**Struggling for Equality by Insisting on Quality Jobs:**

**Path replacement in the Occupational Lives**

**of Arab Policewomen in the Israeli Police**

**Abstract**

Job quality is deteriorating when long working hours disrupt work life balance. Recent studies on job quality suggest unifying its evaluating dimensions, neglecting the question of how employees, aware of different job quality clusters offered by their employer organization, struggle to attain positions of better quality. Such neglect blurs our understanding of coping with lacking compatibility between employees’ life course stage and any specific job quality cluster. *Path replacement*, involving mapping a variety of occupational paths within the same organization and shifting into better balanced ones, constitutes an important analytical contribution to the understanding of job quality as an achievement, rather than an evaluation scale alone. Moreover, it contributes to the existing knowledge on mothers’ coping with time and space requirements which they perceive as incompatible with their caring obligations. Path replacement*,* as an alternativeto dropping out and losing on occupational opportunities,has emerged inductively from our analysis of 39 interviews with Arab policewomen recruited by a diversity policy to the Israeli police. Participants indicated *path replacement* as a struggle for equality that occurs in the multi-layer organization when mothers aim at improving the work-life balance as a dimension of enhanced job quality. Following the notion of *path replacement,* an occupational path emerged via which minoritized policewomen attained better work-life balance next to an experience of loss: the job quality they have gained by their navigation, did not include dimensions of job quality that were important to them. The loss allows us to complicate the understanding of *path replacement.*

**Key words:** Job quality; long hours; Arab policewomen; agentic capabilities; Israel

**Introduction**

Control over one’s working time and space, is salient to job quality in the sense of consistency between one’s preferred lifestyle and one’s work life (Yavaş, 2024). Studies have shown how crucial time is to the ability to keep holding on to a full-time job relevant particularly to mothers to young children (stone, 2007) who pay high penalties when turning to part-time jobs (Pocock & Charlesworth, 2017). Reflecting the weight of control over time at work for job quality is the way the recently presented unified evaluation scale of job quality (Warhurst et al., 2025), persists the feminist evaluation of job quality (Davoine et al., 2008) in including ‘work-life balance’. The objective indicators proposed by the unified scale are “working hours including scheduling, opportunities for flexible working, work intensity”; and the subjective indicators proposed are “perception of work intensity, perceived fit between work and non-working life” (Warhurst et al., 2025: 34). The consensual status of working hours to one’s experience at work, then, is clear. What is less clear is how could mothers with young children, attain organizational positions in which they will be able to perceive ‘a fit between work and non-working life’, given that the positions to which they were initially recruited, require very long hours workday? While it is possible to resort to the painful coping mechanism of opting out (stone, 2007), another option would rely on agentic capabilities in operating in two directions within the employer organization. Firstly, mapping organizational positions and their attributed control over work hours; and, secondly, making the effort to convince one’s superior to support a shift towards an organizational path that is characterized by increased such control. We named the two-stages expression of mothers’ agentic capabilities *Path replacement*, and our objective is to develop it as an analytical tool that opens narrative possibilities in mothers’ work histories so that losing occupational opportunities ceases being a necessary option. At the same time*, Path replacement* does not exclude the notion of maternal penalties (Budig & England, 2001), and it is intriguing to investigate the nature of the penalties embedded in such organizational motions.

The opportunity to understand the complexities of *Path replacement* emerged as part of larger project investigating a diversity policy that was adopted by the Israeli police force as part of a local endeavor to improve the relationship between the police and the Arab citizens of the country. Following the ideas of “representative bureaucracy” (Krislov, 2012) the Israeli police began increasing systematically the numbers of recruits, men and women, who belong to the Arabic speaking minority. Reproductive bureaucracy is defined as the odds that minority communities will establish better relationship with the state administration, once reinforced trust is enabled by ethnic homogeneity between the minority and the street level bureaucrats employed by its agencies. The diversity program that was expected to generate increased trust, offered Arab women quality jobs based on a prolonged training course. For Arab-women, who belong to an indigenous-national minority, who hold academic degrees or not, a diversity policy with a generous on-the-job training component constitutes a rare opportunity to enter a higher quality fulltime stable job. However, the image of public sector jobs as quality jobs, mystified the reality of long hours intensified jobs that they practically encountered at the Israeli police, an organization in which unionization is prohibited, and employment conditions are determined by the government. In the early 1990s, public sector organizations, the Israeli police included, implemented various measures to help mothers manage work and family obligations (Rubery, 2013). However, downsizing and productivity enhancement (Sauer et al., 2022) generated intensified workloads for those recruited. Such workloads meant that women who had responded to public sector diversity policies and have begun work for the police, would have had to deal with a demand to work very long hours under the condition of under-staffing currently typical in public sector organizations.

Thus, the diversity policy, offering rare and lengthy training course, constitute an organizational effort to improve the recruitment, retention, and due promotion of members of commonly excluded or minoritized categories (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022; Thomas, 2007). Unfortunately, once recruited, ethnic minority women encounter greater challenges than their majority counterparts in balancing work and family obligations, often due to conflicts between workplace cultures and traditional expectations that burden them with significant caregiving responsibilities (Ali et al., 2017; Dale, 2005).

Below we unfold our theoretical framework and research design aiming at understanding how Arab policewomen mediate the discrepancy between the level of job quality they hoped for when entering a public sector job and its experienced level, the encounter with the losing control over their hours at work. Our literature review follows the notions of job quality highlighting possible contours of *path replacement* as expressing an insistence on quality jobs. Our objective is to contribute the analytical instrument of *path replacement* as a struggle for equality locating job quality in a multi-layer public sector organization, the Police.

