When determining whether a person would major in engineering or nursing, for instance, subjects continued to depend more on gender stereotypes than on information about the individual's interests,

even after being informed that men and women in the study population were equally distributed among college majors (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Stereotypes frequently include opinions about groups' general relative merit and position as well as presumptive distinctions. Studies on gender stereotypes and attitudes have shown that there are views regarding difference and relative position among genders in modern North American civilizations. Women are perceived as being more communal, whilst men are considered as being more agentic and instrumental. Additionally, gender stereotypes claim that men are more powerful and more skilled than women in important areas (Eagly et al., 2007; Wagner Berger, 1997; Williams and Best, 1990). In reality, gender beliefs give males a higher overall evaluation than women, making them appear more competent overall and at both general and specifically "masculine" tasks. Women are perceived as not only being different from males, but also as being more skilled in "feminine" occupations that are themselves undervalued (i.e. lower status) (Eagly et al., 2007). In conclusion, gender status beliefs are deeply ingrained societal notions that men are universally regarded as superior and diffusely more capable than women.

While many stereotypes have significant repercussions, status perceptions are directly related to inequality. In fact, status beliefs are frequently found in the stereotypes connected to many of the factors that form the foundation of important macro-level systems of stratification, such as race and gender. The theory of status traits offers a cogent and well-supported account of how status beliefs, such as those concerning gender, directly affect interactions' ability to exert power and prestige.

### ***2.6.2 Status Characteristics Theory***

Profile traits are those category distinctions tied to generally held status beliefs that provide people with various levels of the characteristic's values varying degrees of competence and worth. The classifications actors get paid of oneself and others in

various contexts lead to patterns of uneven authority, prestige, and impact in the interaction, claims the status features theory. This happens as a result of the status generalisation process, in which actors are asked to add more to the people close if they have a valued condition of a particular attribute. Therefore, compared to actors who have a less desired state of the characteristic, these players take and are granted more authority, influence, and reputation. These regional structural disparities frequently mirror and support larger-scale categorical disparity systems. Socially valued abilities, know-how, or achievements that are necessary for a particular work and suggest a constrained set of competencies are referred to as specialised status attributes. Examples include proficiency with computers, gardening, or specialised technical expertise. Preconceptions linked to both general and specific expectations are linked to diffuse status attributes. Diffuse qualities and particular traits are distinguished from one another by their associations with societal norms of competence and value. In the United States, gender functions as a diffuse status trait (Stangor, 2015; Ridgeway, 2011; Marwick, 2013). When status traits become apparent in a scenario, whether as a means of differentiating amongst actors or since they are thought to be important to the work at hand, they have an impact on interaction. An actor in the setting begins to build expect states for themselves rather than others once a status trait becomes salient. An actor's perception of people's relative ability to succeed at a given task is roughly what is meant by the theoretical construct known as an expectation state. Expectation states are unique to the work at hand, always relevant to other people in the environment, and not always aware. The process of status generalisation results in the development of distinct performance expectations, which in turn influence interaction in a way that results in behavioural disparities across actors (Stangor, 2015; Dickie-Clark, 2013). The initial formulation of status features theory has undergone numerous significant improvements and elaborations. The effects of improper status determinations, such as when a guy is classified as a woman, are one issue that hasn't been thoroughly addressed,

though. In earlier research, Lockhart (2022) looked at the effects of status errors in the context of a made-up status.

The findings indicate that even after the error was corrected, actors who first believed their spouse to be in a lower rank than they did deferred to that person less frequently than subjects who were aware of their partner's higher position from the start. However, after learning that her partner actually had a lower status than she did, the actor treated the other person in the same manner as participants who had known their spouse's lesser standard all along. These results show that when a position mistake is made, the actor who committed the mistake gains a relative rank advantage and it continues to affect subsequent patterns of inequality even after the error is remedied. Even if the error is remedied, a high-status person who is mistaken for a low-status person will receive less prestige and power than they would have if the actor had known their true position from the start. As a result, the context of gender discrimination follows the same trend. Despite having superior organisational skills, female coworkers receive fewer benefits and privileges at the office because of their gender (Collins, 2016).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

I've studied earlier academic studies on gender-based discriminatory expectancies and perceptions in the current chapter. A few instances from the business world were also used to support the claims. As a foundational theory, Social Categorization and Status Characteristics Theory were briefly examined. Additionally, Maltese gender discrimination is discussed with instances. The approaches used to address the research's objectives and questions are described in the chapter that follows.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.0 Introduction

Appropriate research methods selection is vital for making the research strategy effective (Saunders et al., 2009). The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed explanation of the methods used for this study to analyze the experiences and perceptions of gender- based discrimination of management at the Malta International Airport.

#### 3.1 Research Approach Rationale

An inductive qualitative approach was chosen for the current study because the researcher wished to develop a research topic. One of the primary benefits of using a deductive technique is that it allows the researcher to draw a specific conclusion from a wider range of potential outcomes. Deductive research offers the assurance of a reliable result (Creswell, 2013). For the current research since interviews were the method of data collection over a short span of time, a deductive approach was adopted. The researcher identified theories leading to research questions, and through the data analyzed from the interviews, the researcher discussed the findings with the available theory (Soiferman, 2010).

