

**Book of Abstracts
2023-24**



**L-Università
ta' Malta**

**JosAnn Cutajar
Gender and Sexualities Department**



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Keynote speakers

Simon G. Fabri, Pro-Rector Research and Knowledge Transfer, University of Malta

Title: Research and Innovation in the Social Sciences and Humanities

Abstract: Research and Innovation endeavours are typically associated with the areas of science, medicine, engineering, and technology, including schemes for national and European project funding. In recent years, this tendency is rightfully getting challenged and modified such that factors from the social sciences and humanities (SSH) are also being integrated into research projects. The elements introduced by SSH, including gender issues, provide crucial insights towards obtaining a better understanding of complex problems, possibly leading to more innovative solutions that take into consideration the human dimension. Such an approach has the potential to achieve outcomes that are more comprehensive, effective, impactful, and holistic. This presentation shall give an overview on how such integration can take place, and discusses some different methodologies that drive SSH research, including evidence based approaches, that should lead to improved policy-making and the implementation of solutions that are socially acceptable, marketable, and inclusive.

Prof Vince Cassar and Dr Stephanie Fabri, University of Malta

Title: Work-life balance: Unfolding the myth and shaping the evidence

Abstract: In this keynote event, Prof. Cassar and Dr. Fabri ponder on the extent to which the notion of work-life balance and its associated policies have actually delivered on their promises, especially for career women. The speakers explore what these promises have implied from a number of perspectives, including psychological, social, and economic ones, transcending the needs of the individual woman as a carer, contributor to society, and a professional with her own career aspirations. To explore these dimensions, the speakers present a preliminary Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) which examines scholarly narrative trends alongside empirical evidence to highlight the current challenges by critically reviewing past untouched barriers that may have hindered the full spectrum of promised benefits from work-life balance initiatives from being realized. Through their assessment, the speakers pose a number of critical questions in light of these trends and patterns, intended to provoke further research and debate amongst researchers and policymakers. The keynote will delve into specific statistical data to illustrate the real-world impact of these policies. They will discuss whether the concept of work-life balance has evolved or remained stagnant and what this means for future policy-making. Furthermore, the speakers will address the intersectionality of work-life balance, considering how factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and cultural background influence the effectiveness of these policies. They aim to uncover whether these policies have been inclusive or if they inadvertently favour certain groups over others. By integrating personal anecdotes from career women who have navigated these policies, Prof. Cassar and Dr. Fabri will provide a holistic view that combines theoretical insights with lived experiences. This

approach aims to humanize the statistical data and highlight the diverse realities faced by women in the workforce. The session will conclude with an interactive segment, inviting attendees to share their perspectives and experiences, thereby enriching the discussion with a variety of viewpoints. This participatory approach underscores the complexity of the work-life balance discourse and emphasizes the need for a multifaceted strategy in addressing these issues.

JosAnn Cutajar, University of Malta

Title: Addressing the Gender Pension Gap in Malta: Challenges and Solutions

Abstract: The gender pension gap is a significant issue, especially in Malta where the gap rose from 22% in 2014 to 46% in 2021, as the baby boomers began to retire. This disparity in pension is influenced by multiple factors, including the nature of women's participation in the labour market and socio-cultural expectations. Women often work part-time or in lower-paid, in feminized sectors, resulting in reduced pension contributions with a concomitant effect on the accrual of benefits. The motherhood penalty further exacerbates this gap, with mothers experiencing a drop in earnings compared to fathers within a decade of the birth of their first child.

Current pension systems, based primarily on paid employment contributions, fail to account adequately for unpaid caregiving roles predominantly undertaken by women. This results in a lifetime of financial dependence and vulnerability, particularly in cases of domestic violence or relationship breakdowns. Additionally, the legal and social frameworks often do not support equitable distribution of pension rights during separation or divorce, further disadvantaging women.

Addressing this gap requires a multifaceted approach. Key solutions include implementing pay equity for equal work and work of equal value, ensuring equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities, and accrediting social security contributions for all unpaid care work, not just childcare. Policy adjustments are necessary, starting with tackling the breadwinner model favoured by policy makers, providing adequate parental leave, and introducing a living wage. Moreover, legal reforms should ensure fair adjudication of pension rights in family law cases when relationships break up. By addressing these issues comprehensively, we can work towards closing the gender pension gap and ensuring financial security for all retirees.

Keywords: Gender pension gap, pay equity, motherhood penalty, socio-cultural expectations, financial security.

Jennifer O'Mahoney, South East Technological University, Ireland

Title: (In)Visible Realities: Women's Care Work in Magdalene Laundries and Contemporary Ireland

Abstract: This paper traces the trajectory of women's care work in Ireland, examining the historical context within the Magdalene Laundries and contrasting it with the contemporary landscape of women's care responsibilities. Care work, encompassing direct, personal, relational, and indirect activities, significantly shapes societal structures. Unpaid care work, often unrecognized and disproportionately shouldered by women, not only influences economic realities but also has profound implications for gender equality.