**Job Quality in an Interpretative Perspective**

Job quality is typically evaluated according to the extrinsic (remuneration, stability, training opportunities, union protection) and intrinsic (satisfaction, direct participation, autonomy, discretion) characteristics of a specific position (Kalleberg, 2011). However, a critical treatment of job quality suggests that its investigation is often marked by dichotomous analyses that focus on either objective or subjective dimensions of job quality (Knox et al., 2015). Other critical voices suggest that its evaluations too often rely on available data rather than on systematic evaluations (Warhurst et al., 2022). Responding to a range of critical arguments in the field, Knox and Wright (2022) argue that an interpretative perspective is valuable for examining how the meaning of job aspects can shift within specific institutional contexts and workplaces. It can reveal how employees, either individually or collectively, can alter the quality of their jobs.

Illustrating the kind of sensitivity enabled by an interpretive approach to job quality, Davoine et al. (2008) developed a gender perspective on job quality with six crucial dimensions not clearly identified as either extrinsic on intrinsic: (1) Socioeconomic security (i.e. decent wages and secure transitions); (2) Skills and training opportunities; (3) Working conditions (accidents, work intensity, long working hours, health risks); (4) Balancing work and family life; (5) Gender equality in promotion (6) Collective interest representations. These six dimensions are sensitive to women’s work histories and life course turning points that may disrupt them. In light of this sensitivity, a Euro Found Report (2021) studied seven dimensions of job quality. Of them two are time-related: work intensity (i.e. Quantitative demands, pace determinants and interdependency, emotional demands) and working time quality (i.e. Duration, Atypical working time, working time arrangements, flexibility). Of the two, the work intensity dimension corresponds better with the issue of workload and the question of teamwork: are there others at the workplace who have the relevant skills and are considered as informed enough so they can replace an employee responding to caring emergencies or other non-work obligations? Obviously, not all the sub-categories of these two dimensions got to be included in the recently proposed unifying scale (Warhurst et al., 2025), that is based on 75 studies over a 20-year period between 2002 and 2022. Work intensity, on that unified scale, although a matter of workplace policy in terms of moderating workloads, is represented as a subjective indicator of work-life balance. Nevertheless, a sense of control over time requirements at a job, is clearly consensual among UK, US, and EU researchers in the field.

The discussion of job quality from its time-related dimensions is commonly associated with the question of quality of life. A recent study has validated the salience of the time dimension to employees’ willingness to hold on to their otherwise high-quality jobs (Yavaş, 2024). Unlike, earlier studies focusing on forces pushing mothers out of their jobs (Stone, 2007) Yavaş revealed the pulling forces, calling upon white color privileged employees to improve the quality of their lives by quitting their stressful time demanding jobs. But, even if so, the outcome of both accounts is similar: a loss of the job. One alternative, which in job quality accounts is referred to as ‘working time arrangements’ is the shift to part time employment (Florian, 2018; Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018), which is consistent with the loss of the full-time job together with its material and non-material benefits. Such a shift suggests that employees are willing to lose on certain dimensions of job quality, rewards, while gaining on others, control over time at work. Thus, an interpretative perspective on job quality, other than just the concept of job quality evaluation and the way it is experienced, could include a more processual element questioning the process in which ‘a fit between work and non-working life’, is achieved even if the initial job at the workplace did not include it. This process was conceptualized within the framework of idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) negotiated to increase benefits for both employer and employee (Rousseau, 2005), a conceptualization appropriate for what are sometimes non-formal arrangements thus not suitable for a discussion of job quality that is grounded organizational occupational paths. In the following section we elaborate the processual element that we aim at contributing to the knowledge about job quality, and consider individuals’ efforts to use the agentic capabilities so that they move between clusters of job quality, minimizing the loss embedded in leaving one’s position.

**Path replacement**

Job quality was found repeatedly to be improved by employees’ agentic capabilities with scholars identifying these processual elements of job quality in the forms of job crafting and I-deals (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018). Typically, these processes assume modifying the job employees were recruited into. However, not enough is known about the ways in which employees apply agentic capabilities to improve the quality of their jobs by utilizing the variety of job quality clusters within the same organization.

Scholarship on human resource architecture (Lepak & Snell, 2002), has revealed the multi-layer organizational context in which many employees work in organizations that offer a variety of job quality clusters that are offered by the same organizational management. Diverse clusters of job quality are offered to employees according to uniqueness of skills, their rarity and their centrality to the organization. A processual element of an interpretative job quality, that investigates employees action rather than just their perceptions of their jobs (Knox & Wright, 2022), analyzes the process through which employees familiarize themselves with the multi-layer institutional context in which they are employed and their efforts to move between positions offered by the organization. In this way, employees are able to hold on to their contribution as full time providers in their families, their role as a working parent and their labor market participation. Such a processual element deserves unique attention because it introduces a discussion of job quality, not as a matter of assets brought by employees to their job in order to enhance its quality, but as a matter of locating resources within a specific institutional context and accepting the loses to job quality that a move would entail. Loses here refer to the possibility to expose a hidden mechanism of maternal penalty paid by those who are determined to avoid opting out and insist on opting for a different position even if its cluster of job quality is less favorable. In other words, recognizing shifts within an organization as an alternative to quitting or regaining control over time by reducing one’s job into a part-time one, reveals the benefits of the interpretative perspective to job quality by raising a discussion of the conditions in which employees are willing to shoulder a lower quality full-time position while being able to maintain their sense of belonging to the organization (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018). Narrow opportunity structures creating a dependency on the job, should be discussed as part of the conditions under which such shifts become the rational way of acting. We call the turn to searching a better fit with non-work obligations via a different position within the same organization Path replacement. We now turn to describing the set of conditions in which it inductively emerged as a struggle for equality enacted through moving between clusters of job quality dimensions.

