**Diversity Without Inclusion?**

**Autonomous Mothering among Arab Policewomen in Israel**

**Abstract**

**Objective:** ​Intrigued by Arab policewomen’s refusal to positively respond to the opportunity to be promoted to the rank of officer we aim to clarify how policewomen perceive their struggle to experience their autonomous mothering and how this struggle is involved in their refusal to be promoted. Moreover, we contribute a conceptualization of diversity policy as a family policy. ​

**Background:** Arab policewomen in Israel were recruited to the Israeli police within the framework of a diversity policy. Their refusal of promotion provides an opportunity to study diversity as a family policy.

​**Methods**: A qualitative semi-structured interview-based study was conducted with 27 Arab policewomen employed by the Israeli Police. The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory.

**Results:** Arab policewomen who rely on kin-care to cover for their long hours are afraid of promotion, which threatens to interrupt two family obligations: firstly, the maintenance of their kin relations with those who provide them with kin-care; secondly, mothering tasks aimed at cultivating children’s performance at school and in afterschool activities.

**Conclusion:** Policewomen refuse promotion as part of their struggle over for autonomous mothering. Accepting promotion would prevent them from cultivating their children’s cultural capital; their refusal exposes the nature of the diversity policy as a hostile family policy.

**Implications:** Diversity has to be conceptualized as a family policy and its evaluations require a focus on autonomous mothering.

**Keywords:** Arab women, policewomen, work-life balance, autonomous mothering, minority women, promotion.

**Introduction**

The study of organizational diversity policies is often held as separated from discussions of family relations or motherhood. Diversity policies, a conscious organizational effort towards the inclusion of women, minorities, minority women, and sexual minorities, into all organizational ranks, are not included in sets of policies perceived as relevant to work-family conflicts. Collins (2020) demonstrated this tendency by counting the following as relevant: “providing paid parental leave, job security surrounding childbirth, part-time and flexible work schedules, affordable universal child care and health care, vacation and sick day provisions, and cash allowances to parents” (p. 850). Apparently, the relevance of policies is evaluated from the point of view of those who do not require a special effort in order to be recruited into workplaces relevant to their skills.

In contrast, diversity policies aim at recruiting members of commonly excluded categories, and following recruitment, organizational diversity policies are required to ensure due promotion and limited dropping out of members of these categories (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022; Thomas, 2007). Alas, once recruited, ethnic minority women, compared to their white counterparts, encounter greater challenges balancing work and family obligations due to the clash between local work cultures and traditional home expectations, which place significant caregiving responsibilities on women (Dale, 2005). The additional challenge that minorities have to face is also related to the fact that the time aspect of the work-family conflict is added to other stressors they experience in the workplace such as racism and sexism (Bradley et al., 2005).

Once scholars succumb to the public/private divide, family issues may seem irrelevant to diversity questions. But, as shown already by the Gender Moral Rationality (GMR) model (Duncan & Edwards, 1997) and the more recent relational approach to work-life balance (Ali et al., 2017), employment opportunities are assessed against family and community considerations. Consistent with the understanding of employees’ embeddedness in their family context (Hobson, 2011), is empirical evidence indicating that minority women who entered organizations by positively responding to diversity policies, often refuse promotion or drop out even before a promotion is offered to them (Green, 2021).

Such unintended consequences of diversity policies raise a conundrum worth examining: assuming that at the recruitment point, minority families were able to get organized around a mother’s recruitment to an organization, and assuming that the chosen solutions covering caring obligations, could continue operating effectively enabling minority women undergoing training courses and beginning to contribute to their respective organizations, which mechanism operated in later stages that resulted in the refusal to be promoted? What were the forces that denied them inclusion to the extent of them allegedly ‘opting out’ (Stone, 2007)? On top of Stone’s earlier findings of work overload and intransigent employers, two heavyweights in police employment, what we suggest here as a step forward in answering this question, is a focus on autonomous mothering.

From the perspective of autonomous mothering, practical care cannot, caring tasks that can be replaced by policies ensuring childcare, by kin care or by paid solutions, hardly cover the matter. Instead, the invisible work of mothering, including for example the relational work (DeVault, 1991), the need to respond to caring emergencies (Co-author2 et al., 2012), the incidents of transferring emotional capital (Reay, 2004), as well as concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) aspects of child-rearing, could provide a key. These invisible aspects of autonomous mothering play a crucial role in the lives of full-time employed minority women, we argue, who were recruited as part of diversity policy. Employment via a diversity policy that doesn’t allow for autonomous mothering exposes the face of diversity policy as a hostile family policy. Autonomous mothering may be revealed as an important clarifying mechanism operating even when the work-family interface is effectively managed.