Using the Magdalene Laundries as a case study, the paper explores how the historical Catholic ethos in Ireland influenced women's roles and societal expectations regarding their caring responsibilities. Operating as Catholic institutions in the Irish State from 1922-1996, the Magdalene Laundries

subjected girls and women, frequently victims of poverty and abuse, to unpaid care work such as laundry services, cleaning, and sewing. Drawing parallels between unpaid care work in Magdalene Laundries and contemporary Ireland, the paper highlights the enduring consequences of historical injustices. This includes the persistence of gender inequalities in care work today, impacting women's participation in society and the quality of their employment.

The paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges women face by juxtaposing historical care work in Magdalene Laundries with contemporary contexts. Through this exploration, we seek to catalyse conversations that drive societal transformations, fostering a future where care work is acknowledged, valued, and shared equitably.

Keywords: care work, Magdalene Laundries, gender inequalities, sharing of care work.

Prof Valerie Heffernan, Maynooth University, Ireland

Title: Who Cares for the Carers? Understanding Maternal Regret

When Israeli sociologist Orna Donath's published her study of mothers who regret the decision to have children, she provoked an important discussion about a topic that has long been considered taboo. However, both before and since the publication of Donath's pioneering research, there have been many literary, visual, cinematic and artistic engagements with the idea and experience of maternal regret. This paper compares two such examples: Merle Grimme and Felizitas Hoffman's documentary short *Regretting Motherhood* (2017) and Diana Karklin's photo-narrative project *Undo Motherhood* (2022). While both projects offering new insight into the deep sadness, frustration and shame that these women face about their motherhood, the manner in which they represent the regret that these mothers feel is quite different. My paper analyses the different approaches to representing regret in these two projects and reflects on how each contributes to our understanding of this taboo topic.

Anna Borg and Liberato Camilleri

Title: Beyond Balance: Gender Insights into Family Size and Work-Life Dynamics in Malta

Abstract: Malta is currently experiencing high employment rates and the lowest Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.08 among all EU states. Using a stratified random sample of 600 women and men aged 18-39, the study examines Work-Life Balance (WLB) issues and their impact on the perceptions and attitudes of women and men towards fertility intentions. Using a gender perspective, the study explores the challenges of balancing paid work with family commitments and investigates the support measures that could help alleviate these conflicts.

The findings indicate that women and men desire an average of 2 and 1.86 children, respectively, with an overall ideal of 1.93 children, higher than the current TFR. Significant gender disparities emerged, with work-family conflict disproportionately affecting mothers and their fertility intentions and younger individuals being more sensitive to these imbalances.

The study identified dissatisfaction with the duration and compensation of current family leave policies (Maternity, Paternity, and Parental Leave) and called for extended, better-paid leave, including new leave for sick children. There was a

strong demand for temporal and spatial work flexibility to enhance WLB. Additionally, improved financial support for families was highlighted as crucial for encouraging higher fertility rates.

In conclusion, the study emphasises the need for multi-level holistic interventions at macro, meso, and micro levels to address work-family challenges and improve fertility rates in Malta.



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Symposium 19th September 2024

*Vania Tabone, University of Malta

In person

Title: The ripple effect of the motherhood penalty. A statistical overview of Malta, EU and non-EU States.

Research has shown that on becoming mothers, women in the labour market face a motherhood penalty of seven percent on their return to work (Budig and England, 2001). Many mothers are constrained to take career breaks in order to take care of their children when they give birth or adopt/foster and/or reduce their working hours once they return to work. This impacts negatively on their salaries and even so on their career progression. They can try to lower this 'damage; this penalty, to five percent by attending job training or engaging in educational courses while on their career break (Budig and England, 2001). Employers, on the other hand, have the impression that mothers may not be so productive as they were before they were childless and may thus unconsciously discriminate against them.

This paper will analyse secondary data to compare Malta with other EU member states on how it is trending when it comes to the gender wage gap. The motherhood wage gap has not yet been measured in Malta. The gender wage gap widens the more women participate in the world of work (Arulampalam, Booth and Bryan, 2007; Tjidsens and Van Klaveren 2012; Doherty, Levine, Moldavskaya and Xiong, 2017). The motherhood wage gap can also be the root cause behind the low fertility rate that is persisting within EU and especially in Malta, which happens to have the lowest fertility rate.

Keywords: motherhood; career; discrimination; fertility; motherhood penalty.

Emily Galea

PhD Student, University of Malta
In person

Title: Care and the possible consequence of femicide

In this paper, I intend to explore the area of care in terms of institutions dealing with violence against women, (i.e. possibly including police, social workers, NGOs, support services, healthcare services) and to highlight issues in the field that relate to femicide. Such problems may include inaccessibility or delays to services, lack of communication between agencies, lack of action following reports, and so forth. I also intend to investigate the reasons for those issues, which may include (care) workers being underpaid and/or overworked. An example that suggests the aforementioned issues would be the case of Bernice Cassar. The ministerial inquiry into the femicide of Bernice Cassar that was conducted in 2022 found that her lawyer “pleaded” (Xuereb, 2023, par. 5) with police to take action, concluding that the state failed Cassar due to “lack of resources and a heavy caseload” (Xuereb, 2023, par. 1). This example demonstrates the need for exploring the services and support involved when it comes to violence against women and the care services available.