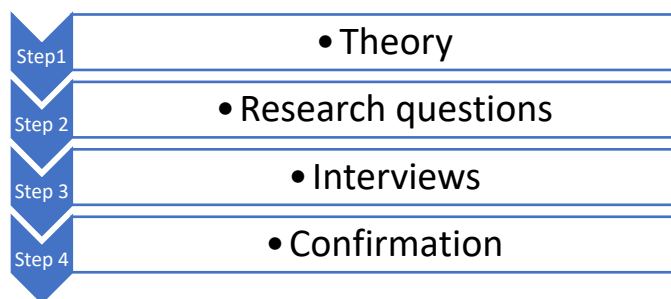


Figure 3: Deductive Research Approach Model

### **3.2 Research Question**

Following a literature search and based on the experience of the researcher the following Research Question was formulated for the study:

“What is the perception of gender-based discrimination of managers working within the structure of the Malta International Airport?”

### **3.3 Population & Sampling**

Managers and departmental heads of MIA were contacted and were considered as the main population since it was assumed by the researcher that they would be part of the recruitment process and would be responsible for handling employees in a direct manner. The responders were chosen based on their level of industry knowledge and experience.

Nonprobability samples include those used for purposeful sampling. When using sampling techniques, the researcher chooses the tests based on their ability to make decisions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In purposive sampling, the researcher would choose the samples based on his or her subjective expertise, and they would be the best representation of the entire population under investigation, according to Tongco (2007). However, the researcher should only choose this sampling strategy if she has expertise in the field. Purposive sampling was thought to be the best approach for the current study, according to the researcher.

Management level employees were contacted to be part of the research. Since, MIA is the only airport operating in Malta, management employees currently working onsite were contacted through emails for interviews. When choosing the sample, several factors including the following were taken into account: a) To be employed at MIA for a minimum of 5 years; b) to be departmental head and have at least 2-3 employees directly reporting to them. The above two criteria were considered essential since if the management employees have worked for more than 5 years, they would have come across various recruitment and employee



performance reviews while being employed at MIA. If they are reporting heads for employees, they would have come across various issues raised by their team members specifically regarding discrimination.

A consent form was sent to obtain data collection approval. Once the consent for participation was received, management employees were further approached by the researcher through emails.

### **3.4 Research Instrument**

An open-ended interview was used as the research instrument for collecting the data to meet the research aim and objectives. Interviews were considered as the most apt method for the current dissertation since the researcher wanted to have in-depth understanding of the topic under study and would like to have personalized view of the participants recruited for the research.

The following questions were the questions posed to each participant. This ensured that the topic was adhered to and that the respondents did not open about other matters in an emotional manner with regards to the subject in hand.

Can you please share with us the demographics by gender in your Company?

Can you tell me about the way in which gender influences career progression in your Company?

What are the barriers and obstacles to achieving gender equality?

When ordering uniforms for staff do you take into consideration the neutral gender?

When considering job assignments, what factors do you consider? Why?

What policies are in place to avoid gender discrimination?

A pilot test involving two people chosen at random from the research population was carried out to verify the relevance and accuracy of the information gathered.

Before doing the actual research, the investigator wanted to run a pilot test to make sure that there were no inaccuracies in the questionnaire items so that participants may raise any issues or ask for clarifications on any concerns. Before the interview questions' final draught was distributed, they could be fixed. The participants in the pilot test provided encouraging feedback. The interview took, on average, 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Questions 2 and 6 received amendments.

### **3.6 Data analysis technique**

In the current research, a Thematic Analysis was used. According to studies, theme analysis is a suitable first analytical technique for qualitative researchers who are just starting out to grasp (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2012; Clarke and Braun 2017; Nowell et al. 2017). The decision to utilize thematic analysis should, as with any other research or analytical method, be founded more on the objectives of the research than on a desire to pick an easy-to-use method of analysis.

When attempting to comprehend a group of events, thoughts, or actions spread throughout a data collection, thematic analysis is a suitable and effective technique to apply (Braun and Clarke 2012) For the current dissertation, I wanted to have an in depth understanding from the managers and departmental heads in regard to how they handle gender discrimination within their departments. A technique for assessing qualitative data called thematic analysis involves looking through a data collection to find, examine, and document recurring themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

It is a technique for summarizing data, but when choosing codes and creating themes, it also involves interpretation. Since, in the current research interview was used for collecting data, once the data collected was completed codes were formed and themes were identified.

The ability of thematic analysis to be employed within a wide spectrum of theoretical and epistemological contexts and to be applied to a variety of research questionnaires, designs, and sample sizes is one of its distinctive characteristics.

