

**Gender Mainstreaming Policies Affecting Career Development within the Public Sector: A
Case Study of the Macao Public Security Police Force**

**Políticas de Integração de Género que Afetam o Desenvolvimento de Carreira no Setor
Público: Um Estudo de Caso da Força Policial de Segurança Pública de Macau**

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in the context of career development within the Macao Public Security Police Force. It analyzes the interaction between institutional policies and socio-cultural contexts in this traditionally male-dominated profession, employing the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to investigate the influence of Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control on career development processes. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes 16 in-depth interviews (8 male and 8 female officers) from various ranks and divisions. The findings indicate that, although incremental progress has been made through measures such as flexible work arrangements and extended parental leave, deeply rooted gender biases and traditional role stereotypes continue to present significant structural and cultural challenges. Police officers consistently express a need to reduce systemic barriers, such as gendered task allocation, and to strengthen support for work-life balance. Through the integration of local contextual analysis and global gender mainstreaming practices, the study identifies several potential new factors, e.g., *Empathy, Self-awareness, Power Enhancement, and Courage*, that moderate individuals' behavioral intentions regarding the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies. These factors extend the TPB framework and provide cross-contextual insights to improve gender-inclusive practices in male-dominated public sectors globally.

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KEYWORDS: gender mainstreaming policies; public security police force; theory of planned behavior; qualitative approach; male-dominated organizations; career development.

RESUMO: Neste estudo analisa-se a implementação de políticas de integração de género no contexto do desenvolvimento de carreira na Polícia de Segurança Pública de Macau. Examina-se a interação entre as políticas institucionais e os contextos socioculturais nesta profissão tradicionalmente dominada por homens, empregando a Teoria do Comportamento Planeado (TCP) para investigar a influência da Atitude, das Normas Subjetivas e do Controlo Percebido do Comportamento nos processos de desenvolvimento de carreira. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, o estudo analisa 16 entrevistas aprofundadas (8 oficiais masculinos e 8 femininos) de diferentes graduações e divisões. Os resultados indicam que, embora tenham sido feitos progressos incrementais por meio de medidas como horários de trabalho flexíveis e licença parental prolongada, preconceitos de género profundamente enraizados e estereótipos tradicionais de papéis de género continuam a representar desafios estruturais e culturais significativos. Os oficiais de polícia manifestam consistentemente a necessidade de reduzir barreiras sistémicas, como a atribuição de tarefas com base no género, e de reforçar o apoio ao equilíbrio entre a vida profissional e a pessoal. Por meio da integração da análise do contexto local e das práticas globais de integração de género, o estudo identifica vários fatores potenciais, como Empatia, Autoconsciência, Empoderamento e Coragem, que moderam as intenções comportamentais dos indivíduos relativamente à adoção de políticas de integração de género. Estes fatores ampliam o quadro da TCP e oferecem perspetivas transcontextuais para melhorar práticas inclusivas de género em setores públicos dominados por homens a nível global.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas de integração de género; força policial de segurança pública; teoria do comportamento planeado; abordagem qualitativa; organizações dominadas por homens; desenvolvimento de carreira.

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming emerged from an international policy agenda established at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations, 1995) and aims to integrate a gender perspective into every stage of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation to ensure equitable opportunities for all genders. In the 21st century, it has become an increasingly vital topic in public sector career development, garnering significant attention from global academic and policy communities (Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005).

The concept of gender mainstreaming has been applied across domains, including policymaking, career development, and organizational management, with notable progress in public support for gender equality documented by international bodies such as the United Nations and the European Union (United Nations, 2002). However, male-dominated professions like law enforcement continue to face considerable challenges: enduring “masculine professional cultures” and systemic barriers impede women’s equal participation and career advancement (Brown, 1997; Rabe-Hemp, 2008).

This study focuses on the Macao Public Security Police Force, a critical case of a male-dominated public sector organization where gender mainstreaming policies have been adopted but not fully translated into equitable outcomes, even though Macao’s strong performance on gender equality indices (Social Welfare Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2022). Connell’s (2005) Gender Theory supports this discrepancy, highlighting how deeply ingrained historical and cultural values shape organizational norms and hinder progress toward gender equality. Simply designing policies is insufficient; broader social and cultural transformation is essential—this research gap underpins the study.

In recent years, the Macao SAR Police Force has implemented gender-inclusive initiatives: flexible working arrangements for parents during typhoons, lighter-trigger handguns and quick-release duty belts for female officers, on-site breastfeeding areas, extended maternity leave, and newly introduced paternity leave (Macao SAR Government, 2019). These measures reflect a commitment to gender mainstreaming, but their effectiveness in addressing career disparities requires empirical assessment—another core motivation for this research.

1. Problem Statement

Despite the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government's development and implementation of tactical and operational policies since 1999 aimed at fostering a more inclusive environment, progress has been limited. According to a local report on the *Macao Women Development Goals Plan 2019-2025*, although the participation rate of women in the public sector has increased, there remains a significant underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. This situation highlights the challenges of effectively implementing gender mainstreaming policies and underscores the need for expertise and insights to address these gaps. Consequently, this paper explores this issue from the perspective of police officers, seeking to understand their perceptions. The two research questions are:

What are the key challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality in the Public

Security Police Force?