***Path replacement: context***

In 2016, the Israeli Police appointed a Muslim senior officer to head a new unit aimed at improving police services in Arab communities. An inner publication at the time, revealed the rational as consistent with the ‘representative bureaucracy’ perspective: “as part of the effort to improve the nature of the relationship between the Israeli Police force and the Arab communities a decision was made that the Israeli police will recruit male and female police officers becoming part of all its units” (Agbaria, 2021). One of the subsections in the publication, entitled “Be ambassadors of change", the text is directed to the reading individual stating: “as an Arab police officer that is present on the street level, you are a significant partner to the consciousness transformation and to the improvement of the public order and the personal safety in the Arabic residence areas, in the mixed cities as well as in the Jewish residence areas” (Agbaria, 2021).

As part of transformation project, the unit in charge established 12 police stations in Arab areas. A diversity policy was then introduced by the unit ensuring the continuous recruitment of Arab men and women insisting that no one is positioned in the station in their own residential area. Applicants passing the selection process, are compelled to attend a training course of 27 weeks, a form of on-the-job training that is commonly considered a job quality strengthening dimension (Davoine et al., 2008) associated with increased autonomy, control over the work process and promotion (Evertsson, 2004). In addition, the diversity policy represented the intention to promote both Arab representation at the organizations’ senior leadership.

Thus, the diversity policy offered promotion to an officer rank to Arab policewomen. At its first stage, the policy opened an employment opportunity for just over 150 Arab policewomen. Most of whom are Christian and Muslim, with fewer Bedouin and a few Druze, between the ages of 24-45, 16 with seniority of more than 15 years, 33 between 5-15 years and 115 with less than 5 years. 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 ethno-nationally mixed spaces. Many among the recruits, married, single or divorced, hold an academic degree. In their diverse positions, they investigate crimes or domestic violence; or serve the intelligence and patrol.

It is important to understand that recruitment to policing jobs opened up a rare employment opportunity of relatively higher quality of jobs. It was offered to women who are members of the Arab indigenous minority that experienced the Nakba[[1]](#endnote-1) in 1948 and are since, citizens of Israel who until 1967, were controlled by military governance (Bäuml, 2011). They constitute 21% of Israeli’s population (ICBS, 2025). They hold a formal citizenship status, distinguishing them from Palestinians residing in the territories occupied since 1967. Arabs in Israel suffer discrimination, exclusion and oppression and consequently sharp inequality that is expressed at the everyday practical level, and at the constitutional level, social rights and resource allocation (Bäuml, 2011; Sa'ar, 2017). Systematic exclusion led Jamal (2007) to characterize their status as “hollow citizenship.” Nevertheless, in recent decades Arab women’s education and employment increased significantly (Authors, 2022; CHE, 2022; Sa'ar & Younis, 2021). However, teaching remained one of the most prevalent professions among educated Arab women, which in turn contributed to job market saturation and a high prevalence of part-time employment or underemployment within this group (Authors, 2022; Co-author2, 2019). Therefore, the representative bureaucracy policies of the Israeli police have contributed to expanding employment opportunities for Arab minority women seeking to establish themselves within the public sector. Among the recruits, mothers with young children faced challenging space and time conditions and had to consider ways of action that would enable them to hold on to the rare opportunity to benefit of a quality job. Below we unfold the research design that allowed us to comprehend their action.

**Methods**

Our study followed feminist interview research (Reinhartz, 1992) combined with Charmaz’ (2014) guidelines for grounded theory analysis. Two waves of semi-structured in-depth interviews with Arab policewomen in Israel, conducted 3 years apart, initially 27 and returning to 12 among them allowing us to understand whether and how they changed organizational positions over time. Our objective here is understanding participants’ subjective meanings of the quality of their jobs and their struggle to hold on to full-time employment. However, the article is a part of a broader project in which we investigate the integration of Arab women (with and without academic education) in the Israeli job market. As part of this research, we interviewed policewomen from all religious/ethnic groups (Muslim/Christian/Druze/Bedouin) and in various social statuses (education/marital status/motherhood).

*Research participants*

Data of the first wave are from a field study conducted in 2022, interviewing 27 who were in the age range of 24-45. Of them, 3 are divorced, 11 are married, and 13 are single. Most of them are Muslim and Christian and few are Druze and Bedouin. Four hold an M.A., 20 hold a B.A. degree and three have no academic education. Twelve were mothers but only seven had young children when starting the training program. The second wave consisted of 12 follow-up interviews conducted in 2024/2025 with policewomen who had previously participated in the first wave of interviews; aged 26-45; 2 are divorced, 7 are married, and 3 are single. Eight are mothers; Most of them are Muslim and Christian. Three hold an M.A., 8 hold a B.A. degree and one have no academic education.

*Procedure*

 The current study was approved by the ethics committee of the college and by the Israeli police. Participants were informed in advance that the study includes questions on their personal biography and that sensitive topics would be raised in the interviews, and of their right to skip questions or discontinue participation at any stage. Most of the interviewees were concerned about being identified and were promised full anonymity in the publication of the findings. All participants were designated pseudonyms, and any identifying information was removed or changed in a way that protects participants’ identity, without affecting interpretation of the findings (e.g., religious, years of seniority in the organization, the place where they serve or their position).