Moreover, diversity policy should be evaluated as a family policy in the sense of the quality of the jobs offered to racialized minority women – is it associated with gendered dimensions of job quality proposed by Davoine et al. (2008) including secure transitions for mothers and recognition of mothering obligations? Below we unfold the issues of diversity policies, discuss mothering ideals, and introduce our conceptual framework.

**Literature Review**

*Diversity Policy as Family Policy*

Circumventing the separation between diversity policies and motherhood scholarship, we propose to recognize aspects of motherwork (Hill Collins, 1994) that go beyond daily mundane care. Aspects that were already mapped and made visible by earlier scholarship but were still left out by the overemphasis on extensive mothering (Christopher, 2012) or integrated mothering (Dow, 2016) dealing with mothering as a set of tasks transferable to others. We see the emphasis on community support and solutions as an act of erasure, not recognizing the specific aspects of mother-children dialogue so salient to motherwork. Recognizing these aspects, including for instance the work that working-class mothers do when negotiating welfare support for their daughters’ wellbeing (Co-author2 et al., 2021), requires that we identify diversity policy as a family policy and that we conceptualize the relationship between diversity policies and motherhood.

The case of Arab[[1]](#endnote-1) policewomen in Israel, among them many are mothers who were recruited to the Israeli police within the framework of a diversity policy that opened up new opportunities for women with academic degrees, provides an opportunity to study the significance of diversity as a family policy. The point of view of Arab policewomen in Israel may contribute to our understanding of their insistence on being the good mothers they want to be in the context of a greedy institution that refuses to permit them shorter hours work week or shorter hours work day. An organization that expects them to manifest their devotion by participating in training courses that deny them the possibility of returning home at night. What we see as the leverage for conceptualization in their experience is their embeddedness in a network of family relations that provides kin care defined by Dow (2016) as the shared responsibility over children’s needs. Nevertheless, whether or not these mothers/policewomen see the care for their children as covered, freeing them to devote themselves to their jobs at the police, is an empirical question which we see as conducive for recognizing the nature of diversity policy as a family policy.

A 2019 research conducted at the Israeli police (Gottfried-Oz and Sasson, 2019) validated the salience of motherhood to women’s promotion at the police force. In accordance with traditional concepts that assume that the household duties are on the woman's shoulders, commanders believe that in their roles as mothers, women cannot do their jobs. The study showed that superiors see mothers as less effective highlighting policewomen’s weaknesses as part of their effort to perpetuate male culture. Respondents justified their attitudes by underlining unplanned work at unusual and hectic hours, emphasizing the value of long working hours as a measure of effective functioning and devotion to the police. Against the backdrop of these sexist attitudes, they refrained of promoting mothers further glorifying male culture in the organization.

Indeed, powerful attitudes operate within organizations against diversity policies. These attitudes are manifested in a broad range of implicit tactics that were named by Thomas (2007) *diversity resistance.* More recently, Dobbin and Kalev (2022) summarized their studies of the effort to introduce diversity policies into law firms among other types of organizations showing a range of organizational barriers to apply diversity, even when managers and superiors are made to undergo diversity training. Nevertheless, despite all prejudice and discriminatory practices, difficulties are overcome in quite a few cases to the extent that white mothers, racialized minority men and women and sexual ‘Others’, manage to hold on to full time jobs and at times, are promoted into higher levels in organizational hierarchies (Dobbin and Kalev, 2022). Surely, the understanding of diversity policy would benefit from more research grounded in organizational dynamics. However, we propose that investigating diversity policy from an organizational perspective only is overly consistent with a public/private divide that reinforces the exclusion of ‘private’ matters as irrelevant. A broad range of researchers have refused to accept such a divide (e.g. Tronto, 2013). Following them we suggest the need to investigate diversity policy as a family policy focusing on the instance in which such policy was successful in recruiting minority mothers but these fully employed women refuse to be promoted. Their struggle to hold on to their full-time jobs renders them a unique case calling for the understanding of the way they see their motherhood and mothering obligations. We turn to a discussion of motherhood.

*Motherhood Ideals – Autonomous Mothering*

Previous researchers (Hill Collins, 1994; Gillies, 2007; Irwin & Elley, 2011; 2013; Christopher, 2012) have conceptualized the intersections of racial/ethnic and class backgrounds in mothers’ experiences, underlining specific intersections as shaping how women ‘do motherhood’ or engage in ‘motherwork.’Further, mothers tend to see their own motherhood as grounded in their relation to their communities’ expectations (Ribbens, McCarthy et al., 2000, in Chambers, 2012; May, 2008, in Chambers, 2012). Similarly, Hays (1996) claimed that each historical period offers cultural models for appropriate child-rearing. At any given time and place, one model tends to take precedence over others. During neo-liberal times, appropriate motherhood has been defined by Hays (1996) as 'intensive mothering.' The logic of 'intensive mothering,' she showed, demands enormous commitments of time and physical, emotional, and financial resources from mothers, directly conflicting with the rational actor ideology that shapes the public sphere of work.