UN Women states that femicide is “the most extreme and brutal manifestation of violence against women [that] affect[s] all regions and countries worldwide” (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2022, p.1). However, this study is based on the foundation and belief that it is also preventable (Weil, 2018), and that researching such issues may reduce the rate at which it occurs. Within this context, by exploring the ‘care’ aspect for victims of violence, this may raise issues that can drive change and improve the prevention of femicide.

Keywords: Care workers, femicide, violence against women

*Nathalie Grima
PhD student, University of Malta

In person

Title: The gendered experience of poverty and in-work poverty: the undermining of resilient social capital among women social networks

Abstract: Gender studies show that there are gendered differences in the experience of poverty and in-work poverty. In the context of Maltese society, there is an increasing awareness and policies that support shared parenting. Shared parenting is embedded in social and legal frameworks that encourage positive parenting practices and safeguard the protection of minors. However, women still bear the pressure of conforming to the social norm of ‘ideal or good mothering’.

This paper explores the often undermined need of women to seek support from family, friends and other social networks to keep up with their socially expected caring role. Studies about resilience and social capital show that social networks are an important asset in alleviating the experience of poverty, a role that women tend to take on. Results from my PhD research will be used to demonstrate how Syrian and Maltese women deriving from low-income households build their resilient social capital at the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity.

Keywords: Resilience, social capital, gender, Maltese and Syrian migrant women, social networks, low-income households.

*Beverley Abela Gatt
PhD student, University of Malta

In person

Title: The Persistent Burden of Care: Internalisation and Resistance in Gender Performance

Abstract: This study investigates the pervasive societal expectations placed on women to care for others and how these expectations shape their public behaviour and perceived appropriate conduct. These caring traits are viewed as inherently feminine, extending even to women without children, who are still expected to demonstrate care, often towards pets or other dependents. Such expectations are ingrained through generational teaching, reinforcing the notion that fulfilling these roles is essential to properly performing 'womanhood'. Failure to adhere to these norms can result in women feeling they are not 'correctly' embodying their gender, illustrating the powerful internalisation of these dominant discourses.

This paper will reflect on data collected for my PhD thesis. The thesis found that despite this internalisation, the study's participants reveal instances of everyday resistance. Women resist these expectations by making personal choices that prioritise their preferences and ambitions over societal norms. Examples include prioritising career goals over traditional timelines for childbearing or opting out of having children altogether. These acts of resistance challenge not only the care expectations but also the prescribed performance of gender.

The data collected highlights the complexity of gender roles and the subtle yet significant ways women navigate and contest societal pressures. This research study contributes to the broader discourse on gender by illuminating the ongoing tension between conforming to and resisting patriarchal expectations, thereby enriching our understanding of gender performativity and agency.

Keywords: caregiving, social expectations, gender performance, resistance, feminism

*Annabel Cuff
PhD student, University of Malta

In person

Title: The motherhood penalty: Does it really exist and how can we overcome it?

Abstract: Motherhood is often cited as one of the significant barriers hindering women in the workplace from attaining leadership positions. While male colleagues and childless women often progress steadily in their careers, the story for mothers is different. The ideal employee is seen as someone who can devote the majority of their attention to their work. Yet cultural norms and traditional understandings of gender roles perceive mothers as placing the needs of others before their own, an expectation that permeates how they are seen as employees. Consequently, for women, having children often leads to a slowing of career progression, lower chances of opting for leadership track and less money and power both in the workplace and in the family.

However, some studies have found that motherhood may also benefit career aspirations. Having children can impart new skills and determination, such that mothers are not always viewed negatively in the workplace. Additionally, changing perceptions and a growing demand for flexible work conditions has led employers to provide better workplace support and make more accommodation for

working mothers. However, in reality women tend to drop out of the workplace or take lower paying jobs once they have children.

A combination of career strategy and policy improvement is necessary to address the needs of working mothers, including seeing mothers in their entirety, comprising intersections of race, age, disability and other factors. Motherhood presents numerous challenges for working women at a number of levels, and likewise interventions must be multidimensional. Organisational strategy and governmental policy change must accompany individual initiatives, to help enhance women's career progression and allow them access to leadership tracks on a par with other colleagues.

Keywords: motherhood penalty, motherhood benefits, career progression, policy interventions, organisational change

*Theresa Kuymizakis
MA graduate, University of Malta

In person

Title: Women at the top: the facilitating factors that contribute to women's career advancement in organisations.

Abstract: Research reveals that women make up half of our population, yet remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in politics and in business in Malta (EC, 2019). This paper will use data derived from my masters to study on the positive and negative factors that help or prevent women from advancing in their careers in the Maltese economy. The purpose is to recognise the facilitating factors that can contribute to encourage ambitious women who aspire to become the future business leaders in Maltese organisations. From an analysis of the literature, it was clear that there were more studies on the obstacles standing in the way of an increased female representation on boards. Literature on the facilitating factors was harder to come by.