What are the societal norms and department policies influencing staff career development with respect to gender differences?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Study of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming, formally introduced as a strategic framework at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, aims to embed a gender perspective into every stage of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation across all sectors—ultimately ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes for all genders (United Nations, 1995). The United Nations (2002) further refined this concept, defining it as an "*ongoing process of integrating gender considerations into policies, programs, and practices*" that proactively addresses historical and structural inequalities. For career development, gender mainstreaming policies are particularly critical: they identify and mitigate systemic barriers (e.g., gender-based task allocation, biased promotion criteria) that disproportionately limit the advancement of underrepresented groups, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields (Daly, 2005).

Studies on gender mainstreaming have grown substantially, with a focus on its application in social policy and organizational management (Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005). However, two key gaps persist in the existing literature. First, most studies have centered on macro-level policy analysis (e.g., comparing national gender equality laws) while neglecting micro-level mechanisms—such as how individual attitudes, interpersonal dynamics, and organizational cultures shape policy implementation in specific occupational contexts (Walby, 2005). This oversight is notable in public safety sectors; Acker (2006) argued that research on gender mainstreaming in public administration often relies solely on policy documents and statistical data, failing to investigate the "lived experiences" of frontline employees (e.g., police officers) or the impact of unconscious gender stereotypes on daily decision-making (e.g., task assignment, promotion evaluations).

Second, the link between gender mainstreaming and career development remains underexplored, particularly in male-dominated professions such as law enforcement. Armstrong (2012) defined career development as a "*dynamic process of skill acquisition, responsibility expansion, and goal achievement*", while Greenhaus et al. (2009) framed it as a lifelong journey of work-related learning and growth. Both definitions emphasize inclusivity, yet few studies have examined how gender mainstreaming policies can actively facilitate this process for women in police forces. Existing studies (*see* Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely & Padavic, 2007) have focused on gender disparities in

leadership but not on how policy interventions, such as flexible work arrangements or gender-inclusive training, can address structural barriers to career progression.

In the context of this paper, it is essential to note the initiatives introduced by the Chief Executive of the Macao SAR Government as part of the 2015 Policy Address. These initiatives aim to align with international conventions on gender equality and women's development, as outlined in the "*Macao Women's Development Goals Program 2019-2025*." Institutional support includes the establishment of the "Women and Children's Affairs Committee" a body tasked with overseeing gender equality measures, and a legal foundation rooted in the Macao Basic Law, Criminal Law, and Labour Relations Law, which prohibit gender discrimination in employment (Social Welfare Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2022). Despite these efforts, the 2022 Report on the Current Situation of Women in Macao notes that traditional social structures and cultural norms continue to hinder women's advancement in male-dominated sectors, such as law enforcement (Social Welfare Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2022). This disconnection between policy intent and on-the-ground outcomes underscores the need for context-specific research on gender mainstreaming in the Macao Public Security Police Force.

2.2. Current Situation of Gender Mainstreaming in the Macao Police Force

Police organizations globally remain among the most male-dominated public sector institutions, and the Macao Public Security Police Force is no exception. Brown (1997) argued that such organizations are shaped by "masculine professional cultures": norms that prioritize physical strength, aggression, and 24/7 availability; creating barriers to women's recruitment, retention, and advancement. These barriers manifest in two keyways: cultural and structural.

Culturally, the Macao Police Force reflects broader societal gender stereotypes. Rabe-Hemp (2008) noted that in male-dominated police cultures, women are often perceived as "less capable" of frontline work (e.g., patrols, emergency response) and more suited to "support roles" (e.g., clerical jobs, public relations). This perception persists even as the force has implemented gender-inclusive policies, such as procuring lighter equipment for female officers and establishing breastfeeding areas in offices (as noted in Section 1). Interviews with Macao Police officers (*see* Section 5) further reveal that some male colleagues and supervisors hold unconscious biases about women's "fitness" for leadership, traits like "empathy" and "attention to detail" are often associated with female leaders but are perceived as weaknesses in high-stress operational contexts (Banaji and Greenwald, 2013).

Structurally, the force faces challenges in translating policy into practice. For example, while flexible work arrangements are available for parents during typhoons, and maternity/paternity leave

has been extended, these measures do not address the root cause of gender disparities: the link between frontline experience and promotion. As Section 5 will show, frontline service (e.g., patrols, criminal investigations) is a mandatory criterion for advancement to leadership roles, yet women are disproportionately assigned to non-frontline positions. This structural imbalance creates a "glass ceiling"—even highly qualified female officers struggle to meet promotion requirements because they lack access to critical frontline experience.