However, more recently, two other normative gendered ideologies of motherhood based on sharing childcare with “other mothers” (Dow, 2016; Hill Collins, 1994) are legitimized. Christopher (2012), who introduced ‘extensive mothering’ found that mothers respond to the cultural construct of the ideal working mother by the remote management of children’s needs. Her interviewees delegated substantial amounts of day-to-day childcare to others, defining good mothering as being ‘in charge of’ and having ultimate responsibility for their children’s wellbeing. Dow’s (2016) findings, however, challenged both intensive and extensive mothering, indicating that middle-class African-Americans career women do not share the need to be always available since they rely on kin-care. If Schnurr et al., (2020) argued that mothers are assumed not to be able to balance home duties with their work duties, Dow’s interviewees showed a full capacity to do so by relying on members of their families to care for their children’s needs. She named this alternative mothering ideology *integrated motherhood,* aiming to underscore that how mothers maintain full-time employment should not be separated from their lives as integrated within their families and communities.

Nevertheless, from an intersectionality perspective, motherhood commitments and devotion are firmly positioned within their class locations. Middle-class parents, primarily mothers, tend to adopt a cultural logic of child-rearing that stresses the concerted cultivation of children. The actions of mothers reflect contemporary attitudes regarding the direct link assumed between investing in children in the present and their success in the future (e.g., Lareau, 2003). Mothers have a role in obtaining resources that will allow their children to participate in the consumer society and indeed, Reay (2004) showed how children’s middle-class position is reproduced by motherwork. Intense daily work with children is very much the province of the mother who have their ‘finger on the pulse’ in many aspects of their children along the life-course (Reay, 1998).

*Mothering Ideals in the Context of the Arab Family in Israel*

Women who are Arab citizens of Israel constitute part of a deeply divided national minority (21% of the population in Israel, ICBS, 2023) within Israeli society and they suffer discrimination by the Jewish Israeli society (Smooha, 2002).

Arab women’s life in Israel has a hybrid nature. Oppression and conservatism exist alongside resisting acts (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2017; Sa'ar, 2007) so that they simultaneously experience trends of change and conservatism next to the relatively heavy weight of controlling families and communities in their lives (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2020). The extended family continues to constitute the principal source of support and supervision despite the intensification of secularization, urbanization, education, and paid employment. Family relationships are still typified by interdependence and a low level of differentiation, centered on a collective family identity that underscores the importance of preserving family ties. And when required, the extended family is enlisted to help individual family members and assume responsibility.

Intersectional feminist scholarship has reinforced the point that experiences of motherhood and employment are far from uniform among women. As in other Arab countries, motherhood in the Arab society in Israel remains highly revered, but its content has been brought up to date (Kanaaneh, 2002; Sa’ar, 2007: Zaatari, 2006). Motherhood in the context of the family being a collectivist unit echoes intensive mothering, in which the parents – especially the mother – are expected to deny themselves, with mother’s happiness and welfare perceived as deriving from the children’s wellbeing (Abu-Baker, 2002).

Historically, being a mother was prioritized over taking paid employment in Arab society. However, over the past three decades, Arab women have undergone various types of changes, including considerable improvement in the percentage of educated Arab women, which has been accompanied by an increase in their integration into various forms of employment. The employment rate of Arab women aged 25-64 reached 41.9% in the fourth quarter of 2021 (a low rate compared to Jewish women- 83.2% and Arab men- 74.1%, Abgar & Elmo, 2023). Structural discrimination means that their entry into the labor market is characterized by their over-representation in the local precariat (Standing, 2015), in involuntarily part time positions (Sa'ar, 2016), exposed to underemployment, regardless of their BA degrees (Co-Author1, 2019).

Despite such bleak overall picture, Arab women holding higher education degrees have managed to embrace multiple paths of resistance to the common gender conservatism in their communities (Co-Author1, 2017). Recent studies show an enhanced tendency towards enhanced egalitarianism among Arab men (Co-author2 et al., 2021). Resistance to gender conservatism was similarly found among professional Druze (one of the ethno-religious categories which the Arab minority is composed of) couples in which women enter non-traditional prestigious careers (Barakat, 2022). Further, couples migrating into mixed cities, distancing themselves from family surveillance, also report heightened egalitarianism (Co-Author1, 2019). However, Sabbah-Karkabi (2021) claims that despite social and economic changes taking place among Arab women in Israel, gender differences in domestic labor continue to persist due to the high proportion of Arab women holding a part-time job. In her recent empirical study, Sabbah-Karkabi (2022) shows that women’s fulltime employment increases the probability of spouses’ participation in childcare. She reports a tendency of men with higher education, similar to their wives’ education, to share childcare.