Despite the fact that some academics have categorized it as belonging to the field of ethnography (Roberts et al., 2019) or being particularly suited to phenomenology, Kiger & Varpio (2020) contend that thematic analysis can stand alone as an analytical method and be seen as the foundation for other qualitative research methods (Herzog et al., 2019). In fact, various other qualitative methodologies, such as theory development (Watling and Lingard, 2012) and conversation analysis, can benefit from the thematic analysis concepts of how to code data, uncover and develop themes, and present findings (Taylor et al., 2012).

Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to content analysis as an approach rather than a methodology because of its adaptability. Thematic Analysis can be applied in post-positivist, revisionist, or critical realism research methodologies because it is not constrained by any one paradigmatic perspective (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Utilizing thematic analysis for various research paradigms requires tailoring the procedure to the intended outcomes. Post By focusing on people's meanings and experiences to gain insights into the outer world through thematic analysis, positivists can promote the development of conjectural understanding of reality. In various interpretivist approaches, thematic analysis can reveal the social, cultural, and institutional circumstances that influence individual experiences (such as constructivism), promoting the creation of knowledge that is crafted through conversations between the researcher and research participants, and revealing the socially constructed meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The research participants might also describe their strategy in terms of their social construct.

### **3.7 Validity & Reliability**

The researcher will use two different research process to guarantee the authenticity and reliability of the data collected. Management-level personnel will participate in the research. A pilot study was carried out to guarantee that mistakes were not made first before actual interview questions were distributed to the research participants. Additionally, before the actual respondents answered, any questions or information requests that the pilot participants in the study had might be clarified or amended. In the proposed research, the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants would be given first attention. At no point throughout the collection of data or analysis of the research will the names of the study participants be made public. Only the investigator and the supervisor will have access to the data that has been collected. After being gathered, the data will be stored on a single disc and kept in the collection archive.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Through emails, respondents were previously informed of the purpose of the study and that their involvement was entirely voluntary. Details about the study, the goal of the research, and the use of the data were covered in detail at the outset of the interview. Additionally, participants were made aware that their engagement would be rendered anonymous and that the information gathered would be treated in confidence. The organisational consent form likewise contained the same details.

Additionally, participants were made aware that their presence was optional and that they might at any point revoke their consent for the interview. Another ethical issue faced by the researcher was the fact that the researcher herself was employed at MIA. To overcome this issue the researcher ensured that while analyzing the data no bias was there during the interpretation and no personal observation were included in the discussion or findings.

### **3.9 Summary of Chapter**

The researcher has provided a thorough explanation of the data collection techniques used for the given study in chapter 3. The study used a qualitative approach. A thorough justification for using a deductive method was also given. Open-ended interviews were used to gather primary data, which was then analyzed thematically. The research methodology and ethical considerations were described. A descriptive summary of the data analyzed would be given in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### Findings & Analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter shall present and discuss the findings of this research study carried out using structured interviews. These interviews were carried out in the offices at MIA at the Malta International Airport during office hours.

Six questions related to gender were asked to Head of Department, namely five individuals heading different sections within the MIA structure. A copy of the transcriptions is found in the appendices. The interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

Four themes were elicited from the data collected. The first theme relates to career progression and analyses the pathways experiences by women within the organization. The second theme relates to gender demographics. The third theme relates to the job assigned to females and the factors considered by management when taking such decisions. The fourth theme regards the effectiveness of policies that the organizational structure has put in place, to guide management with regards to diversity management in general.

The research question for current study was below:

*“What is the perception of gender-based discrimination of managers working within the structure of the Malta International Airport?”*

The data collected was successful in understanding what does the managers look at the gender discrimination at MIA. Most of the respondents reacted that they don't believe there is a discrimination issue in their respective departments. They also consider that they supported well for the career progression of their employees.

## 4.2 Theme 1 – Career Progression

This theme relates to career progression and describes and analyses the pathways experiences by women within the organization. In the first sub theme I will be analyzing what the respondents stated with regards to calls for applications. In the second sub theme I will be referring to barriers or obstacles with regards to the career progressions of females in these departments at MIA.

All six respondents stated that gender was never a hindrance for career progression within MIA.

*“Gender has no direct influence on career progression at MIA. Having said that, men in senior positions outnumber women significantly. This however can be explained by the fact that we have many more men working with us than female as a Company and that we tend to get many more applications from men for senior positions than from women”. (Respondent 1)*

The above response does align (Singh et al., 2022) literature reviewed in chapter 2 which states that even though applications are open for all, it is men usually who apply for senior positions.

*“Our Company is female dominated since most of the work is for cashiers and beauty advisors which somehow attracts more females than males..”(Respondent 2)*

A study by Sangster & Smith (2016) did points out that travellers expect to have more female employees as ground staff since they expect to have more knowledge about the products and have more patience while handling customers. They also tend to be successful in converting enquiries to sales.

*“As a ground handling company, operating at Malta International Airport, gender still plays an integral part in our day-to-day operations. The Passenger Services Section, which includes Check-In Agents, is mainly composed by females whilst the Airside*

*Services Section, is predominantly composed by males. The former is customer-facing whilst the latter requires physical strength due to the nature of the job. Nevertheless, career progression remains on the top of our agenda, by issuing internal vacancies and by promoting all vacancies across all sections". (Respondent 3)*

Ren (2017) study supports the above statement; although applications all called out for everyone during the screening process male applicants get more prioritization towards technical side primarily because of the physique.