This study adopted a qualitative approach and resorted to the feminist institutional theory as this theory underlined the factors which need to be taken into consideration in studies focusing on this topic. Case studies were conducted with four Maltese women who held or had held decision-making position, to find the factors, which facilitated their career progression and the dynamics, which enabled them to reach and remain at the top.

The results that emerged from this study describe how gendered norms and expectations play out in the Maltese culture and in institutions when it came to the reproduction of gender-power relations, where males have a greater advantage over females in a workplace environment, due to the more senior positions held by men. At the same time, these were the people who facilitated the women's progression to the top and ensured that the institution was flexible enough to respond to the needs of a few of the female participants who took part in this research. When the institution did not respond to the family obligations these women were socially expected to shoulder, they had to reluctantly relinquish their posts and set up their own business where they used the skills and acumen they had learnt from their previous job.

Keywords: Women in the boardrooms; gender imbalance at top positions; contributing factors; obstacles in women's career progression.

*Janika Laudi, University of Malta

In person

Title: The roles played by stepmothers in blended families

Abstract: Malta has experienced an increase in the number of separations and divorce in the last thirty years. Re-coupling has helped give rise to blended family structures in Malta (Abela, Bezzina, Casha, & Azzopardi, 2015). International research on blended families mainly addresses family development, communication strategies, relationships between parents and children, and the struggles members of these families face (Portrie & Hill, 2005). Blended family research in Malta is not vast and therefore, this study was conducted to better understand the experiences of stepmothers, so as to examine their status within the communities they form part of.

The research involved gathering data through semi-structured interviews with 5 stepmothers in blended families deriving from varied socioeconomic statuses and ages. Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with 3 service providers working in areas where they often had to deal with 'step-mothers'. The main themes that emerged from these interviews demonstrate that stepmothers are very much involved in the life of their partner's children. They however still face stigma in Maltese society. It was also clear that they can flourish under the right circumstances, given the required spousal/partner support, extended family support, division of labour within the home, work-life balance measures and adequate laws and policies that protect their rights. More research needs to be done in this area, since this is needed to ensure that evidence-based policy is enacted.

Keywords: stepmother, society, stigma, support, blended family, service provision.

*Nadia Abdilla, University of Malta

In person

Title: Exploring gendered household financial decision-making and practices in marriage.

Abstract: The concept of 'care' and 'caring,' is complex and multifaceted. Its recognition, meaning and value are shaped by cultural (Fine, 2015), social, and familial dynamics. Financial decision-making also forms part of 'caring' in the context of marriage. Such caring responsibilities can also be examined through the lens of power dynamics, which can be used to study how financial decisions are made and managed between partners. These decisions, choices, and personal inclinations often echo and perpetuate stereotypical gender roles within the household, even if unconsciously done. In heterosexual couples, even when both partners pursue careers, traditional gender roles can still influence financial practices and decision-making processes. Ingrained social expectations often preserve and reinforce the role of the female caregiver and male provider stereotype. This paper will analyse Jan Pahl's 1989 influential study which provides an interesting shift to the conservative, economic orthodox understanding of household financial decision-making. It looks at Pahl's taxonomy of financial allocative systems and how this has been adopted by several researchers who have adapted the typologies to a specific socio-cultural research context. The aim is to present and discuss the main issues which emerge from the reflective thematic analysis conducted on research which explores the current body of literature on financial decision-making and gendered marital practices. In doing so, the objective is to highlight how the caregiving role, which is culturally and socially imposed

in different societies, helps shape power dynamics and hence shapes the relationship among married couples.

Keywords: financial decision-making, gendered spheres, power dynamics, care, household.

*Celine-Marie Baldacchino & Prof. Marilyn Clark, University of Malta

In person

Title: Attitudes Towards Gender Equality and Gender Based Violence in Malta

Abstract: Attitudes are affective, cognitive and behavioral. Considering Gender Equality (GE) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), GE attitudes reflect values regarding rights, and duties of individuals based on gender, whereas GBV attitudes reflect the acceptability of violence on the basis of gender. Perpetration of gender inequality and GBV result from evaluations of gender as impacted by context and personal factors. This study investigates attitudes towards GE and GBV in Malta. It uses a parallel convergent mixed methods design. It quantitatively measures attitudes towards GE using the Attitudes Towards Women Scale and measures attitudes towards GBV using the CASVAWS. The study investigates gender, age and education differences. The sample consisted of 270 participants, including men and women, individuals aged 18-33, 34-50, and 51+, and possessing varying degrees of educational achievement. Results showed positive attitudes towards GE and negative attitudes towards GBV. Older individuals held less positive attitudes towards GE, and permissive attitudes towards GBV, while women held more egalitarian attitudes and less GBV permissive attitudes. Individuals with higher educational achievement maintained more positive attitudes towards equality, and more negative attitudes towards GBV. This study expands knowledge of the effect of demographic variables on perceptions of gender issues, which lays the groundwork for the establishment of policies and initiatives. It contributes to fostering more equitable societies by reducing tolerance towards GBV and promoting egalitarian ideas. Men, older individuals, and those with less education should be the main targets of initiatives to advance gender equality and diminish GBV.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Gender-Based Violence, attitudes.