2.3. Theoretical Foundation

To understand how gender mainstreaming policies shape career development in the Macao Police Force, this study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991)—a framework that explains how individual intentions and behaviors are influenced by three key factors: Attitude (individual evaluations of a behavior), Subjective Norms (perceived social pressure to perform or avoid a behavior), and Perceived Behavioral Control (perceived ability to perform a behavior, considering resources and constraints). The TPB is particularly well-suited for this research for two reasons: first, it focuses on the psychological and social mechanisms that drive behavior. It is critical for understanding how police officers engage with (or resist) gender mainstreaming policies; second, it has been validated in organizational contexts, including public administration and policy implementation (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Prior theories of gender inequality, such as Liberal Feminism Theory (Tong, 2009) and Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), provide valuable insights into structural and societal dimensions of gender disparities. Liberal Feminism emphasizes legal and institutional reforms to achieve equality. At the same time, Social Role Theory argues that gender stereotypes arise from societal expectations of "male" (e.g., agentic, dominant) and "female" (e.g., communal, nurturing) roles. However, these theories have limitations for the current study: they focus on abstract, macro-level structures (e.g., laws, societal norms) but neglect individual-level factors, such as how police officers' personal attitudes toward gender equality or their perceived control over career choices shape policy outcomes (Ridgeway, 2011; Acker, 1990).

The TPB addresses this gap by centering individual psychology while acknowledging social and structural influences. For the purposes of this research, the TPB constructs are operationalized as follows:

Attitude: Police officers' evaluations of gender mainstreaming policies (e.g., whether flexible work arrangements or gender-inclusive promotion criteria are "useful" or "fair") and their emotional responses to these policies (e.g., frustration with biased task allocation, satisfaction with equal training

opportunities).

Subjective Norms: The perceived pressure from family, colleagues, supervisors, and society to conform to traditional gender roles (e.g., family expectations that women prioritize childcare over overtime work, supervisor expectations that men take on high-risk frontline tasks).

Perceived Behavioral Control: Officers' perceptions of their ability to advance their careers while navigating gender-related barriers (e.g., whether a female officer believes she can access frontline experience, or a male officer believes he can take paternity leave without harming his promotion prospects).

Recent extensions of the TPB support its relevance to gender and career research. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) demonstrate that the framework can explain policy-related behaviors, such as compliance with organizational diversity initiatives. Sniehotta et al. (2014) further note that the TPB's focus on "perceived control" is critical for understanding disparities in career development, especially for marginalized groups that face structural barriers. In the Macao Police Force context, the TPB helps unpack why gender mainstreaming policies (e.g., extended maternity leave) may not translate to equal career outcomes: even if officers have positive attitudes toward policies (Attitude) and lack intense social pressure to resist them (Subjective Norms), they may still feel unable to take advantage of policies due to perceived barriers (e.g., fear of career penalties for using maternity leave).

Complementing the TPB, Banaji and Greenwald's (2013) work on unconscious bias helps contextualize the framework's constructs. Unconscious biases, deeply ingrained stereotypes that influence decision-making without awareness, can shape Attitudes (e.g., unconsciously viewing women as "less suitable" for leadership) and Subjective Norms (e.g., assuming colleagues expect men to lead frontline operations). This perspective adds depth to the TPB analysis, highlighting that even well-intentioned officers may be influenced by hidden biases that undermine gender mainstreaming efforts.

Finally, the World Economic Forum's (2024) Global Gender Gap Report underscores the timeliness of this theoretical approach. The report notes that while gender gaps are narrowing in education and healthcare, they persist in "high-status" fields like law enforcement—primarily due to cultural norms and structural barriers. By applying the TPB to the Macao Police Force, this study contributes to a global understanding of how to address these gaps at the individual, organizational, and societal levels.

2.4. The Proposed Theoretical Framework

The theoretical considerations of this study are grounded in several important works. Both Martin (1996) and Rabe-Hempel (2008) analyzed how organizational culture, gender norms, and institutional expectations affect women's experiences and opportunities for career advancement from the perspectives of the women police officers, while examining gender stereotypes in a male-dominated environment.

The study by Chen and Guo (2024) served as a reference for this paper's framework. They examined how gender attitudes, family pressure, and social norms collectively influence women's entrepreneurial behavior in China, a country with a collectivist culture. Their findings illustrated the barriers women faced in their careers, supporting the theoretical underpinnings of the current study. They used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to demonstrate how cultural and social pressures influence behavior. In addition, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thorough examination of identifying and interpreting key themes in qualitative data provided a guide for the analysis in this study.

This study combines the three key components of TPB to develop the theoretical framework (Figure 1) for examining the behavioral factors that affect police officers' career development. Attitude is classified into Instrumental Attitudes and Affective Attitudes. Subjective Norms refer to the influence of family, coworkers, superiors, and society on police officers' career development. Perceived Behavioral Control examines the main challenges and supportive factors police officers face in their career development. Rabe-Hemp (2008) observed that in police cultures dominated by one gender, officers often dealt with issues like gender discrimination and a lack of supportive policies even though professional training and policy protections for police officers are provided already, besides, various expected obstacles like gender bias in promotions and female officers' struggle to balance work and family are the key factors to tackle for if hoping to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment for all officers.