*Gender Diversity Policy at the Israeli Police*

Existing accounts of the scarcity of women among police leadership focus on organizational characteristics. Alexander and Nowack (2022), for instance, suggested the phenomenon of “the glass cliff” which refers to the tendency of policy organizations to criticize, judge, and scrutinize women in senior positions. Diversity policy at the Israeli police targeted this issue by offering promotion to the officer rank to Arab policewomen. At its first stage, the policy opened an employment opportunity for just over 150 Arab policewomen. Those who were to benefit from this unconventional opportunity were those who could rely on their families’ support, particularly with parents who were involved in nationally mixed spaces. Among them, most are either Christian or Muslim, with fewer Druze. Many among the recruits, married, single or divorced, hold an academic degree. A few of them have served for about 20 years, but the majority have served for less than 10 years. In their diverse positions, they investigate crimes or domestic violence; or serve the intelligence and patrol.

Turning our attention to the police as an organization targeting diversity and inviting Arab women to benefit from quality jobs, it is important to note that the police resemble many other organizations. The police are a gendered “greedy” institution where power positions are held by men seniors while the lower ranking positions are often occupied by women who spend their time and productivity on office housework (Lavee & Kaplan, 2022). The police resemble IT workplaces by ignoring mothers’ constraints. However, Heikkinen and Kivijärvi (2022) found that mothers resisted organizational policies by developing a competent agency that is strongly goal-oriented, standing requirements aiming to attain the position of valued expert. At the same time, policewomen do not always show such resisting agency: a study on women in law enforcement in the U.S indicated that women often take “Second Shift” responsibilities when considering promotions (DeCruise, 2020). These findings resonate with a study conducted by O’Hara’s (2009), showing that quite a few female police officers in Ireland faced difficulty advancing in their careers due to domestic responsibilities such as becoming mothers and persisting domestic responsibilities. In addition, many women believed that they would not be granted certain promotions due to their supervisor’s bias, believing that mothers cannot stand the constant availability required by the job (O’Hara, 2009). For Arab women, recruitment to the Israeli police means traveling daily to areas in which the traditional surveillance over the management of their sexuality cannot be pursued. Although rising rates of Arab women study in the higher education system, along with some changes in family patterns, many of them still accept the prevailing gender path of engagement, marriage, and motherhood, and working in Arab communities (Co-authors, forthcoming). The majority of employed Arab women still work in teaching jobs due to spatial barriers in addition to gender-based expectations.

Therefore, when Arab women embark, instead, on the employment path offered to them by the Israeli police (a mixed national and gender workplace), they defy traditional expectations. As early as the entry stage, the training courses are far from their place of residence (since most of the recruits come from northern settlements in Israel, which are far from the police's college). Later, they would be stationed according to organizational requirements. Finally, against the backdrop of the continuous national conflict in Israel, Arab policewomen suffer various sanctioning demonstrating their communities’ objection to their crossing the lines and entering a police force that represents the settler-colonialist Jewish majority. We deal with this continuous objection elsewhere (Co-authors, forthcoming). Here we promote the approach of listening to women themselves and to their understanding of their struggle to hold on to their overly demanding jobs.

Arab policewomen who refused promotion were the focus of the current study. Mothers employed as policewomen are in professional careers demanding that women invest substantial extra hours beyond their daily shifts. Their workload implies significant mental, emotional, and time commitments that take them away from their families (Ong'alw & Masiga, 2021; Yu, 2019). As devoted employees eager to constitute themselves as competent policewomen, they shoulder all these demands revealing the extent to which the police, as an organization embracing diversity policy, are reluctant to adjust to the ethno-religious specificity of their family and community lives (Green, 2021; Ong'alw & Masiga, 2021; Yu, 2019). Thus, we raise two research questions: How do Arab policewomen in the Israeli police perceive their struggle to experience their autonomous mothering? And, how this struggle is involved in their refusal to be promoted?

*Conceptual Framework*

Arab women are intensively obligated to their families (Co-Author1 2015; Sabbah-Karkabi 2021; 2022; Vitman-Schorr & Ayalon, 2020). Family obligations, primarily the significance of mothering ideals as an explanatory dimension of barriers to diversity policy require that diversity policies are evaluated against gender dimensions of quality jobs proposed by Davoine et al. (2008) including secure transitions for mothers and recognition of mothering obligations. Evaluating diversity policies within the framework of ideals of mothering bears the strength of clarifying women’s insistence on their family involvement even when their children’s needs are cared for.