### ***Sub theme 1: Obstacles to career progression***

*"The aviation industry might be perceived to be more attractive to males.....women are still expected to be the ones to raise children, and this might be a reason for them to hold back from taking on more senior roles. At MIA we do try to assist working mothers by offering reduced hours as much as possible as well as working from home (up to twice a week subject to job role). However, working mothers, especially those who do not have a good support system at home, are at a disadvantage to the male peers". (Respondent 4)*

Sadikhov (2021) in his studies on women working in companies in Azerbaijan stated that due to the culture inherent in this country, women do not get much support. Although, the local culture in Malta is not same as the one in Azerbaijan it is to be noted that locally, there are migrants hailing from different cultures, and this might be having an impact on the MIA women employees as well. Although, government provision for less working hours is in place, this does not seem to have any direct impact on the women coming to the forefront or to the leadership positions.

Respondent (5) *"The nature of the job itself".*

Developed countries like USA and UK have conducted studies about the nature of jobs in the airline industry (Leuenberger and Lutte, 2022). Long working hours and



peak season times mostly keep away women from applying for managerial or leadership roles. Any internal systemic hurdles that exist must be removed by business.

This includes checking the organization's current skill mix at all levels to make sure there is a sufficient amount of female leadership. Changes to employment and succession planning can be made to help this effort.

Respondent (5) “We have been trying hard to recruit more men so that we would be able to get a balance in gender, however we believe that certain job roles attract more females than males”.

Sasson et al., (2020) stated in their research that there are a lot of biased feelings about certain job roles in the airline industry. He also comments that this has led to less applicants or no applicants for certain roles. Unconscious bias training at all levels can help people identify the bias they carry and support open discussion and conversations. In addition, proper training for human resources and employee relations support staff would be appropriate so they can comfortably engage in conversations and support organizational growth.

#### **4.3 Theme 2: Gender demographics**

The second theme identified related to gender demographics. Five out of six responded about the gender distribution in the MIA. The table below represents the gender demographics currently at the MIA. It can be clearly seen that with exception to one store/ department with more females, the remainder have more male employees.

| Demographics by Gender | MALE | FEMALE |
|------------------------|------|--------|
|                        |      |        |
| PARTICIPANT 1          | 63%  | 37%    |
|                        |      |        |

|               |     |     |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| PARTICIPANT 2 | 86% | 14% |
|               |     |     |
| PARTICIPANT 3 | 68% | 32% |
|               |     |     |
| PARTICIPANT 4 | 58% | 42% |
|               |     |     |
| PARTICIPANT 5 | 25% | 75% |

It is significant to highlight that there are now more women working than there were a few years ago. However, there is still a very small amount of diversity in positions of leadership and supervision overall. According to the European Commission's research, women make up 45% of the workforce in Europe, yet they barely represent 3% to 15% of decision-making and other high-level roles across different industries and nations (Xiang et al., 2017). The issue of gender diversity on corporate boards has sparked a great deal of attention among key players in the realms of government policy, business, and academia. The argument made by those in favor of greater female representation on boards is that gender diversity enhances the effectiveness of the boards. (Gull et al., 2017) offers a two-part summary of the argument: a) The society and the company's stakeholders place a high importance on the fairness and equity principles. As a result, procedural justice is valued more highly than the results of the ruling. Lack of female participation on governing boards results in procedural inequity and may cause unfairness in the decision-making process because gender diversity is a fundamental human right. b) The effectiveness of general corporate governance and overall performance is enhanced by the presence of women on boards of directors. Studies have shown that gender diverse boards have a competitive advantage because they make better decisions, are more innovative and creative, and have better access to information. Since women make up half of the population, businesses are unable to access the talents and human capital that makes up this segment of the market.

Contrary to the economic and social aspects, female representation has little effect on the company's environmental practices. The reasons put forth might be related to the female directors' ongoing opposition to the suggested environmental proposals. When making decisions and engaging in other boardroom activities, their male colleagues display stereotyping or sex-based biases (Galbreath, 2011). It is a problem that many organizations commonly encounter. The decision-making process could be hampered by arguments over novel ideas and strategies if women are represented on boards that were previously all-male. However, over time, having more women in leadership positions would have a good effect on a company's environmental initiatives, for instance.

#### **4.4 Theme 3 Factors impacting job assignment**

There are still many barriers and discrimination based on gender even though women have entered the workforce and now make up almost half of the workforce. At the workplace, several sets of factors might affect how jobs are assigned. This is one of the possible causes of the underrepresentation of women in boards and executive roles.

##### **4.4.1 Sub theme: Social factors**

Participant (6) stated that *“there are certain social stigma in regard to women working full-time. Male counterparts consider that women can’t take up full time roles due to their full-time role at home and being a home carer as well”*.