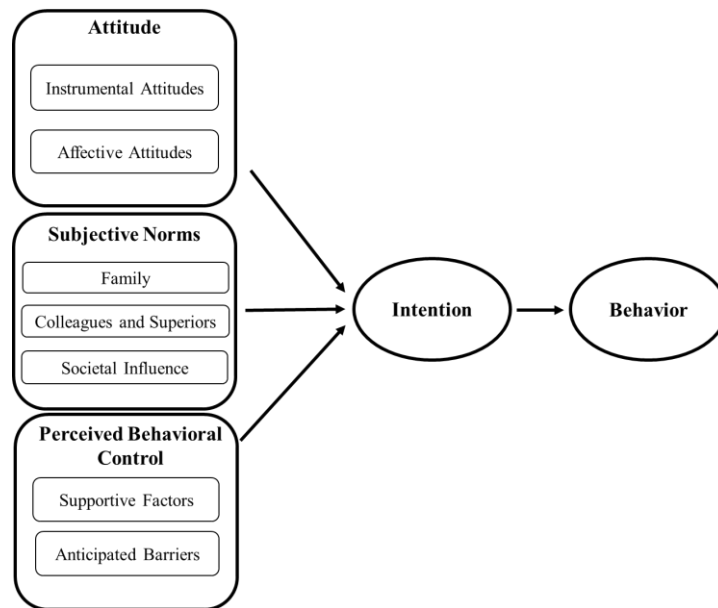


Figure 1. The proposed theoretical framework of this study

3. Procedures of Sampling and Data Analysis

In-depth interviews were conducted between January and February 2025 with 16 officers from the Macao Police Force (8 males and 8 females), and the interviews were conducted in Chinese (as the majority of the Macao SAR population speaks Chinese). Participants were purposefully selected to ensure diverse representation, encompassing police officers of both genders and from various divisions and ranks. Since revealing participants' ranks was somewhat sensitive and the aim of this study is to identify the behavioral factors affecting police officers' acceptance of the gender mainstreaming policy in general, only the number of years of work experience was revealed. As the number of participants who agreed to take part in the interviews grew, a chain referral strategy was implemented to help recruit additional participants.

Each interviewee was assigned an initial designation consisting of an English letter and a number. The letter "M" represented male officers, while "F" represented female officers. The numerical order denoted the sequence of interviews conducted within each group, allowing for organized documentation. For instance, the first interviewee in the male group is referred to as M1, the second as M2, and this same naming convention applies to the female group (*see* Appendix 1 for detailed characteristics of the 16 participants).

A set of semi-structured questions (*see* Appendix 2) was designed based on the proposed theoretical framework, with bilingual (English and Chinese) versions to avoid misinterpretation. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure was adopted, which involved transcribing and translating the interview materials into English and systematically coding them with the help of the

"*Atlas.ti version 25.0.1*" to identify recurring patterns and themes. Their actual experiences and points of view were reviewed, and the barriers and opportunities to achieving gender equality were synthesized. The researcher actively summarized and clarified participant responses during the interviews to reinforce ideas and confirm accuracy in real time. In addition, following the recommendations of Creswell and Miller (2000), the member check method was used in this study; participants reviewed initial findings to confirm accuracy and clarify interpretations. Moreover, as Johnson (1997) identified, any concerns or possible multiple interpretations raised in the understanding were confirmed with participants to eliminate bias and lend credibility to the findings.

This study employs a qualitative research method, which is particularly valuable in contexts where the existing literature is limited, as it enables the integration of relevant theories with practical applications by exploring participants' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research is distinctive in its examination of both male and female officers currently serving in the Police Force, providing firsthand perspectives on gender mainstreaming policies and their implications for career development. To ensure rigor and credibility, the study carefully assessed data saturation to confirm that the sample size was sufficient and appropriate for addressing the research questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with written consent, and high ethical standards were maintained to ensure the integrity, confidentiality, and voluntariness of participants. The research process adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the University of Saint Joseph's ethics committee. Participants received a written informed consent form outlining the study's aims, voluntary participation, and confidentiality protections, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. The co-author explained the study procedures, potential benefits, and associated risks to ensure participants understood their rights before providing consent. Field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues, such as hesitation when discussing promotion bias, thereby enriching the thematic analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The research is theoretically grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior. By evaluating behavioral factors, the study offers policymakers recommendations for aligning future development with gender mainstreaming principles.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Attitude

According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, Attitudes can be categorized into two types: Instrumental and Affective. Instrumental Attitudes emphasize the utility of a behavior and the value of its outcomes, focusing primarily on the behavior's functionality. In contrast, Affective Attitudes pertain to the emotions and feelings generated by the behavior and are more aligned with an

individual's emotional responses.

4.1.1. Instrumental Attitudes

Interviewees identified a consistent gendered pattern of task allocation: male officers were disproportionately assigned to frontline roles (e.g., patrols, criminal investigations), while females were steered toward clerical or back-office work. Critical to career advancement, frontline experience is a mandatory criterion for promotion (Macao SAR Government, 2019). Such a division of labor reinforces traditional gender stereotypes and restricts women's opportunities to engage in essential operational tasks. Furthermore, most female police officers emphasized the need for a transparent and equitable promotion system, with 5 of 8 asserting that gender-based task allocation curtailed their chances of gaining frontline experience.

Most male interviewees acknowledged that both genders possess unique strengths within the police force, enabling them to complement one another effectively. Among the eight female police officers surveyed, five recognized the existence of complementary roles for both genders. However, they emphasized that these roles should not be dictated by societal expectations; instead, they should be assigned based on each officer's true strengths and willingness. As one interviewee, F2, remarked, *"Women and men play complementary roles in the police force, and the challenges faced by us are equally demanding."* It indicates a desire among female officers for greater autonomy and fairness in role allocation.