*Romina Gatt Lopez, University of Malta

In person

Title: Prostitution - a contextual review

Abstract: The ongoing political debate surrounding prostitution, as to whether individuals should be referred to as 'prostituted persons' or 'sex workers', has sparked intense discourse among academics, policymakers, activists, and NGOs both locally and internationally. Within feminist research, these two opposing perspectives have been scrutinized and vigorously debated. One standpoint, rooted in radical feminism, views prostitution as a manifestation of patriarchal oppression and sexual exploitation against women and girls, advocating for its abolition. In contrast, the liberal position, grounded in the sex work model, regards prostitution as a legitimate occupation, a form of free choice and empowerment. These divergent perspectives result in the use of relevant yet conflicting terms such as exploitation, agency, human trafficking, self-determination, coercion, profession, and oppression. Such critical discussions are essential as they significantly impact policy decisions, which in turn affect the overall well-being of individuals involved in prostitution.

This paper will provide a contextual review of relevant literature to elucidate how prostitution is influenced by a continuum of environmental factors. A feminist lens is adopted to analyse the surrounding contexts, including the influence of culture and pornography, which may serve as catalysts for grooming within the realm of prostitution. Additionally, this review will delineate gaps, such as the lack of comprehensive sex education in schools. Through this overarching approach, the paper aims to offer adequate recommendations.

Keywords: prostitution, feminism, culture, exploitation, grooming.

*Maria C. Borg, University of Malta

In person

Title: Exploring Care Dynamics of Women's Organisations in Malta: Sociological Reflections

Abstract: This sociological study investigates the landscape of women's organisations in Malta and Gozo, offering a comprehensive view of their roles, structures, and impact within civil society. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with elite interviews, the research maps 52 women's organisations to understand their organisational forms and activities. The findings reveal a diverse associational life where women mobilise around various interests, predominantly through volunteerism, coalition-building, and digital platforms to broker connective action. Despite a limited identification with a unified social movement, these organisations engage in strategic advocacy, consciousness-raising, and behind-the-scenes influence to inspire societal change. Notably, only 52% of the organisations explicitly identify with feminist ideologies, reflecting a complex relationship with feminism. The study underscores the feminised concept of care, characterized by volunteer-driven community engagement, solidarity, and transformative efforts aimed at social justice, aligning with ethics of care theories. By partnering with political actors and holding them accountable, women's organisations in Malta embody a holistic and inclusive approach to care, contributing significantly to the public sphere. This research draws on social movement theory to analyse the networked nature of women's collective actions and employs political sociology frameworks to understand their strategic engagement with institutional power. The findings highlight the vital role of women's organisations in fostering a more caring and equitable society, challenging traditional boundaries of feminist identity within civil society in Malta and Gozo.

Keywords: ethics of care; civil society - Malta; women - society - malta; Non-Governmental Organisations - Malta; women in public life – Malta.

*Christie Hili, University of Malta

In person

Title: "I was completely terrified": The lived perinatal experiences of Eastern European migrant women in Malta

Abstract: In Malta, the proportion of births to foreign nationals increased by more than six-fold since 2000 and Eastern European (EE) migrants are one of the leading migrant groups contributing to the local birth statistics. This study addressed the dearth of knowledge by exploring the lived perinatal experiences of EE migrant women in Malta using an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology. A purposive sampling of twelve EE women from Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia were

recruited through an intermediary. Data collection involved one-to-one in-depth interviews held face-to-face and online. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed by close, line-by-line analysis in accordance with the double hermeneutic circle. Quality and rigour were ensured using Yardley's four criteria and ethical issues were adhered to.

From the three group experiential themes that emerged, a main finding was that pregnancy and the postpartum period for EE women was anxiety provoking and dominated by uncertainty and fear of "doing something wrong". The responsibilities of being a first-time mother was overwhelming because they were absorbed by the notion of maternal instincts and perfectionism. Consequently, this kindled self-doubt in themselves and in their mothering ability. Nevertheless, being cared for by midwives who were considered caring, empathic, and professional, made women feel safe and valued; this gave a positive twist to women's overall perinatal experience in Malta. This research has several implications for midwifery practice, and it underscores the need to invest in community support services for EE migrant women from a healthcare and social standpoint.