Social obstacles are founded on gender bias beliefs that have been around for a while. Stereotyping results from the receiver's simplification of the knowledge and reliance on previously learned information from environmental elements such established social roles, interpersonal conflict, and gender power dynamics (Tabassum, 2021). To reflect male and female roles in civilizations, specific perspectives have evolved over time. These societal institutions have a significant

impact on how both men and women behave. Men are represented by masculine traits, which typically need them to perform in specific jobs. It is challenging to stop bias of accepted traditional gender roles because a similar mindset is attached to the female function in society. The relationship between stereotypes and discrimination has been proven in numerous studies; the discrimination that results is inevitably due to a mismatch between the qualities associated with women and those required to fill the role. In this case, a woman's kindness and sensitivity would be in opposition to the top executive roles, which are defined by a man's toughness and decisiveness (Neschen & Hugelschafer, 2021). Therefore, a person who embodies male traits would have a higher chance of succeeding. However, there is a bad reputation attached to female leadership. Women are thought to work less than the average man, typically in low-paying administrative occupations (Patel, 2019).

Gender stereotypes still exist even if more women are in managerial positions and there is equality in the workplace. Women are solely exposed to business and entrepreneurship within their family business, according to studies done in India. However, they are not seen as a natural successor and are not permitted to work for an outside organization. In these societies, the workplace demands that women exhibit traits associated with men (Singh and Sebastian, 2018).

#### **4.4.2 Organisational decisions**

Participant (2) reacted that *“Job assignments are given to the people most suitable to carry them out. This is based on job role, competencies, skills, and track record”*. From the above statement in regard to the job assignment it can be seen that organisational decisions have a vital role deciding about who would handle certain job roles.

A prejudiced hiring procedure or a lack of training opportunities are examples of organizational impediments. The poor qualifications of women are an often-cited reason for their slow rise to leadership positions. More specifically, during the

promotion selection process, insufficient managerial abilities and experience were among the factors that prevented advancement. This is attributed by (Elmuti et al., (2009) to the similarity attraction theory, according to which male leadership is drawn to and willing to select individuals who have comparable leadership styles and career mindsets. According to study, mentoring could increase the number of women in senior management. People tend to prefer working with colleagues who share their interests or on common principles in the financial sector. It would be impossible to have a real relationship based on mutual understanding because there are so few women on boards. Mentorships between people of the same gender are thought to foster empathy and support. The male mentor was unable to meet the needs of the female employees.

Participant (3) stated the following factors while allocating job assignments *“Physical strength, customer care qualities, fluency related to languages and general knowledge”*.

Mentors are supposed to offer a lot of encouragement and support in an environment full of challenges and may be able to grasp problems based on their own experiences. In addition, male mentors are more likely to reject female mentees due to gender stereotypes of poor performance, low expectations, or worry about potential sexual harassment accusations (Haile, 2012). Corporate jobs and the layout of the workplace were initially developed by men for men. Therefore, senior management accepts the solutions developed with the same framework in mind while attempting to handle challenges involving equality without taking into account how inequality functions. The behavior in organizations and the standards to which everyone should aspire are set by leaders. Leadership determines the conditions under which women will work and how many will be present on the team (King & Badham, 2020).

#### ***4.4.3 Personal decisions***

“The factors that are taken into account when considering job assignments are the expertise in the role, the education level, and the positive energy that one would add to the team. This is deemed necessary so that we would be able to grow as a Company...” (Respondent 1).

One of the obstacles stopping women from leading successful top management careers is family commitments. In the majority of societies, women's roles include caring for their families. Women might have to take a hiatus from employment, for instance, in order to give birth to a kid. They would therefore have less experience overall than their male colleagues (Cavero-Rubio, 2019). Additionally, having primary responsibility for child care might mean fewer working hours or a need for part-time employment. As a result, deciding between a profession and raising a family within this organization seems like an unpleasant decision. An additional obstacle to women getting promoted to leadership positions has been created by globalization. In our fast-paced world, leadership positions call for more adaptability and constant business focus. Top leaders should also accept probable move to other nations and travel. These would be a significant obstacle for women

who have families and children. The perception of women in nations with less liberal views, such as those in Asia or the Middle East, may be a concern when moving to a new country. Board members or selection committees would likely be reluctant to name a female CEO given these factors. (Cavero-Rubio 2019). Additionally, networking within organizations is regarded as a significant component of the job and a means of extending influence for potential career advancement. However, women must strike a balance between their employment and personal obligations.

#### **4.5 Theme 4: Workplace policies for gender discrimination**

Out of 5 participants only 3 respondents gave a clear reply for the question in regard to policy in their departments and they are:

*“We have an Equality and Diversity Policy, a Human Rights Policy and an Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy. All of these seek to provide a fair workplace for all and provide a means of redress to employees who may feel discriminated against. To date we have not received any complaints about gender discrimination.”* (Respondent 1)

*“We have a harassment policy in place and disciplinary procedures”.* (Respondent 2)

*“No clear policy in place”.* (Respondent 4)

In the modern world, gender diversity is a significant issue. Businesses are devoting significant time and financial resources to supporting workplace diversity initiatives to equalize the still unbalanced gender distribution at the workplace. Failure to address gender diversity issues could harm the company's brand, leave it open to needless lawsuits, and most importantly, prevent it from gaining the benefits of increased performance from a staff that may be more diverse (Scarborough et al., 2019).