In the context of minority policewomen whose mothering is shaped by the relationship between the state, the organization, and the individual, focusing on mothering ideals is necessary for the understanding of that relationship. This is particularly crucial when the institutional, organizational, and family levels contradict each other. The Israeli state’s familism has been often identified with the prioritization of mothering without disrupting the gender script for mothering to coincide with employment, market citizenship and the adult worker model. Its childcare policy (Co-author2, 2001) is nevertheless partial, with insufficient places in Arab residences and regions. In contrast, the police as an employer organization, intending to apply a diversity policy while still reproducing gendering mechanisms (Acker, 2006), is hardly willing to consider maternal obligations. Thus, employed Arab women without alternative childcare arrangements necessarily rely on kin-care to take on their mundane caring obligations. Nevertheless, as quite a few among the Arab policewomen experience the intersection of middle-class and ethnic minority status and hold academic degrees, the coverage provided by their families for childcare, leaves them to still struggle for their right to experience their mothering as autonomous. Our study is designed to explore Arab policewomen’s subjective meanings for autonomous mothering.

**Methods**

Since the beginning of 2022, we conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured in-depth interviews of policewomen, with a formal approval from the Israeli Police. Our participants are 27 Arab middle-class women aged 24-45; 3 were divorced, 11 were married, and 13 were single. 12 were mothers of children of diverse ages, the others raised concerns related to their future planned motherhood. Four held an M.A., 20 held a B.A. degree and 3 have no academic education. Our semi-structured interview focused on three main issues: interviewees’ experience as a woman at the police; as an Arab woman working at the police; as a mother working at the police. These questions reflected our theoretical interest in the rare occupational path generated by the diversity policy.

*Procedure*

The interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ offices during shift hours, with the organization’s approval. To reduce the formality pressures, a lengthy phone call preceded each interview. It clarified that the policewomen understand that the interview is not obligatory and that no identifying details will be transferred to the police unit that contracted the study. Based on the phone call, we had 7 policewomen declining.

Agreeing participants were assured that they are not obligated to take part in the study and that their interviews are firmly protected, and accessible to the research team only, with total anonymity of any data reported to the police. Their response was enthusiastic, they felt it was an important opportunity to voice their concerns. The interviews were conducted in their offices in the police stations to which they are appointed, ensuring complete privacy. Time for the interview was set following an intensified efforts interviewees made to find a time which they expected would be free, often after several cancellations. The policewomen were interviewed in Hebrew for at least 90 minutes and were taped with the interviewees’ consent. They were then fully transcribed. We analyzed the interview material using grounded theory principals (Charmaz, 2014) focusing on three main themes: The policy as an employer, mothering, and their views on their possible promotion to officer positions. These themes evolved in a gradual and dynamic evolution process according to empirical indicators in the transcripts. We coded and classified content into these themes using ongoing comparisons between data and categories. In this way, we identified similarities and differences and were able to trace patterns in the material world.

## **Findings**

Time pressures for Arab policewomen is an overwhelming experience turning their everyday lives into a continuous struggle. Investigating their perception of the police as an employer and their efforts to hold on to their full-time jobs, we have encountered a painful discrepancy between how participants described their motherhood obligations and how they described their mothering practices. They felt that the odds of becoming the ‘good enough mother’ ran against them. Thus we realized that our material provides an opportunity to study the meaning of autonomous mothering in their lives.

*Aspiring for Autonomous Mothering*

Despite social changes in the broader society, in the Arab communities, an independent nuclear family structure has not replaced the extended Arab family in Israel and the intergenerational contract in Arab society (Sabbah-Karkabi, 2022). Thus, the participants indicated that kin networks are a major source of child-care support for them. Arab policewomen who are mothers used kin from their family of origin or from their husband's family for various forms of childcare. Kin-care is essential in their world because of the difficulty generated by the fact that their shifts do not always end as formally defined. Because the Israeli police do not station men and women in their area of residence, on top of their long working hours, their absence from home is prolonged by lengthy commuting and training as well as task related travel. Therefore, they depend on kin and community members to assist them with childcare (Dow, 2016). We introduce below four aspects of *integrated mothering* enabled by kin-care, as experienced by Arab policewomen. These are: the stated parents’ devotion to support, the meaning of kin-care as demanding relational work, time limits for kin-care; and a sense of loss. The first is the stated unlimited devotion of their parents:

During the course, my children were with my parents. Without my parents’ help... there’s no other way, I needed their help. I also lived at my parents’ house at the time. So, without my parents’ help, I would not have been here... [after the recruitment there is] a year and a half of coursework and it is hard. I am also a mother, a mother of children. It is hard, hard. During the exams my child was in first grade, it wasn’t easy. But my mother covered everything. What can one do?