In developing criteria for promotion assessment, the department made specific adjustments to the physical fitness test standards for women. Nonetheless, many interviewees expressed that this attempt to achieve fairness between the two genders is a double-edged sword. Six out of eight male officers acknowledged that while these adjustments aim to foster equality, they ultimately diminish the uniformity of overall test standards. Consequently, the gender mainstreaming policy tends to undermine equality in physical fitness assessments. For instance, during the promotion assessment, male officers are required to complete tasks such as jumping over a stone wall, whereas female officers are exempt from this requirement. Some male officers viewed this discrepancy as unfair and believed it could impact perceptions of equal opportunity within the police force. Given that both genders ultimately need to confront the "stone wall" in real-life situations, this exemption raises concerns about how female officers would handle such physical challenges in frontline positions.

4.1.2. Affective Attitudes

Regarding Affective Attitudes, both male and female police officers recognized the importance

of employing various leadership styles, believing that these approaches enhance team dynamics and overall organizational effectiveness. Male respondents pointed out that diverse leadership styles contribute positively to decision-making and team performance. In contrast, five out of eight female police officers expressed that female leaders are often detail-oriented and empathetic; while these traits are crucial for fostering team cohesion and morale, they can also be perceived as weaknesses in operational or high-stress situations. Female officers voiced their frustrations over the persistent gender stereotypes that limit their leadership opportunities. As a result, they underscored the need for inclusive leadership that fosters cohesion and values diverse perspectives.

4.2. Subjective Norms

In this study, Subjective Norms play a significant role in shaping the behavior and career development of police officers within the force. The analysis reveals notable differences between male and female officers, highlighting the impact of family dynamics, interactions with colleagues, and societal expectations as critical factors in forming these norms. These influences often reinforce traditional gender roles, creating structural barriers that disproportionately affect women.

4.2.1. Family Influences

For male officers, family expectations are commonly linked to their role as the primary breadwinner. Six of eight participants noted that societal norms typically encourage men to prioritize work over family, leading them to feel unfairly treated as well. M5 remarked, *"Men may be required to take on extra shifts and high-demand work tasks, because men don't have childcare duties, which leads to a potential sense of unfairness among male employees."* However, male officers generally experience fewer constraints in balancing work and family responsibilities compared to their female counterparts. Interviewee M3 noted that *"in Macao, where two-earner families are common, there isn't a strict or traditional division of labor regarding family and childcare responsibilities,"* suggesting a gradual shift in family roles.

For female police officers, traditional family roles often impose additional responsibilities. Many female officers emphasized that childcare and household duties significantly affect their ability to pursue career development opportunities. Interviewee F8 noted, *"It is challenging to excel in both meeting the demands of the police force and fulfilling family responsibilities, especially when both spouses are police officers. When our child is sick, I'm the one who has to take leave—missing out on training or promotion opportunities as a result."* These societal and familial expectations create a dual burden for women, ultimately affecting their career advancement.

4.2.2. Workplace and Societal Influences

In the workplace, the environment frequently reinforces male dominance in leadership and operational roles. Most male officers reported being more likely to be assigned high-risk or operational tasks. Interviewee M8 remarked, *"Male police officers are deemed more suitable for frontline work, particularly in situations requiring the use of force."* Many female officers reported that their superiors' perceptions of male and female abilities, along with colleagues' attitudes and behaviors, reduce the likelihood that women will participate in specific tasks and prove themselves. Often regarded as proficient in organizing, communicating, and enhancing public relations, female officers are frequently assigned to clerical or public relations roles.

For male police officers, societal expectations often align with traditional gender roles, reinforcing their dominance in physically demanding tasks such as patrolling, crowd control, and responding to emergencies, as well as in leadership positions. Even though these preconceived ideas have been evolving, as Interviewee M7 stated, *"Society is moving away from the old concept of 'male domination and female subservience', but there's still a perception that men naturally have the authority in handling leadership and demanding roles"*. Interviewee F2 noted, *"In the course of law enforcement, some members of the public may lack due respect for female police officers, or even adopt a belittling or discriminatory attitude, which may affect their authority in law enforcement"*.

Overall, both genders noted that fair promotion processes and equal training opportunities are essential. 14 out of 16 interviewees agreed that the police force has been making efforts to improve gender equality through changes in training and promotion reforms. For example, Interviewee F7 noted, *"Opportunities for education and professional development are open to both genders, which has greatly narrowed the gap between men and women in terms of career success"*.

4.3. Perceived Behavioral Control

In the context of career development, PBC is shaped by Supportive Factors and Anticipated Obstacles, which collectively influence officers' intentions and behaviors. The interview data show significant gender differences in PBC.