Numerous measures have been taken by European politicians to encourage women's company growth. One of the first initiatives to be put into practice was the policy of gender quotas or affirmative action for corporate boards. Although France and Spain were among the first countries to implement the strategy, the first required European quotas were first enacted in Norway in 2003. In Norway, all publicly traded firms were obligated to increase the proportion of women on their boards of directors by 40%, which was just 9% at the time. As a result, female representation has increased by 20% in just two years (Adams and Funk, 2012). Faccio et al., (2016) were among the first to examine how obligatory quotas in Norway will affect firm value. Even though the overall results indicated that obligatory quotas had a detrimental impact on corporate value, there have been changes in how people are represented in boardrooms. Lack of experience among female directors was the first factor the study identified as having contributed to unfavorable results. In Norway, women made up just 5% of CEOs before the requirement for gender equality. There were extremely few qualified female candidates with CEO experience. In contrast to the 68% of remaining male directors and 63% of current male directors, just 33% of the new female directors had any CEO experience. In comparison to their male counterparts, female directors were on average 7 years younger in age. Even while state legislation has made it easier for women to be represented equally in boardrooms, most candidates fell short of the requirements, which negatively impacted the company's worth. The politicians want to advance women into leadership roles and implement social justice for them. Despite their best efforts, many people rejected a set quota. According to the data, ASA company numbers have decreased from 554 to 238 since 2003 because of enterprises changing their incorporation status in order to avoid meeting mandated quotas. Spain has taken a different route by implementing a soft quota policy and a Spanish Gender Equality Act. This strategy emphasizes incentive-based motivator for businesses who follow the soft quota. Governments do not penalize businesses or delist them from the public stock exchange, in contrast to obligatory quotas. The ruling party has decided to use soft



quotas to shield businesses from a lack of qualified applicants and potential criticism of the merit-based system (Cabo et al., 2019). However, numerous studies indicated the necessity to reevaluate the soft quota strategy due to its inefficiency and slow growth during the previous 10 years (Fagan et al., 2012). Even by the year 2022, 40% female representation would be unachievable given the current pace of development. In one of the greatest studies carried out by (Cabo (2019), 767 companies' progress on gender equality from 2005 to 2014 was assessed. Companies that directly rely on government contracts have shown a 4% yearly growth and a 60% boardroom representation now. These were businesses that would immediately profit from the soft policy's incentives. On the other hand, the whole sample's annual growth rate was 0.4%. (Cabo et al., 2019). The government's preference in contract awarding is the only motivation for adhering to quotas. The lack of growth necessitates a change in policy.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the elicitation of four themes. These themes all seem to indicate that gender discrimination is well taken care of on paper but still not taken care of in practice. In the next chapter I will be concluding this dissertation by discussing the main research findings and giving an overview of how well this dissertation has managed to answer the research question posed for this research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to explore how and to which extent are gender discrimination policies practiced in the only airport of the Maltese Islands, namely the Malta International Airport. To answer the research question, the current study performed a thorough analysis of the academic literature, followed by a qualitative study. The research data was gathered by interviewing 5 departmental heads working in the Malta International Airport.

From the data collected four themes were derived. The first theme investigated the career progression of employees working in the MIA. From the respondents it was found that all departmental heads promoted their existing employees to progress towards their next level based on their experience, skills, and ability. From the literature review conducted it was found that organizations should promote their employees based on their abilities and experience and whereby gender shouldn't be a factor taken into account (Amis et al., 2018)

Second theme was gender demographics, and it was found that except one department all others had more male employees in comparison to female employees. As per prior studies as well It was found that in the airline industry it is very common to have more male staffs in comparison to female staffs (Kleven et al., 2019).

The third theme was factors impacting job assignment and from the interviews it was found that there were 3 sub themes such as social factors, Organisational decisions, and Personal decisions. These themes were also identified by other studies like (Ridgeway, 2011; Scott, 2018; Tuominen and Härkönen, 2022).

The fourth theme was workplace policies for gender discrimination and there were following the most common European laws, and some didn't have any policies in

place as well. This disparity was identified in the literature review as well (Hitlin,2015; Gresa and Valbona, 2020)

## **5.2 Revisiting research objectives**

In conclusion, this research is likely to have a few outcomes. First, it is estimated that the rate of gender discrimination at the Malta International Airport will be high. The reason for this is that Malta and other international airports had a record of high discrimination cases in the past. Additionally, in case the management of the Malta International Airport fails to implement and enforce the equality and Harassment policies properly, there are higher chances that the rate of gender discrimination, especially against women, will even be higher in the future. Malta is also a patriarchal society where the male gender is put above their female counterparts. This situation further indicates that if the management of Malta International Airport ignores on the matter of equality, diversity, and inclusion, then more cases of discrimination will be reported daily, and this will affect how productive the company will be (Dimitriou, 2018). This airport accounts for almost 5% of the country's revenue owing to it being the main transport system for tourists coming to Malta. This means that if employees are wrongfully dismissed due to discrimination, then service delivery in the institution will be negatively affected. There would be less workers to take care of the guests at the facility, and many talented people would fear being employed in the company.