Later in the interview she emphasized:

The children grew up at my parents’. As if it was their home. As if my mother and father, grandfather, and grandmother...yes, it’s like...like they’re mother and father...so, obviously. Food and so on... They go there after school every day, every day (Salam, 38, divorced+2, 5 years' seniority)



Integrated mothering is based on parents’ endless devotion, where parents recruit themselves to the project of their daughters’ success in the police. Salam perceives her parents’ care-work as similar to real “mother and father.” The nature of kin-care supports as having no limits was validated during the training course which illustrated how challenging the mothers’ absence is, requiring her own mother to stay sensitive and attuned to the child beginning his first grade. Still, her employment denies her of an aspect of mothering that she feels unable to waive.

The second aspect of integrated mothering is the required relational work that demonstrates the extent to which, kin-care is time-consuming in itself, beyond work obligations:

...After work I go to [my parents’ village] to pick up the children from my mothers’...and this means standing in traffic there...and it is not every day that I can pick them up and leave soon after... [Is that] a place of storage for my children? No! I need to talk with [my mother], and then the necessary shopping, and when finally, at home, I take the dog for a walk…, laundry, a few things around the house for an hour- half an hour, ok, so when do I start doing homework with the children? At 8PM, 7:30-8PM until 9:30-10PM (Alaa, 32, married+2, 5 years' seniority)

Relying on parents’ care-work means additional traveling time: her workplace, her parents’ place, and her home are far apart. However, another aspect is revealed here as important: kin-care cannot be maintained on an alienated relationship base. Rather, the time of fetching children become a form of relational work that includes parents’ visiting duties and interactions. Every day, the relational work may be translated into additional expectations for the daughter’s fulfilling tasks needed by her parents as a way of standing the convention of mutual gift-giving and support. Furthermore, in her words, Alaa conveys her stance that preparing homework with her children, an irreplaceable task in her mothering ideal, begins too late in the evening.

Another characteristic of integrated mothering is the practical time limits of kin-care. In other words, even if family members state their willingness to help with the children, their ability to do so is limited by their own commitments, forcing policewomen to rely on different family members who would not accept the long hours required.

A sense of loss emerges repeatedly among mothers whose families totally take on their care-work obligations. What are policewomen worried about when they talk of loss?

My husband helped throughout the whole time I was taking the course, for eight months he worked half-time. He was with the children, with help from the family, my sister, my mother-in-law. Yes, they all helped. My husband supports me, he also wanted me to become an officer. I had started the process, almost reached the end, and quit. It’s not because of work...because there’s always someone to replace you. But for the personal responsibility I will have for my cases, for my job, I think that as an officer I will lose my family. Fine, my father-in-law can pick them up, I can stay at work. But I say: “No! I have my children first, I have to get home on time. Even if...my father-in-law takes the children, they will eat, they are at their grandma’s and everything is fine. I have to go to them (Amna, 34, married+2, 5 years' seniority)

Amna quit the process of becoming an officer under the condition of full care-work support. She explicitly explains her reasoning by her sense of loss and the understanding that if she would be promoted to officer, she **“would lose [her] family”**; she feels that on top of the great care they receive from their grandparents, without time with them, she would lose them.

And Alaa says: “...I am missing out on my children. For two years my children did not have any extracurricular activity, I hurt them, and it is not right.”

A sense of loss is associated with the possibility that regardless of the continuous availability of kin-care, they are losing a crucial component of their maternal care, one that cannot be covered by the devoted members of the family providing kin-care. Kin-care cannot cover for middle-class mothers’ duty to contribute to their children’s success at school or ensure they participate in extra-curricular activities (e.g., Lareau, 2003; Reay, 2004). An inner autonomous mothering requirement appears to not allow policewomen to not rely on kin-care after a long working day but rather to ensure that they are involved in their children’s lives and fulfill 'cultivating motherhood' (e.g., Lareau, 2003; Reay, 2004). Fulfilling her autonomous mothering ideal, Alla takes her children to the extra-curricular activity, something that her mother cannot do, something she will not be able to do if promoted to the rank of an officer. The limited nature of kin-care is revealed then, when it comes to understanding mothering as women’s ideological devotion to cultivating academic achievements. For this component of mothering, kin-care cannot be a substitute.