 *Data Collection and Analysis*

The policewomen's contact information was received from the police. The interviews were conducted after a conversation with each policewoman emphasizing that they are not obligated to take part in the interview. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew at the police station in which they work after scheduling the most convenient time for the interviewees securing privacy during the interviews. The interviews lasted about 90 minutes with the interviewees’ consent, all of the interviews were recorded. The interviews were semi-structured, but interviewees were encouraged to add information by sharing their 'thick description' (Geertz, 1983) adding any topics. This approach, prevalent in feminist literature, allowed women to express their ideas, thoughts, and experiences in their own words (Maynard, 1994). Participants were prompted for: their educational background, employment experience, the decision to become a policewoman, coping with assimilation processes, the family’s and community’s approach towards interviewee’s occupational choice, social acceptance of an Arab woman who is performing policing roles, professional development throughout the years of service and promotion processes.

Following grounded theory, the recorded interviews were analyzed thematically (Charmaz, 2014) in three stages. At the first stage, all the data were read in order to become familiar with their contents and understand their potential to contribute to a comprehensive picture of the studied subject, and to ensure that they were complete. At the second stage, the data were sorted with the help of tests of the significance and connections were identified between the texts. At the third stage, the themes were collected under primary and secondary headers to elicit answers to the research questions from the items of information and from identified connections in the data. Accounts of their dealing with communities’ disapproval and their understanding of how communities benefit from the representative bureaucracy project, were already published elsewhere.

**Findings**

Arab policewomen positively respond to the Israeli police diversity policy as an opportunity to benefit of occupational development that is primarily outside the traditional range of jobs constituting their local-dependent opportunity structure (mainly teaching jobs). In their interviews they emphasize security as a major dimension of the quality of their jobs: “It’s financial security”; “you don’t have the worries of the beginning of the month”; “It’s a secured salary”; “there are relatively good conditions”. In addition, they underline the dimension of skill development, possibly as part of the intense ‘on the job training’: “you feel how you continuously learn and develop, very, very interesting and allowing self-expression”. These dimensions of job quality are part of a job quality cluster where they accompanied by immense work intensity:

I was first recruited to the position of domestic violence investigator. I was working 24/7 then. Even while at home, I would be working, my phone in my hand, my phone on my ear, all the time... Emergency calls were my routine. Emergencies from here till Thailand, as if, at 2am, 3, 4, 5am, hm… whenever there’s an incident, let’s get going, Marua, we need you to come immediately… we need to find a [bed in a battered women] shelter at 2, 3 am. And unfortunately, your superiors do not mind, they do not care that you’ve got kids at home, hm… and that I need to get them ready for school for the following day. They do not care, I had to arrive asap (Marua, married+2, seniority of 8 years).

For those among the Arab policewomen who feel obliged to improve the experience of the encounter with the police for members of their community, the pressure to take into account the well-being of those complaining of domestic violence or those arrested, is powerful. In her interview Marua takes pride of actually putting together the domestic violence unit in her region and her close connection to anything that happens in the area. The level of work intensity created in the weaving together of workforce shortage and her level of devotion, gradually becomes impossible to carry. With children continuously worrying about her absence, “mommy where are you going? What happened? Are you going to work? Are you on call? Are you going to work?” she begins consider a change:

But, getting up, leaving, it was a decision, it was a difficult decision. I cried. I cried. I said, I don't want to. But on the other hand, it would be good for me. So… I said, I need something more convenient for me, closer to home. I mean, hm… with all the pain, I chose home. I mean, hm… I had to go where it would be more convenient.

Q: What really made the change? What was the straw breaking the camel’s back, as they say?

It was my last shift. I was on my own. A night shift. I had 13 arrestees on that shift. I swear to you. 13 arrestees and I’m on my own. Just before the shift began, I had a call from human resources telling me that if I’m into leaving, I need to sign some papers. I said to her NO, wait, I haven’t decided yet. As long as I haven’t decided, I cannot accept the move, I won’t sign. I could still cancel the whole thing. Right in those words I said to her. I told her: give me more time. Until tomorrow. I’ll decide. I’ll think again and we’ll take it from there… by the time my shift was over, I had this pressure in my chest, like a stubbing, I was aching. Excruciating pain, I tell you... I said to myself the pain, the pain is a sign from God approving of the decision to move. I left my position the following morning (Marua, married+2, seniority of 8 years).

The pride in her skillful functioning under enormous pressure of being alone at the station on a night shift comes with extreme stress. Neither, the stressful night shift nor the realization that this level of intensity can be no longer maintained, were new experiences to her. In her interview she describes her position at the domestic violence unit as someone who is well known in each family in the region, to illustrate the kind of expert she is. Concurrently she describes her children as under trauma of her disappearing for long hours. Knowing that a change is necessary for her family, she worked for a while in preparing the change in the quality of the job. A change she was ambivalent about as she was extremely attached to her project.

Q: Where did you move?

I’m now the head of our cybercrime department in charge of all the north region. I prepared this position for a long time… got the police to send me on a course in this field, began give talks at schools on cybercrime, voluntarily… so I was informally in this area before I got the formal position. It’s a position of my own choice. When I chose the position, I chose another thing: I’ll go and work where it is convenient for me not where it satisfies me! I’m satisfied today, I can say, but let’s say, if I had found for myself another position, unrelated to cybercrime, that would suit me in terms of the time, I would have left the previous position and go there. Because I reached a state that was impossible. The station sucked all my energy, a lot of physical energy, mental energy and time. I was spending more time at the station than at home. But today, in my new position, I work between half past seven in the mornings and half past three in the afternoons, at three I drop the pen and I’m on my way home (Marua, married+2, seniority of 8 years).