Secondly, it is also estimated that although the Malta International Airport has tried to implement gender equality and diversity programs, they are yet to be fully implemented in Malta international airport. The reason for this is that this company has made minimal effort to improve gender equality and diversity in its operations. However, according to Budd & Ison (2020), since other major airports in the world, such as Heathrow and Beijing, took a while to implement equality, inclusion, and diversity programs fully, it is hoped and envisaged that the Malta International Airport will follow suit. Budd & Ison (2020) explain that social and economic institutions such as Airports that enforce equality and diversity usually experience

dynamic growth in terms of revenue collection and retention of employees, and attraction of new talents. For instance, in the case of Malta international Airport, it would experience an influx in the number of tourists and other foreign guests flocking into the country airport, based on the kind of services they offer and the types of employees that they have (Mal et al., 2018). Tourism activities in the country will also improve, and therefore the company will be regarded as one of ten contributors to economic growth and prosperity in Malta.

Consequently, Malta International Airport will also be able to retain its employees. The Human Resources section will have an easier scenario to deal with, since the company's management will be able to motivate employees through the provision of a conducive working environment, amongst other motivational incentives. Employee turnover in the company will also decrease, with a decrease in the number of discrimination cases in the facility.

Moreover, the Malta International Airport will be able to have a harmonious, cooperative, happy, loyal team of workers who will ensure that productivity in the company increases (Williams, 2012). All genders will be able to interact freely without fear of contradiction. Females will be able to occupy top positions in the company and management without being overlooked and despised. With such a conducive working environment, the company is envisaged to experience consistent growth.

On the other hand, for employee retention and reduction in employee turnover, implementing a more defined framework to ensure gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity will enable Malta International Airport to develop special programs for all employees. These programs will help these businesses and companies incorporate benefits positioning statements for all their employees. When employees review their current or new benefit contracts, they will find some added value services built in for them, such mental Health support. These programs will be very important as they will also help them access these benefits in time.

The company's HR teams, and management should therefore adopt measures that will ensure that employees are motivated in their work through eradication of any form of discrimination, mainly gender discrimination, and the promotion of equality, gender equity, diversity, and inclusion (Edge et al., 2018). This move will reduce employee turnover even in the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure that the culture of productivity is always maintained.

Jäger and Fifka (2022) notes that a conducive working environment also attracts loyal and happy employees. With the enforcement of the equality and harassment Policies, the Malta International Airport will be not only be able to retain its employees but also attract new talents that will offer much expertise to the institution. By attracting new talents, the Malta International Airport will also be able to manage and enhance customer experience effectively. With the fact that the company considers customer experience as one of its main business pillars, enhancing and enforcing equality and Harassment Policies will be of so much importance to the business. The company will be able to attract many customers and guests worldwide due to the high quality and hospitality services its empowered, motivated, and happy employees will be offering to its customers. Therefore, Malta International Airport will be able to build a customer experience that extends beyond the hospitality services it offers.

Furthermore, by ensuring that gender equality, diversity, and inclusion are maintained and that all forms of discrimination are eliminated from the employees and management, there would be the creation of a better employee experience. Employee experience refers to the impression that employees have of a company's brand through all aspects of the employee journey (Tuominen and Härkönen, 2022). Employee experience results in their view of a company's brand and therefore impacts factors related to the company's bottom line, including revenue, retention, and recruitment of talents. Employee experience is, therefore, an end-to-end experience and usually begins when a potential employee hears about a particular company from a friend or any other reliable source until they are

employed in that organization (Wren et al., 2002). The Malta International Airport Management will be able to create a memorable emotion in the employee based on its value goals. When an employee recounts memories, that is a good memory; they are sharing the experience they had about that company. Therefore, the employees of Malta International Airport will be able to share good memories of the company. For instance, they will recount how good the company is in terms of employee motivation, the culture of productivity, and a conducive environment to work that is free from any form of discrimination and intimidation (Siddiqi, 2003). The emotions will be able to influence what employees feel about Malta International Airport, their performance, productivity, and how they evaluate their encounters and their decisions. Therefore, creating such memories for employees is a good way of improving the brand of a company such as the Malta International Airport and improving their culture of productivity.

### **5.3 Recommendation for implementation**

The following are recommendations for future planning and implementation:

Most studies have not fully sought to quantify the lack of inclusivity and increased inequality in women's lives. Most of the studies (Hearn and Wray, 2015; Lewis et al., 2015) have not thoroughly emphasized why women are more discriminated against than men. Most specifically, the inclusivity and equality studies research studies have failed to thoroughly explain why the female gender has more frequent, dangerous, and unpredictable life events compared to the; life events of the general population in the cooperate world. The female gender is disproportionately affected by violence and stress at the workplace because of gender discrimination. Therefore, more studies must be performed in this area.