## *Criticizing Organizational Culture*

The interviews indicate that the policewomen are coping with severe workloads, extra time far beyond the defined hours per shift, and a requirement to take work home i.e., permeable borders, (Clark, 2000). They are stationed outside their places of residence (extreme commuting) and, as officers, they would be required to move between positions every several years. Despite the great satisfaction that the interviewees expressed in relation to their professional and personal challenges, they have also voiced criticism regarding the organizational culture of the police, which is extremely hostile towards mothers. Gadir explains her reluctance to accept the organizational offers relating to being an officer:

And that’s it, it’s like, I am already on track for becoming an officer, but I am giving it up, I already told them that I am giving it up. Because no, it’s not worth it. It’s not worth it, being a mother and this work, it’s not, it doesn't go together... officers almost never go home, they even get called at nights, they don’t sleep and it’s not, it’s not right (Gadir, 31, single, 4.5 years' seniority)

Although Gadir is still single, her refusal to respond to the offered promotion is grounded in her future plans of becoming a mother salient to normative belonging and the gendered expectations it posits. Being an officers could endanger policewomen’s ability to balance between managing family and domestic responsibilities with advancing their career. All participants expressed their fear that they would not be able to juggle between their domestic responsibilities and the advancement of their careers. Being officers may disrupt the expected family scripts of devotion to their mothering ideal:

I told them to transfer me to a station near home. [they declined:] no, you’re an investigator and we put a lot of resources into your training, you are good for us, we will not lose you, we want you as an officer here, and I will not be an officer there...I tell them let go and they say we’re not letting go. This is in fact the problem of the police- the understanding that the distance and the commute and the family pressure and all, and children, it’s hard (Alaa, 32, married+2, 5 years' seniority)

Alaa, the interviewee who mentioned above the price paid by her children for her long hours outside the home, emphasizes the job's constraints. She is frustrated and disappointed with her employer' perspective of his expectation of 'personal responsibility' on her part and the manner in which her inability to convince her employer to take her care obligations into consideration. She perceives herself as paying a price for on-the-job training turning her into a skillful employee whose superior refuses to lose. The negative emotions identify the promotion to the officer rank as a form of surrender which she is determined to struggle against so that she’ll be able to fulfill her autonomous mothering. Her response corresponds with Ali et al.’s (2017) suggestions that managers should develop an awareness of the conditions of equality and that minorities need to be treated differently.

Accepting the promotion offer would mean, the interviewees know, going out on an officer training course. However, the courses are held under boarding house conditions and go on for seven months, in which mothers are unable to see their children during weekdays. The courses, therefore, are a repeated focus of criticism against the police. The physical isolation and the difficulties for mothers, indicate the specific mothering ideal that their employer remains blind to. Here is how Salam explains her maternal obligations:

...In the course the others were single... after the daily activity, they went to the gym and hung out together... And I had to talk with the children, to make sure they finish their homework; To prepare them for exams, on WhatsApp-video... It was not simple...not simple, not simple. They did not consider mothers at all, not at all, not at all (Salam, 38, divorced+2, 5 years' seniority)

Elsewhere in the interview, Salam said that her children receive dedicated daily care from her mother. It emerges however that still, she feels responsible for the daily education and cultivation of her children. Going out on another course that would echo the earlier course in which she could not demonstrate her autonomous mothering, is out of consideration. Providing the specific motherwork, that she believes is necessary, raises criticism of the organizational culture. Her blaming of the police is clear: “Being an officer is being rousted... you’re always expected to be there. There is no way to say no. It’s a responsibility.” Clearly, for Salam, demonstrating autonomous mothering and shouldering the responsibility of the offered promotion, is incompatible.

The need for autonomous mothering goes beyond employed mothers’ dependency on childcare arrangements among other forms of outsourcing mothering obligations. Scholarship focusing on these needs has often attended to the struggle of mothers with the precarious nature of these arrangements when social policy is not committed to fully covering mothers’ working days. In contrast, autonomous mothering while relying on kin-care arrangements, sheds light on women’s own consideration of their children’s needs, going far beyond what other sources of support are able to provide. What we found is that kin-care is crucial but cannot save mothers from the weight of their mothering ideal: they want to cultivate their children’s educational assets and reproduce their middle-class position. The children’s professional future is as worrying for them as their own professional present.

## **Discussion**

In recent years, the diversity policy applied in the Israeli police was successful and more than 150 Arab women joined the Israeli Police managing demanding full-time jobs. However, Arab women are still significantly underrepresented in Israeli police forces especially when it comes to officer ranks. Intrigued by Arab policewomen’s refusal to positively respond to the opportunity to be promoted to the officer rank we asked: How do Arab policewomen in the Israeli police perceive their struggle to experience their autonomous mothering? And, how this struggle is involved in their refusal to be promoted?