4.3.1. Supportive Factors

Among the Supportive Factors, 10 interviewees (5 male and 5 female) acknowledged that institutional policies are fundamental to enhancing family support. The police force has implemented various policies to support officers with family responsibilities, which all police officers can access positively. For example, both Interviewees F1 and M5 highlighted that *"The police force has*

introduced support measures for officers with family responsibilities, such as caring for children or elderly parents". These measures, which include paternity leave and flexible work arrangements, help officers balance work and family responsibilities, and both genders feel their needs have been fully considered. Regarding training and development opportunities, 12 officers (7 male and 5 female) emphasized the importance of equal access to the program as a critical enabler. Interviewee F3 stated: *"The existing system has already provided much support, such as training courses and exchange programs targeting different departments and posts. These programs do not impose gender restrictions and are open to both male and female police officers. It has helped narrow the skill gaps".*

Additionally, Interviewee F6 suggested that increasing opportunities for women to participate in traditionally male-oriented tasks, such as frontline operations, could further enhance their career prospects, *"Consideration can be given to increasing the opportunities for women to participate in projects and tasks usually undertaken by male police officers, for example, through greater involvement of women in frontline work".*

In addition, the police force has made efforts to promote inclusive leadership and raise awareness of gender equality through conducting Gender Equality Lectures. Interviewee F2 stated: *"Lectures on gender equality awareness should be targeted at all officers, so that they can fully understand the existence of gender differences and potential prejudices".*

Nine police officers (four male and five female) underscored the significance of such initiatives, with the lectures addressing critical topics such as understanding gender equality, recognizing and addressing unconscious bias, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture. These discussions highlighted how gender stereotypes can adversely affect decision-making, task assignments, and career advancement. The lectures reinforced the idea of complementary strengths across genders, aimed at building a supportive team environment while promoting equitable opportunities and respect throughout all levels of the organization.

4.3.2. Anticipated Barriers

In terms of Anticipated Obstacles, male officers typically foresaw fewer barriers to their career development and believed that their success was largely contingent on their own actions and capabilities. Six male officers voiced confidence in their ability to surmount challenges. When asked about potential hurdles, Interviewee M5 remarked: *"The main challenge is staying competitive and continually proving myself. I do not perceive any significant barriers as long as I continue to perform well."*

Female officers, on the other hand, anticipated significant obstacles that made them feel less in

control of their careers. Six female officers highlighted the work-life balance issues and gender stereotypes. Interviewee F6 pointed out that cultural expectations often push them into traditional roles and explained, *"As a mother, I have to juggle my responsibilities at home and work. I notice my male counterparts don't have to deal with the same pressures I do, and honestly, it makes it harder for me to be promoted"*.

Additionally, five female officers, including Interviewee F1, expressed concerns about the lack of mentorship and support for women in leadership roles. Interviewee F1 remarked: *"There are not many women in senior positions, so it is hard to find someone who understands the challenges we face and can guide us"*.

5. Conclusion of the Findings

5.1. Answers to the Research Questions

To address Research Question 1: What are the key challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality within the Macao Public Security Police Force? This analysis applies the Theory of Planned Behavior and related studies as the framework to illustrate how gender mainstreaming policies interact with the constructs of Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control.

Deeply entrenched cultural stereotypes (e.g., female “unsuitability” for frontline work) and structural barriers (gendered task allocation, frontline-promotion links) persist. Existing policies (flexible work, equal training) and gender equality lectures provide a foundation for progress. Expanding women’s access to frontline roles and embedding inclusive leadership in organizational culture are critical next steps.

Fostering cultural change and raising awareness among all officers can help dismantle traditional stereotypes and organizational norms. It is essential to consistently review and reform policies to advance gender equality within the organization. In addition to shifting attitudes internally and addressing societal expectations, there must be a more substantial commitment to creating an equal and inclusive working environment for all officers.

To address Research Question 2: What societal norms and departmental policies influence police officers' career development with respect to gender differences? The insights gathered from the interviewees reveal that societal and familial expectations surrounding gender roles exacerbate the dual burdens faced by women as they attempt to balance home life and career advancement. Notably, the findings indicate that traditional gender roles also impose pressures on men, as they are often viewed as the primary breadwinners. These two different perspectives contribute an essential dimension to the discourse on gender equality policy.

While there has been some progress in attitudes towards gender equality in the Macao context, the interviewees' responses indicate that women in law enforcement and leadership positions still encounter challenges in gaining the general public's trust and authority. Even with supportive policies in place, informal rules (e.g., gendered task allocation) and the link between frontline promotion and disparities perpetuate disparities. Women often find they must exert greater effort and determination to overcome entrenched stereotypes and earn recognition. Police officers acknowledge improvements in the cultural landscape of gender equality; however, these changes have not yet been fully integrated into everyday practice. This disconnection between awareness and the actual implementation of gender mainstreaming policies represents a significant structural challenge for the Macao Police Force.

5.2. The Conceptual Framework of this Study

This study's qualitative data further verified that social expectations and organizational task-allocation patterns profoundly shape career decisions and promotion opportunities. It could be viewed as a top-down structural problem that highlights several phenomena specific to the Macao Police Force's organizational culture. For example, while the policies emphasized equal opportunities, the interview data indicated that the traditional division of labor, informal rules within the department, and leadership preferences still directly influence how tasks are distributed and the processes for promotion. Frontline experience is crucial for promotion, and women have less of this kind of experience due to traditional job assignments, creating a disadvantage for women and reinforcing unconscious biases among their peers and supervisors.