As much as the trade unions are important when it comes to rights and interests of the employees, they should not hesitate to speak out even when most private entities report exploitation cases since harassment and discrimination are general issues that affect everybody. They should not let those institutions solely solve

their issues but should readily protect the employees. For instance, Unions should be stronger in fighting gender discrimination.

To help in promoting inclusivity, equality, and diversity at the Malta International Airport, the Maltese community should come together and be able to recognize and spot when it is not happening. The community and all other stakeholders should be able to familiarize themselves with discrimination and the different forms it can take. This will enable them to report any discrimination case to the management in case it happens.

Another major recommendation is that the company's management should constantly try to get employee views regarding discrimination and whether they feel diversity, inclusion, and equality are upheld in the company. The views could be obtained through random interviews, the use of questionnaires, and even through online platforms. This will be a more excellent way of getting their experiences and engaging them thoroughly so that major changes can be made in the company.

Employees of the Malta International Airport should also be given priority to voice out their ideas regarding the whole issue of discrimination and how to promote equality, diversity, and inclusivity in the institution. They may be useful in providing insight into the Human Resources Department or the diversity officer in the company. They may also have greater ideas that may be used to steer ahead organizational goals in being more inclusive and diverse. This move will ensure that overall values of equality, diversity, and inclusivity are achieved at the workplace and that every employee is valued.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

Even if the author has met the goals of the study, there are several limitations that must be addressed. To investigate the ongoing gender, pay disparity in the workplace and evaluate activities advancing women in Malta, the researchers looked at both primary and secondary sources. It is crucial to highlight the lack of

reliable statistical data and pertinent scientific papers. Western countries have conducted substantial localized studies on gender disparity which has produced a plethora of data analysis. On the other hand, there aren't many scholars in Malta researching this subject. Most of the material is only available in reports supported by big western universities and non-profit organisations.

Furthermore, there are no traces of past research on this subject being conducted in Malta in the body of literature. The author has been unable to contrast this study to other research or consider how gender discrimination has changed, despite the fact that it is unique.

The extensive structured interviews gave thorough information about the organization's policy on gender diversity and employee behaviors toward it. However, due to the extremely small sample size and the company's senior management's rigorous access controls, it was challenging to detect trends and make associations between specific policies and business performance. It is thought that a large study would be more useful to assess how gender discrimination policies affect business outcomes. Thus, studies examining certain policies or tactics and their impact on corporate performance are advised.

Because modern scholarship has offered mixed conclusions about the effects of gender bias and has failed to build a persuasive business case, the beneficial benefit would make gender discrimination less likely to occur in Malta.

### **5.5 The research journey**

The current study has made several contributions towards industry as well as to academic literature. Due to the unbiased status adopted by the researcher towards the data collection and analyses, the researcher was able to better understand the discrimination policies at MIA. The researcher was not aware of any research prior to conducting this study. However, after resuming this study the



researcher is now aware of how data should be collected to have a better understanding of underlying issues as well as to conduct action research in future.

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## Appendix



## **RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM**

I, the undersigned, give my consent to \_\_\_\_\_, ID No  
\_\_\_\_\_, to process the information provided by myself for the purposes of  
research and the completion of the Master's thesis as approved by ITS and in line with  
the applicable ITS rules and regulations and Maltese Legislation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name & Surname of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
ID Number of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

↓ Researcher is to fill this PDF and give it to the participant for manual or digital signing

## Interview Questions

### Employers

How many employees do you have? 900

What is the percentage of employees with disabilities within your company? Approx. 10 percent

Are employees with disabilities given equal opportunities in the company? yes

Are the company's team policies inclusive and respectful to employees? yes

Does the company encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for positions within the company? yes

Are women and men doing the same job, in the same position and with similar qualifications paid equally? yes

Does the company have a practical framework for registering complaints concerning discrimination and harassment? yes

Has the management implemented policies that discourage discrimination and harassment in the workplace? yes

How does the company measure the effectiveness of its policies on equality, diversity, inclusion and discrimination? Taking action and reviewing when a complaint is filed

Does the Malta International Airport provide a conducive environment that promotes equality and inclusion? Air Malta yes

How many tribunal/court cases were opened by employees claiming discrimination? I have been in office for 5 years and inherited 2 cases that are about to close. Nothing in my time



Interview Questions (Continued)

- Can you please share with us the demographics by gender in your Company?

322 Males

238 Females

- What can you tell me about the way in which gender influences career progression in your Company?

There are no Gender based influences. Career progressions are based on skills and experience

- What are the barriers and obstacles to achieving gender equality?

One of the barriers might be that women tend to be more focused on their social responsibilities and their career is not in their main focus

- When ordering uniforms for staff do you take into consideration the neutral gender?

No

- When considering job assignments, what factors do you take into account? Why?

Some jobs which require physical strength might be driven to be based on gender selection. Otherwise no factors are taken into account.

- What policies are in place to avoid gender discrimination?

The gender equality act chapter 456 is replicated as a policy