A two stages process is unfolded: at the first stage, the encounter with the meaning and the ramifications for the family and for their health, resulting of the opportunity that the employee received for skill development and high levels of satisfaction. With the gradual realization, an effort is made to locate a different position in which an eight-hours workday can be the routine. At a second stage, the actual move is negotiated and new ways of work “I drop the pen”, emerge.

 Participants reflected an awareness of their recruitment as a project demanding great effort that allows women to establish their status as part of the organization. Namely, while during the first years of the lengthy training program, and the following first operational positions, the effort is assumed to be necessary. The burden on the family is recognized as characterizing the beginning stages and is framed as possible. Nevertheless, later on, the operational officer positions are escaped. Positions allowing greater control over time and space, are seen as a condition for maintaining their fulltime employment.

Sometime life course stages became very visible in the descriptions of the route. Rawah who was still single during her 2022 interview, was already preparing herself for her next life course stage and indeed, was married by 2025. Here’s how Rawah explained her determination to navigate her police employment while anticipating her next life stage:

I will no longer agree to go on the operational path, and not because of the transfers [between stations furthering her from her home] but … because of the hours and because of the requirements... Even if you are not an Arab woman it takes so many hours out of you, even for men… I see the... I saw the officers at the station, there were sixteen, seventeen hours a day! I don't know how much I want to sell my soul (Rawah, single, seniority of 5 years)

The refusal to sell her soul has clear implications for the diversity policy: even if the interviewee was recruited to the police and intensely trained for an operational path where she’ll be able to contribute to improving the contact with the population, according to the ‘representative bureaucracy’ rational (Krislov, 2012), *path replacement* renders these efforts a waste. The policewoman’s insistence on her right to not sell her soul by losing temporal and spatial control has clear implications. Here’s how Rawah describes her navigation within the organization on the 2025 interview after moving from the operational path in which she served as an investigator to an office position at the intelligence department:

The night shifts, frequently changing night shifts, were the most difficult… and then you had the emergencies call, suddenly you had to be there at an incident. Here, at the intelligence, I have an office job, mornings only. No weekends! Thursday till Sunday, I’m at home. Personally, I really loved my work as an investigator, but nothing could be done, at the end of the day I got too tired, I felt the extreme burnout, it was hard and I would get terribly nervous and all that for a very low salary. Getting so tired, wasn’t worth it. I had to think of myself, my family, my life (Rawah, already married, seniority of 8 years).

Resembling Rawah reflexive considerations Dalal too wanted for herself a short intensification span. However, in Dalal's narrative of her own occupational development at the police, she not manage to fulfill quite the same route. Since the process of her promotion to the officer rank was longer, and, as she sees it, she was not supported by her superiors, her plan for a similar navigation route did not work as smoothly. Here’s how she describes colleagues who entered with her to the same recruitment program:

I know one operational officer, a [different of her ethnic category], from a station in the north [name of the village], who wanted to gain the rank, so began the promotion process. Once completed the operational officer course, she pursued one operational position in which for two years she worked as an intelligence and investigations officer. After two years, she moved to a far less demanding position. She is now working in the area of wiretapping. It’s a far less demanding position in which you don’t have night shifts. It’s a position that allows her to spend much more time at home. And there’s another one, both of them have babies now, they received the officer rank together. She too pursued an operational officer position for two years at [name of a Northern Jewish station), and after two years, immediately, as fast as she could, escaped to a management position in another station, [mentioning the name of a station in the same region]. She’s now holding an administrative position, a far more relaxed one. So you see, they got the rank, got the status for themselves, each of them has her own history, her own achievements, they did whatever they did, and then they changed their caliber… they are into balancing their work with their families now (Dalal, Married+1 and pregnant, seniority of 8 years).

In the way the route is described by a policewoman who did not manage yet to engage in it, it sounds as if the route is known and conveys possibilities for other female recruits. But for Dalal herself things were not as easy. She is describing how police officers in diverse committees, at specific points in the process failed her, blocked her plans by heightening the ethnic barriers, which meant in her case that her struggle for promotion was longer. When the process gets longer it impacts the willingness of parents, parents-in-law and partners to continue supporting the mothers in their long hours jobs. What seemed to begin as a family project, later on, develops into the expectation that women will need less help. Dalal describes her disappointment with her partner and cites a colleague’s husband on the matter:

As much as I wanted to believe that my husband was advanced on these issues, and how much he supported me at the beginning and wanted me to enter the police, and yes… and yes…, well yes, I feel that all this is threatening him in the most direct way possible… Like a colleague was describing the other day how her husband seemed to be flexible at the beginning and was willing to spend time with the children, fetch them, whatever needed, and now he is saying ‘that’s it’! you must be with the children, you’ll collect them yourself, I don’t mind officer or not officer, you’ll fetch them, full stop. They don’t really want all this change, even if he told me earlier on, ‘yes I really want it’… his primitive self is coming out with time (Dalal, Married+1 and pregnant, seniority of 8 years).

Things have changed with time for Dalal, and the level of support she benefited of at earlier stages, are no longer there which is problematic as long as she hasn’t attained yet a position with a more balanced cluster of job quality. It seems she’s attuned to future possibilities but because she’s at her first position since her promotion to the officer rank, the only change she awaits is her expected maternity leave:

At the moment, I’m at the position of operational controller. Working at a youth department, which is tricky because they keep pulling me out for other cases when I’m needed elsewhere; youth is considered less urgent than other things. In any case, I’m not into work as I was at the moment, my due date is approaching and I await my maternity leave… My next promotion, from operational controller to commander is secure for me, it’s an automatic promotion, you need no favors from anyone for that (Dalal, Married+1 and pregnant, seniority of 8 years).