The in-depth interviews further confirmed that these hidden societal biases are not a thing of the past, but they still hinder people's career choices today. Even though educational levels have changed, especially with the rise in female participation in higher education, this has not fully translated into fairer career development opportunities. This phenomenon highlights the complex interaction between cultural norms and institutional resources that shapes career development outcomes; it also reveals the complexity of addressing structural inequality in professional environments. Qualitative data validated the TPB's utility but identified four potential factors that moderate behavioral intentions toward gender mainstreaming (Figure 2). These factors reflect the Police Force's unique context, where informal rules and cultural norms shape outcomes despite formal policy equality:

(see Figure 2).

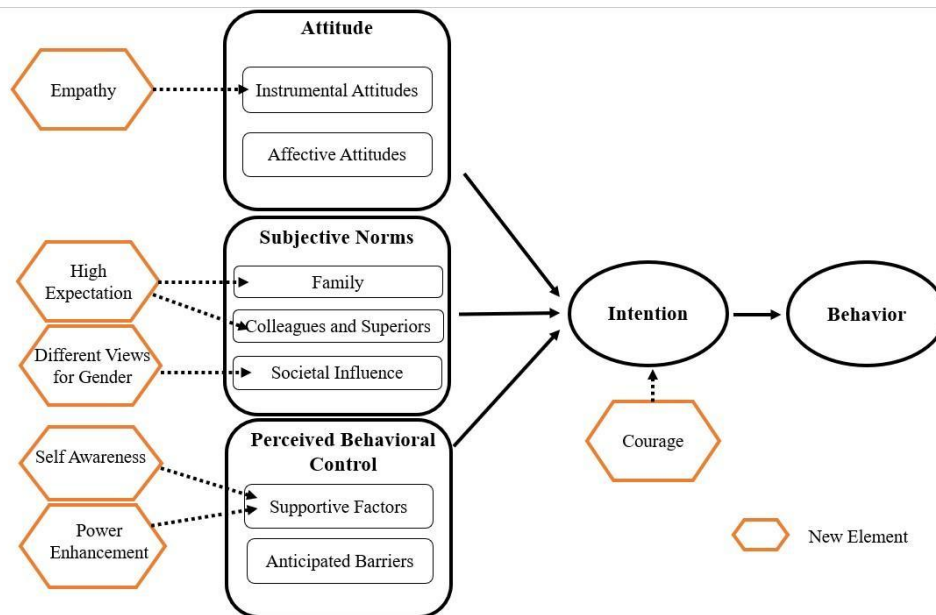


Figure 2. The Revised Conceptual Framework Integrating TPB and Potential New Factors

5.3. New Factors

The three constructs of TPB have been shown to interact, affecting the intentions and behaviors of both genders in the context of career development in the police force. Firstly, a very subtle element emerged in this study: the Empathy of male officers towards their female counterparts. While male officers pointed out that frontline experience was limited to their female counterparts, they also showed empathy. They recognized the challenges women face in gaining that experience due to entrenched gender roles. This Empathy moves Attitudes beyond passive acceptance to more active support for fairer career development. Female officers, meanwhile, emphasized structural barriers in task assignment and promotion processes, though this element has not yet translated into systemic change.

Next, High expectations of the male offices and Different Views in looking at the gender mainstreaming policies give a more transparent lens in understanding the dilemma of the double-edged sword; it indeed acts according to the gender mainstreaming policies, considering the physical differences of both genders, yet it creates another type of unfairness to both genders. The results of the interviews revealed that specific groups continue to be assigned certain occupational roles in the workplace regarding gender stereotypes. Family, workplace, and societal norms indeed regard men as physically more powerful, so it is common to assign them tasks that require strength, while women are generally considered more detail-oriented and good at communication, so clerical tasks are regarded as their priority.

Next, Self-awareness and Power Enhancement are crucial enablers. Among the sixteen police officers interviewed, those who felt more in control of their careers (ten people: six male and four female) were more positive about advancing their career path. The other six (two male and four female)

pointed out numerous obstacles. These findings highlight the influence of PBC.

Female officers have benefited from policies like flexible working hours and expanded training opportunities, which have helped them develop a deeper understanding of their actual work situations: the opportunities, the difficulties, and barriers they face in their careers. This growing Self-awareness has empowered them to shift from passive recipients to active agents pursuing professional growth—a process that can be seen as Power Enhancement. Additionally, the recent introduction of gender mainstreaming lectures for all officers has been widely recognized as an essential step in raising awareness across the police force.

Last but not least, Courage is a new insight for achieving effectiveness. Female officers needed courage to challenge gendered task allocation and stereotypes, which acts as a bridge between positive Attitudes and meaningful action.

5.4. Intention

Courage emerged as a critical psychological resource for translating intentions into change. "Courage" is not just an abstract concept but a powerful demonstration of determination and intention in tackling bias and advocating change. For these officers, having the courage to speak out about unfair treatment or unsatisfactory support among female officers can influence their ability to create change within the police force.