Keywords: Migration; health; Eastern European; pregnancy; interpretative phenomenological analysis

*Yvonne Garcia, Dr Mary Grace Vella, University of Malta

In person

Title: Caring for those within: Caring from the outside

Abstract: Millions of families around the world have a family member who is incarcerated. Incarceration affects not only the individual who is imprisoned but also their significant others as those 'outside' often end up bearing the brunt of criminal acts committed by those 'within'. This article examines the experiences, difficulties, and challenges encountered by female partners of male inmates, as seen through the eyes of professionals who support families of the incarcerated. The study examines the distinct consequences of incarceration on female partners of male inmates as they strive to care for those within from the outside. The challenges faced are multifactorial as they lead to socio-economic and financial strain, stigma, isolation, and communication barriers, which impact the dynamics of the caring relationship. Based on the findings emerging from the study, the paper proposes recommendations for future research and improved policy development in the field within the Maltese context.

Keywords: inmates, caring relationship, stigma, and partners.

Julia Alegre Mouslim, Amy Marie Abela, Claria Cutajar, and Lucia Miguel Azzopardi - Moviment Graffiti

In person

Title: Beyond self-care: how can we care for each other in activist communities?

Abstract: In neoliberal societies, there is a heightened focus on the individual to take care of oneself (often referred to as 'selfcare'). This trend goes hand in hand with the commodification and institutionalisation of care through market and governmental principles. Without a doubt, commodities

and institutions have provided much needed care, but it begs the question whether there is a role to be played by 'community care.'

Our presentation as such would expand on an issue that is neither entirely individual, family-related or societal, but rather concerns a politicised notion of care that happens in public and private spaces, understood as 'community' or 'collective care.' Based on our lived experiences and work with the NGO Moviment Graffiti, we want to address the possibilities and limitations of educating community care. Most importantly, we would like to engage in a conversation on this topic and exchange suggestions and tools to help nourish community care in Maltese society.

Keywords: political activism, education, community care.

*Carmenrita Bugeja, University of Malta

In person

Title: Caring about Diversity and Wellbeing in Commercial Kitchens

Abstract: Current workplaces are increasingly characterised by diversity among employees, encompassing variations in gender, race, ethnicity, age, and more. This paper aims to shed light on this diversity in the commercial kitchen in Malta to underline that if the company does not have the necessary mechanisms in place, microaggressions linked with diversity may impact the mental health of the kitchen workers.

The paper proposes that positive diversity climates at work, which can be characterised by inclusivity and equitable practices, can enhance employee wellbeing by fostering a sense of belonging (Nishii, 2013). Conversely, poorly managed diversity may intensify stress and diminish wellbeing due to the increased potential of conflict and perceived inequities (Homan et al., 2008).

Research on workplace diversity and wellbeing in Malta highlights the significance of fostering inclusive environments and addressing the challenges faced by a diverse workforce. In this paper, studies and initiatives focusing on the intersection of diversity, mental wellness, and overall workplace wellbeing in Malta will be discussed.

Research underscores the importance of embracing diversity not only as a demographic reality but as a strategic asset for fostering a healthy and productive workplace. Recognizing and valuing diversity can lead to improved mental health and overall wellbeing for employees, thus enhancing workplace harmony and productivity.

Keywords: diversity, wellbeing, commercial kitchens, inclusivity, mental health.

*Anthea Cardinali, University of Malta

In person

Title: Not Made of Stone: Caring about the Sexuality of Women with Physical Disabilities

Abstract: Throughout history, femininity has been recognised as a compilation of dominant heteronormative ideologies which shame female sexuality, inhibit sexual desire and thus, deny women the right to sexual expression. In the case of women with physical disabilities, the situation is far worse. The sexuality of women with disabilities is often taken for granted and/or it is assumed that their need for sexual expression and/or discovery is non-existent. Consequently, the sexuality of women with physical disabilities has been perceived as aberrant to the norm and became associated with stigma and taboo, particularly within an ableist and patriarchal society like Malta.

The aim of this study is to bring to light the concept of sexuality of women with physical disabilities and how it is represented in dominant discourse within a Maltese context. The methodical process for collecting the research data entailed the use of case studies in the form of interviews. Moreover, since this study is mainly concerned with the analysis of written and spoken language around the sexuality of women with physical disabilities, the data collected from case studies was evaluated through discourse analysis.

In keeping with literature, the study findings demonstrate that women with physical disabilities are doubly disadvantaged. For years, their voices have been silenced, their views discounted, and their needs denied. Confined within a culture that fails to address women's issues, the voices of women with disabilities with respect to several different life aspects, including their education, employment, economic status, health care and sexuality, are completely muted. From a very young age, they begin to internalise prevailing, harmful societal beliefs, which are endorsed in dominant discourse and, consequently, feel undervalued, unattractive and non-sexual.

Keywords: women, sexuality, physical disability, discourse, feminist post-structuralism, Maltese context.

*Silvana Zammit, University of Malta

In person

Title: Women embedded in Male-Run Family Businesses

This paper investigates the experiences of wives embedded in male-run family businesses through data derived from semi-structured interviews. Globally, family businesses are commonly founded by husbands and wives. This study focuses on wives whose husbands manage the family business, revealing that these wives typically do not receive salaries for any work enacted, whether direct or indirect.