Dalal doesn’t know yet whether and how she will fulfill the two-stage process, in her future as she is currently learning of the option of doing less (“I’m not into work as I was”) while staying in the same position. Her form of speech may be interpreted as conveying her determination to modify the quality cluster of dimensions at her job through already adjusting her levels of devotion. Indeed, for some of the policewomen, reducing one’s own levels of devotion, refusing to commit to the officer rank promotion, constituted of the second stage. Rather than locating a next position totally detached from the position to which mothers were initially recruited, the effort towards a new cluster of job quality enacts self-protective consideration. The work intensity of the potential future officer rank is imagined as a situation of ‘nobody to whom the work could be handed over’, in instances of needs to leave the workplace.

Operational Officers… in the position of an operational officer you have to be available twenty-four seven. Even now I'm available twenty-four seven, but the responsibility is different. Now I can, if I'm with my children and I can't respond to a work call, I can contact my superior, or her deputy, who can also help. If I'm the officer in charge, I don't have anyone to turn to, it's a job, I must be available all the time… I didn't want this life for my children, nor for myself. So that's it, I'm out of the operational officer track. There are plenty of roles in the police that I can do, there's a variety of roles… (Amna, Married+2, seniority of 8 years).

The operational path which offers the dimensions of stability and occupational development clashes with the dimension of control over hours at work. In Salam’s account, Amna’s confidence that she would have someone to turn to, is revealed as illusionary:

I once had an incident ... I was on a night shift and ... at two am I wanted to go home and then some detainee arrived, I continued working until I finished with the detainee... And that night there were shootings in my home neighborhood... and then my daughter called crying... my parents were abroad… and she called me crying and saying, 'Mom, what should I do?' And this, well I stayed on the phone with her during the whole interrogation, and everything is recorded… I had to calm them down. There’s nothing I could do, I had no choice. You couldn’t leave the shift; you can't leave the detainee. I couldn’t go out. On the one hand the work, on the other the children. The two children are alone and crying at home, which is not easy. It's not simple at all (Salam, divorced+2, seniority of 4.5 years).

The encounter with both concrete and imagined work intensity contradicts the quality of life that the participants wanted for themselves. To fulfill the life they wanted for themselves without leaving the police, both Amna and Salam realized, it may be better to avoid the promotion for to the operational officer position, avoiding the extra responsibility involved in it, and begin work in a different way, turning their operational jobs into office jobs by undergoing administrative promotion course while familiarizing themselves with the diverse positions that would still allow for maintaining access to a quality job without becoming an operational officer:

I can first of all move through roles and then I advance through the ranks. I can also be a coordinator, which is like an officer's deputy. Yes, there is room to advance, obviously there is room to advance (Amna, Married+2, seniority of 5 years).

Even single policewomen who still hope for marriage and children discussed the contradiction between the life they want for themselves and the benefits of their operational positions exposing them to precious moments of skill recognition together with a sense of belonging, commitment and friendships:

Every shooting incident in our area with wounded people, they call me since I’m in charge of shooting events. I was literally every day at the station... I might as well move my bed in here. But I did it out of love, not that anyone is forcing me. Once I watched the collapse of everyone - I did it wholeheartedly… Yes [we were] literally married to the police… there aren't enough investigators so you can’t leave your buddies at work and just go home. You get to the point where they ask you to go on leave, but you can’t. (Maram, Single, seniority of 5 years).

Being completely immersed in the excitements of the operational route, Maram presented herself in the later 2025 interview as still fulfilled and satisfied experiencing herself as contributing significantly to bringing criminals to court and prison. The realization that it is either marriage in the common sense or marriage to the police reveals three mechanisms that make the operational route difficult for anyone who needs hopes for control over working hours. The first mechanism is the under-staffing which would mean that taking days off practically leaves the job undone. The structural constraint of understaffing plays on employees’ moral self to care for the required task more than the organization cares for it. The second mechanism is again a moral one: caring for members of the team - “all collapse” suggests that going home is impossible for a good friend or colleague who is expected to show solidarity. The third mechanism is the pride of excellence in one’s expertise, so rare in the context of the opportunity structure. The employee applies to her job the cultural weight of marriage (“moving my bed in here”; “we were practically married to the police”) since being given the recognition of an expert without whom the task cannot be fully performed. As the expert responsible for shooting, her presence is essential in the crime scene. Surely, the pressure for long hours is mixed together with a wave of recognition for her professional skills. Returning to the discussion of job quality, we see how the extrinsic dimensions may contradict intrinsic characteristics: long hours is concurrently a burnout dimension and an opportunity to gain recognition and to experience one’s own as an expert and as a worthy member of the team. Moving to a different job quality cluster with more control over time where one does not have to marry the police but can marry a person and have children, obviously means turning away from such benefits. Alar, a policewoman who is no longer on the operational path but found for herself an administrative position, exposes the interweaved dynamics between the burden of long hours and the significance of the professional commitment:

...Yes, there are emergency calls. And listen, I was on investigations and detective work. You knew when a shift started, you didn't know when it will end. I remember once I started the shift and finished the next day at noon while being a mother... you never know... when it ends… And if all of a sudden some minors are arrested - it's better that juvenile investigators interrogate them- and you get kicked out of bed and if you're a detective then you’re there with the arrested youngsters, arrested yourself in a way. There is no shift and no one that will come and replace you, you continue with them until you hand them over (Alar, Divorced+2)