"Courage" bridges positive attitudes toward gender equity and the action necessary for meaningful change. When female officers are empowered to voice their concerns, they inspire their peers and create a ripple effect that pushes the movement forward. Without organizational support (e.g., safe feedback channels), even positive Attitudes toward gender equality remain ineffective. The police force must foster a culture that rewards courage, e.g., recognizing officers who advocate for inclusive task allocation, to drive systemic progress.

6. Research Conclusions

6.1. Theoretical Conclusions

This study extends the TPB by identifying several potential moderating factors (e.g., Empathy, Self-awareness, Power Enhancement, and Courage) that influence the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies in male-dominated public sectors. It addresses literature gaps by integrating micro-level individual experiences with macro-level policy analysis—providing a more holistic understanding of gender equality implementation.

6.2. Practical Conclusions

The findings provide policymakers with actionable insights. First, task allocation should be reformed to ensure women's equitable access to frontline experience, such as through formal rotation programs with clear criteria. Fitness test standards should be revised to balance gender equity and operational competence, for example, by establishing gender-neutral core requirements with flexible implementation. In addition, mentorship programs should be expanded to pair female officers with senior women leaders. Training on tackling unconscious bias should be incorporated into mandatory annual professional development.

These recommendations are transferable to other male-dominated public sectors (e.g., the military and fire services) facing similar gender disparities.

6.3. Limitations

It is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations while considering the research findings. Firstly, the small sample size may not adequately reflect the entire Macao SAR Public Security Police Force; future research should use mixed methods (surveys with $n > 200$ and interviews) to validate the findings. Second, because gender issues are sensitive, some respondents might have suppressed their true views about gender issues in the workplace due to pressure from the police workplace, which could impact the integrity of the data. Anonymous online surveys could mitigate this in future studies.

Macao's unique socio-cultural context (family-centric norms, small organizational scale) limits direct generalization to other regions. Cross-cultural studies in larger police forces (e.g., mainland China and the UK Metropolitan Police) are needed. The study focused exclusively on gender, neglecting intersections with socioeconomic background, marital status, and education. Future research should explore these variables.

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Appendix 1

Code	Gender	Age	Years of working experience
Interviewee F1	F	37	13
Interviewee F2	F	35	11
Interviewee F3	F	40	16
Interviewee F4	F	28	8

Interviewee F5	F	26	7
Interviewee F6	F	33	11
Interviewee F7	F	42	20
Interviewee F8	F	30	9
Interviewee M1	M	32	9
Interviewee M2	M	36	13
Interviewee M3	M	33	10
Interviewee M4	M	37	13
Interviewee M5	M	35	15
Interviewee M6	M	42	23
Interviewee M7	M	53	29
Interviewee M8	M	29	7

Table A1. Participants Background Information

Appendix 2

No.	Interview Questions	Theoretical Basis (TPB Component)
1	<p>What do you think about the opportunities for men and women in the police force in terms of promotion and work environment? Do you think they are the same for everyone?</p> <p>您如何看待男性和女性在警隊中晉升和工作環境的機會？您認為這些機會對每個人都一樣嗎？</p>	Attitudes
2	<p>What do you think about the leading roles in the police force? Do you think different genders will have different impacts on the operation of the department?</p> <p>您對於警察隊伍中的領導角色有何看法？您認為不同的性別的領導對部門運作會產生不同的影響嗎？</p>	Attitudes
3	<p>What do you think are the general expectations of Macao people regarding the roles of men and women within the family? Do you think these expectations affect the way men and women work in the Public Security Police Force?</p> <p>你認為澳門人對男女在家庭中的角色一般有什麼期望？你認為這些期望會影響男性和女性在警隊的工作方式嗎？</p>	Subjective Norms

4	<p>What are the views of your colleagues in your workplace about officers of different genders taking on leadership roles?</p> <p>在您的工作環境中，同事們對不同性別的警員擔任領導角色持有什麼樣的看法？</p>	Subjective Norms
5	<p>What do you feel about the challenges that police officers of different genders may face in taking up frontline roles in the Public Security Police Force?</p> <p>您如何看待不同性別的警員在警隊中擔任前線職務時可能面臨的挑戰？</p>	Subjective Norms
6	<p>What do you think are differences in the level of difficulty and process for people of different genders to succeed in the police force?</p> <p>您認為不同性別的人想在警察隊伍中取得成功，其難度和過程有何差異？</p>	Perceived Behavioral control
7	<p>What do you think about the support the police force gives to police officers who have family responsibilities, like taking care of children or elderly parents? Do you think it is enough for both men and women?</p> <p>您認為警隊對於有家庭責任（例如照顧小孩或年邁父母）的警員所給予的支援如何？您認為這對男性和女性來說都足夠了嗎？</p>	Perceived Behavioral control
8	<p>What ideas could be made in the Public Security Police Force to ensure that men and women have the same chance of success in their careers?</p> <p>您認為可以在警隊中做出哪些改變，以確保男性和女性在事業上有相同的成功機會？</p>	Perceived Behavioral control
9	<p>What do you think the Public Security Police Force should improve the working environment to help leaders overcome challenges and achieve equitable development?</p> <p>您認為警隊應該如何改善工作環境，以幫助領導者克服挑戰，實現公平發展？</p>	Perceived Behavioral control

Table A2. Interview Questions Design