Conducting our analysis seeking to respond to these questions, we encountered the salience of mothering ideals in our material- a salience that is currently under-discussed in analyses of diversity policies. As emphasized by Özbilgin et al.’s (2011) critical review there is a need for a more nuanced story that responds to the gaps and omissions in organizational research - which captures the changing realities of family and workforce through the lens of diversity and intersectionality. However, our study reveals that without rejecting allegedly unifying culturally embedded maternal identity (e.g., Collins, 2020) and focusing attention on the current multiplicity in mothering ideals, understanding of diversity policies will continue to be limited. Moreover, the understanding of the nature of diversity as a family policy that depends on mothering ideals is necessary for the understanding of the dependency of diversity efforts on limiting women’s and men’s workday hours.

It is no longer accurate to assume that the culturally dominant maternal identity that corresponds with the ideal of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), is the only one guiding those who positively respond to diversity policies. Christopher (2012) suggested that working-class mothers rely on the extensive mothering ideal, where they activate others to replace them during absence time, maintaining their sole responsibility. However, our middle-class interviewees relied on kin-care consistent with the integrated mothering ideal found to characterize middle-class mothers (Dow, 2016) as a form of shared responsibility over childcare. Importantly, these three previously described maternal ideals, have not captured the nature of autonomous mothering, the dimensions of mothering that cannot be transferred to others.

According to Dow’s (2016) conceptualization of integrated mothering, career mothers rely on kin-care arrangements in ways that allow them to assume their devotion to paid employment and achieve economic self-reliance. However, when the opportunity for promotion interferes with kin-care arrangements, a question emerges, concerning mothers’ ability to accept the workload embedded in the promotion. Can they extend their reliance on kin-care even when expected to work around the clock? From Dow’s point of view, integrated mothering would allow for shouldering the proposed promotion for the sake of securing economic self-reliance. Nevertheless, can we assume that kin-care is satisfying for mothers regardless of their understanding of their children’s needs? Being middle-class mothers, as was shown by Reay (2004) and Lareau (2003) implies a devotion to cultivating children’s development and schooling. Can kin-care arrangements replace this aspect of middle-class expectations?



Our study approached Arab policewomen who rely on kin-care arrangements and were offered a promotion to the officer rank. Namely, they were not discriminated against either by gender or by nationality. Their experience of kin-care manifested a sense of loss. We interpreted their repeated fear that they are going to lose the relationship with their children if they take the promotion as representing another level of loss: that of their autonomous mothering. Such interpretation was supported by their intense description of their imagined threats to officers’ life. As much as it is obvious to them that even in the present time, they often miss on their role as cultivating mothers, it is even more obvious that the promotion to the officer rank would constitute a loss. Namely, they lose their ability to experience their motherhood as autonomous, losing their autonomy to shape their integrated motherhood as inclusive of the aspect of intensive motherhood that involves being the cultivating mother for their children. Yes, their family members shared their responsibility for raising their children, as suggested by Dow (2016); nevertheless, there were moments in which extensive operations of others (e.g., a sister) was needed in issues (e.g., homework) over which they did not want to relinquish their responsibility.

We found then that women’s struggle over their autonomous self operates as a gender reproduction mechanism in organizations. This was revealed in our study as particularly true for an organization that allegedly embraces diversity policies but ignores their meaning in the family. When such a diversity policy targets the recruitment of mothers to higher ranks, it practically privatises the responsibility over childcare solutions. By ignoring mothers’ need for a form of mothering that goes beyond children’s basic needs, the Israel Police defeated its own investment in its labour force, bringing mothers to the point in which they cannot devote their skills and expertise to the organization’s goals.

The limitation of our study is our focus on policewomen’s perspective only without integrating their mothers’ and their mothers-in-law’s perspectives on the meaning of integrated motherhood in their lives and more specifically, their own work-life. Future research should add their voices as well as longitudinal data collection regarding policy change within the police and policewomen’s life course dynamics.

Practical implications underscore the need to include a focus on autonomous mothering in evaluations of diversity policies considering it as relevant only then. Such evaluation of diversity policy would criticize, for example, the convention of recurrent change in officers’ positions and workplace locations. We found that such instability contradicts Arab women’s ability to accept promotion. As members of a minority that is limited in terms of its residential regions and who depend on the limited employment opportunities of their partners, as well as their dependency on kin-care arrangements, they cannot be spatially challenged in this way. Moreover, organizational adjustment requires cancelling the organizational culture based on officers’ 24/7 availability. This conventional expectation is actively involved in blocking Arab women’s ability to positively respond to the offered promotion opportunity. No evaluation of diversity policy can be effective unless measuring the extent to which mothers are able to experience their mothering over time as the set of practices, they believe their children deserve

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1. The participants in the current study identify themselves as Arabs and not as Palestinian-Arabs, therefore to indicate their identity we will use the term "Arab women in Israel" or "Arab policewomen", using their terminology rather than the terminology that used in other studies where the participants defined their identity as Palestinian-Arabs or Arab-Palestinian. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)