As noted by Cutajar Camilleri and Grixti (2023), unpaid labour in the household allows men to participate in the public sphere without hindrance. The research explores the impact of unpaid labour – at home or for the business - on these women, examining how it affects their power dynamics within the household and business, their access to financial resources and assets, and their situation if the relationship ends.

Findings show that women who are not financially compensated for their work in the family business lack financial independence. Those not officially involved in the business reported being discouraged

by their husbands from participating or starting their own ventures. Additionally, the study indicates that parents often prefer sons over daughters for inheriting the family business, suggesting persistent social and cultural biases that disadvantage women.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that unpaid labour – at home and for the business - contributes to the financial dependency of women and perpetuates gender inequality. This paper argues that social and cultural expectations continue to harm women, reinforcing traditional roles and limiting their economic opportunities.

Keywords: Male-run family businesses, unpaid work, dependence, poverty, power.



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Conference 20th September 2024

Brenda Murphy, SETU
Clarissa Sammut Scerri, University of Malta

Title: Care Ethics and Feminist Digital Activism against gender based violence: a case study

Abstract: In this paper we argue that feminist digital activism is a form of care work and care work is primarily the responsibility of women. Activism requires time, effort and resources and it is often performed without compensation - financial or otherwise (Torres Santana, 2020).

Informed by a feminist care ethics (Noddings, 2010, 2013; Held, 2006; Tronto 2013, 2016) we argue that feminist activism aligns with the concept of care and delivers in the following spaces: empowerment and support; advocacy; community building; while at the same time addressing violence and discrimination.

In this paper we use an innovative marriage of interdisciplinary approaches using as theoretical standpoints - feminist theory, gender studies, cultural studies, alongside psychology and family studies (Lazar, 2007; Tilley, 2018).

Central to this paper we argue that we are living in a mediated world (Grodin & Lindolf, 1996; de Zengotita, 2008; Wadbring, Ingela & Pekkala, 2017) and through that media engagement and influence we are increasingly exposed to online global activism. We engage in, are touched by, and impacted by, women's stories across the 'global village' (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). In this paper we spotlight a moment in Maltese online activism against gender -based violence (GBV), which coalesces around, and is fuelled by, a particular event in a particular moment in time.

To show case this, we will be focusing on the case of Chantelle Chetcuti. Chantelle Chetcuti was murdered by her ex-partner on February, 2nd 2020. This femicide awoke an unprecedented response in Maltese online activism, and her murder was pivotal in spurring action and a raising of voices. This paper is driven by that 'moment in time', and the subsequent expression of anger and activism expressed on social media.

In this paper we locate the digital activism and support mechanisms that emerged to resist GBV and we map the online moments that reflect some women's lived experience during this period - February

to March 2020. We analyse the responses from one key online site – Women for Women - an online Facebook community of over 30,000 women - and locate the digital activism and support mechanisms that have emerged to resist GBV.

The research located three emergent themes - anger, online solidarity and support and environmental victimisation. Anger was a powerful theme that encompassed expressions of sorrow, frustration and a call to activism and action. We look to Chemaly's definition of anger as "a powerful emotion that warns us of threat, insult, indignity and harm" (Chemaly, 2018), and we argue that anger propels activism and activism propels change. We explore how the online site - Women for Women - contributes to creating and consolidating a feminist community and how the media texts empower women to support each other and to reach out for help.

Keywords: care ethics; feminist activism; digital media; GBV

*Gábor Mélypataki
University of Miskolc, Hungary

Online

Title: Legal and social perception of invisible work

Abstract: Invisible work is primarily a phenomenon affecting women. It is work that has no economic value. However, its social utility is unquestionable, as it includes activities related to family life and everyday child-rearing. It is therefore important how society and the law view this phenomenon. I will explore this issue from the perspective of law.

Keywords: work, invisible work, labour market, gender gap.

Corinne Scicluna Ward
University of Malta

In person

Title: Charting the Course: Advancements and Obstacles in Maltese Nursing

Abstract: In an environment with increasing demands on the health service, it is imperative to challenge existing attitudes and systems to deliver quality care for the Maltese population. Nurses, positioned close to patients and their families, are uniquely placed and educated to identify the need for innovation and to drive change. Empowering nurses to improve services is crucial, but this responsibility cannot fall solely on nurses. This presentation will explore some of the broader factors influencing the development of nursing practice in Malta such as the hierarchical and bureaucratic system that excludes specialist and general nurses from organizational and professional decision-making processes. Furthermore, the concepts of power, empowerment, and power distance will be discussed in the context of nurses working in Malta. Additionally, the impact of the dominant patriarchal ideology, rooted in the Roman Catholic identity and the societal position of women in Malta, will be addressed.

Related findings from my PhD study on specialist nurses in Malta conducted in 2013 and later supported by another study in 2023 will reveal insights into the existing challenges and areas for improvement. These results include: concepts of advanced nursing practice, role boundaries, preparation, regulation and autonomy to practice.