From an interpretative quality of job perspective, the long hours were not solely a burden. Directing themselves towards such a heightened quality job would often mean a change in their contact with the population and therefore reduced intrinsic job quality with the disappearing chances to act as improving the minority experience at the police. Nevertheless, *Path replacement* with its two stages of locating a suitable position and managing the move into it, is an opportunity to combine the security of the (described repeatedly in the interviews as meager) salary and a sense of WLB. At a certain point policewomen begin to insist on their right to not sell their soul by losing temporal and spatial control. Such insistence seems to have clear implications: the police failure to adjust to the needs of those who are already mothers as well as those who see themselves as future mothers, not developing the organizational possibility to keep mothers on the operational path, triggers agentic capabilities in the search for an alternative occupational route within the organization. For some, it means that *path replacement* would begin with the hope for an administrative path as the only one possible. The reflexive consideration of alternative organizational employment paths, are intensified further when superiors refuse to see family related difficulties:

I asked 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, married+2, seniority of 5 years).

Control over space is closely related to control over time in the interviewees’ lives as long commuting hours come on the expense of parenting time. Realizing the precise weight of the spatial control barrier, the commuting difficulty, Alaa cannot convince her superior to support her ability to function as a mother while devoting herself to investigations. Shortsighted at the time of the dialogue with Alaa, he fails to come up with the alternative that would ensure the organization with the benefit of the organizational investment in her training. A penalty, however, awaits, those navigating away from the operational path:

I'm used to fifth gear and cruise control at 150 and I fly. All of a sudden, I get here, I'm at full gas in neutral, that's what I feel… Everything works slowly, everything works slowly and everything goes slowly and there is no, sometimes there is no rational in the things that happen, very frustrating. But slowly I, I am learning the organization, I am starting to adjust myself to the silence, to this calmness. As if it suits me, I bring the child in the morning and come, leave here, take the child and go home. I don't have phones, I don't have mental confusion in the evening, I don't have anything. Friday-Saturday I'm at home with the kids, I'm calm, I'm calm, what's wrong with me? Shit salary, yes, but … I'm not a lone provider…  (Yara, Married+2, seniority of one year).

Enacting *path replacement* enabled control over time and space. The occupational attainment in the form of an organizational path that is embedded in the past protective institutional logic allows the interviewee to keep calm. She is now, able to spend weekends with her children fulfilling her understanding of the appropriate mother. Thanks to her *path replacement*, Yara currently benefits of a quality job in which she is supported for her WLB and can therefore hold on to her job with no disruptions. At the same time a maternal penalty is embedded in her current position signifying the experienced loss associated with *path replacement*: the shift to an administrative position means loss to her salary and a loss of excitement and the sense of meaning. The loss that is represented by silence as well as by her ability to observe the lack of effective management, are seen by her as reasonable given the precious protective setting. In her interview, Yara, thoughtfully expresses the ambivalence she feels in her current role, balancing motherhood and work while experiencing a certain decline in professional satisfaction. Gradually, she adjusts and comes to terms with her decision and new cluster of job quality dimensions. Additionally, the fact that the police allow for her *'Path replacement'* strengthens her ability to adapt to her new career, offering her hope to stay in the organization and to navigate for professional advancement.

**Discussion**

Following the interpretative perspective for job quality (Knox & Wright, 2022), our analysis of our qualitative database enabled us to assess how within a specific institutional context and a specific workplace, the meaning of specific aspects of job quality may change. Central to the institutional context are three main features of the social location of those responding to the diversity policy are (1) the opportunity structure opened for minority women; (2) The availability of familial and non-familial childcare; (3) The barriers to crossing gender and ethno-national boundaries. Such barriers may weaken the attractivity of employment paths that may go against political and cultural norms. The importance of taking contextual characteristics into account is in evaluating the extent to which potential recruits to a diversity policy, may first, positively respond to the jobs offered by the diversity policy and then, depend on the jobs proposed by it.

Our findings suggested primarily the great value of on-the-job training for the Arab recruits: the participants described the work they have done while on the operational route as extremely valuable, exciting, filling them up with a sense of meaning, enhancing their status not just personally but within the organization and in the region they work in. Their devotion to improving life for the population they represent, meant that operational jobs were experienced as definitely empowering.

However, the cluster of dimensions of job quality in the operational positions, involved a loss of control over the temporal and spatial dimensions, the realization of which practically transformed the meaning of the dimension salient to job quality ‘on the job training’. Evertsson (2004), who looked at gender differences in the impact of on-the-job training, already noticed the possibility that, in women’s occupational lives, its benefit is not going to be as strong. Several interviewees, came to a point where they were willing to drop its advantages, even if it meant a great sense of loss.

Applying an interpretive perspective to job quality revealed the pain in which employees realize they must modify the cluster of quality dimensions in their jobs. Concurrenlty, it revealed the need to add the processual element to job quality that would direct attention the reflexive considerations of specific job quality clusters, as well as to the agentic capabilities enacted in learning of alternative routes within the multi-layered organizations and negotiating the move with superiors.

Applying such an interpretive approach, we aimed at examining job quality under a diversity policy in a public sector organization. Our analysis of Arab policewomen’s accounts unfolded for us the power of the two-stage process of *path replacement.* We realized that the encounter with lack of control over time and space, interviewees began engaging in a learning process. One in which they mapped the occupational paths offered in the multi-layered organization which they entered when positively responding to the diversity policy. Beyond constituting a neglected expression of agentic capabilities*, path replacement* is crucial for understanding the mediating work required for closing a discrepancy: responding to a promise of a quality job while practically facing the experience of low-quality jobs offered by downsized public sector units where long hours and stressful burden and burnout are typical. *Path replacement* emerged from our analysis as a form of an employee’s endeavor towards enhanced job quality that is specifically relevant in the context of an exclusionary social policy towards the ethno-national ‘Other’.

*Path replacement* responds to three typical lacunas in job quality conceptualizations. From the point of view of agentic capabilities, it asks how is agency expressed in the struggle to hold on to a full-time job as the benefit of training offered by an employer? The insistence of holding on to the job an employee was trained for, may be a strong motivational force propelling improved equality both at home and at work. The narrow opportunity structure which is a powerful contour of the minoritized population targeted by the diversity program, added to the picture a dependency on the offer which probably enhanced such motivation. The second lacuna in the job quality literature constitutes a focus on temporality: it refers to the learning and understanding of the organization that develops between the mystified image of the organization at the stage of considering applying for the job, and through later stages when more accurate understanding of the organization is accumulated, and its diverse occupational paths are mapped. Once a discrepancy emerges between the expected quality of the job and the actual level of job quality, the specific cluster of job quality dimension may or may not be consistent with present or future life stages; The third lacuna is the tendency to focus on evaluating job quality with less attention to how any specific cluster of job quality dimensions was achieved. *Path replacement* is a perspective that can be used as a magnifying glass in the investigation of the limitations of attaining quality jobs as a personal project instead of benefiting of organizational policy.

Both collective and individual struggles for improving job quality may constitute the mediating work that would close the discrepancy between the promised job quality and daily routine. Such mediating work would require efforts in the sense of both overtly and covertly mobilization of resources. In past accounts of job quality as an assessment of jobs proposed by a diversity policy these issues were commonly ignored even if attention to collective efforts to improve job quality in relations to jobs not related to diversity policies, primarily in the form of unionization, prevail (Knox et al., 2015; Simms, 2017). We propose to fill these gaps in knowledge concerning the quality of jobs offered to minority women by diversity policies by an account of *path replacement*, along the lines unfolded below.

The main characteristics of the organization offering the diversity policy enabling the focus of the processual element of *path replacement* is the tension between the range of employment paths within the organization, perhaps characterized by better quality, on the one hand, and pressures to shoulder lower quality paths, on the other hand. As it becomes apparent from our finding section, a clash between the gender hierarchical nature of caring obligations and intensified work can hardly be reconciled. Therefore, job quality is powerfully reduced despite the range of dimensions contributing to its enhancement. Our findings indicated *path replacement* as a possible response to the reduction of job quality, that is pursued by some and hoped for by others: it is a path of moving to an office administrative job while losing on the excitement and self-fulfillment. As participants put it, there comes a moment when they have to think of themselves and their family. Thus, an emotional ambivalence emerges for those who manage to navigate away from the original purpose of the diversity program: those minoritized policewomen who have shifted their occupational lives towards an eight hours working day, experience a loss: a loss of interest and satisfaction, as well as a loss of a sense of purpose or meaning as they cannot be part of the original project of improving the relationship between their minoritized communities and the police. Their loss sheds light on our understanding of job quality was not achieved on an organizational level. The organization embracing a diversity policy failed to accompany it by organizational practices as those suggested by Pocock & Charlesworth (2017) including for instance teamwork allowing team members to back mothers in caring emergencies. Leaving the struggle for equality to be shouldered by the recruits themselves, means a loss for both the organization and the employees. The former cannot benefit of the training included in the diversity policy as much as it could have and the latter, cannot contribute their skills and motivation, leaving representative bureaucracy as mainly a leap service. In the absence of organizational support, the pressure for *path replacement* increases, pressuring recruits to locate alternative occupational paths within the organization in ways that indeed enhances their job quality on certain dimensions, significantly reducing it on others.

Although this article draws on two waves of interviews (2022 and 2025), the study can still be considered short-term. Its limitations are evident, as the time-specific perspective does not allow for a comprehensive examination of the process of *path replacement* and its evolving significance over time. Additionally, while the study focuses on Arab policewomen—members of an indigenous minority—it is safe to assume that their subjective experiences may change due to the ethno-national tensions and in light of the fact that specific political developments make their service either easier or more difficult in addition to gender considerations beyond gender-related factors alone. Future research would benefit from exploring *path replacement* through both gendered and national lenses over extended periods, to better capture the dynamic and contextual nature of these experiences.

*Path replacement* is particularly valuable as it feeds the field of job quality by incorporating ‘on the ground’ views, specifically highlighting the experiences of policewomen from indigenous-national minority groups through a gender lens. Our findings could aid in increasing the representation of these women in the police force by addressing the challenges they face during integration while considering family and community influences. The issues explored extend beyond the police, offering insights into the broader integration of indigenous-national minority women in the mixed labor market while crossing boundaries. In order to take into account such broader dynamics, follow-up studies must be conducted that would deepen the understanding over time of agentic capabilities as reflected in *path replacement*.

**Data Availability**

*The data underlying this article are available in the article and presented anonymously without any identity details. Beyond this the data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly due to the privacy of individuals that participated in the study. The study has been approved by the College Research Authority Ethics Committee.*

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1. The Nakba (‘catastrophe’ in Arabic) occurred upon the destruction of Palestinian society and its homeland in 1948, and the permanent displacement of the majority of Palestinian Arabs (Allassad-Alhuzail et al., 2024). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)