Nursing in Malta has made significant strides over the past three decades, yet there is much more to be done to attract and retain nurses, ensuring they can work to their full potential in a sustainable manner. The argument will also delve into necessary actions which need to be taken to empower nurses and enable them to lead in healthcare. This includes establishing legally accepted definitions and frameworks for advanced or extended nursing roles from a national policy perspective.

Keywords: Nurses, Malta, professional development, challenges, advancements

Krista Bonello, University of Malta
Anna Borg, University of Malta

In person

Title: The Local and Transnational Care Roles of Third-Country National Women Working in Malta

Abstract: Working as a third-country national (TCN) woman in Malta presents difficulties, as well as opportunities. Our paper delivers findings from a qualitative study based on interviews with women from South Asian countries. Our research questions centred on their lived gendered experience as workers in Malta, considering how this intersects with immigration status and socio-economic conditions. Our paper will focus on a cluster of themes around care, which emerged as prominent in the interviews. Work in Malta was perceived as central by our respondents, sometimes providing access to support networks, other times impeding such access. For example, many respondents brought up the impact that working in Malta has on their family life, often resulting in the separation from families in their country of origin. Some of the respondents worked in care-giving jobs, which tend to be in lower-paid sectors; this made family reunification effectively inaccessible, since it is dependent on income and resources. Most respondents nonetheless send remittances to family members back in the country of origin. The emerging themes therefore relate to family, motherhood, transnational care, care work, and community support.

Keywords: care, transnational relationships, family reunification, migration, labour.

*Nickos Myrtou, National & Kapodistrean University of Athens

In person

Title: Maids, Wives, Kóres and Psychokóres. Representations of female house workers in Greek Movies

Abstract: Greece lies between the east and the west with a modern history full of wars which have led to several transformations in the 19th century. But the core patriarchal structures were in full effect until the 80s. The dowry in Greece was not just a custom, but also a law. In 1978 there was a first

attempt to change the laws but the change took place in 1983 alongside a number of changes in the legal position of women.

In a poverty stricken and war-torn country the dowry was a heavy burden for families with daughters. Many young women (sometimes from ages 10 and up) moved to cities to seek a brighter future. Those girls were either foster daughters (psychokóres) or employed as maids. Both situations were largely undocumented adding to the invisible labour of women in the household. However popular films of the 50s to 70s provide us with an interesting sample of representations of this labour. What is of special interest are the representations of maids and psychokóres in Greek comedic films which are iconic and diverse. The focus of this paper is on popular comedies which are still being broadcasted and considered classic and family friendly. Reference will be made to these to showcase the various depictions of paid and unpaid housework conducted by women.

Keywords: maids, psychokores, invisible labour, housework.

*Edit Kriston, University of Miskolc

In person

Title: Broken stereotypes? The financial situation of the weaker party after divorce/separation - examples from the current practice of Hungarian courts

Abstract: In my presentation, it will be shown that traditional family models are changing in Hungarian society nowadays. Besides marriage, de facto relationships are increasingly present. However, once the marriage is dissolved or the partnership is ended, clarifying the financial situation of the parties immediately becomes a key issue, and in more and more cases, one party becomes financially vulnerable. For a very long time, jurisprudence proved that women were primarily considered to be the weaker party in these situations. the presentation will analyse the question of whether this situation can still be observed in today's Hungarian society or whether changes have taken in the court practice in recent years.

Keywords: protection of weaker party, maintenance, divorce, separation.

Hadia Majid, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)

Online

Title: Productive vs. Reproductive work: rethinking the relationship

Abstract: The relationship between productive and reproductive work has largely tended to underscore tradeoffs. Here, a major emphasis in the GAD literature and that on women's economic empowerment remains the role of gender relations in driving gendered burdens of productive vs. reproductive work, with analyses predominantly showing that reproductive work constrains women's productive choices. This paper looks at the various channels through which reproductive work mediates women's access to economic resources while pushing back on the framing that the first necessarily compromises the second. Referencing national and international policy agendas and using in-depth interviews with 15 women across socio-economic classes, the paper presents analysis

on the ways in which reproductive and productive work interact in a patriarchal society with highly restrictive and defined gender roles such as Pakistan. The paper highlights the constraints along with the opportunities that reproductive work presents in extending women's access to economic resources as well as how women approach and conceptualize their social reproductive work. In the end, the paper makes a case for reframing the relationship between the productive and reproductive spheres and the directions in which GAD needs to be extended to make real headway in improving women's well-being.

Keywords: reproductive work; productive work; Pakistan; women; double burden

Josephine Attard, University of Malta

In person

Title: Essential competencies in spiritual care for nursing and Midwifery

Abstract: Spiritual care competencies in nursing/midwifery are vital for delivering holistic, compassionate, and culturally sensitive midwifery care. These competencies involve the midwife's ability to address and support the spiritual needs and concerns of their clients, recognizing the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In the EPICC project (Enhancing Nurses' and Midwives' Competence in Providing Spiritual Care through Innovative Education and Compassionate Care 2016- 2019), we have worked with more than 60 nurse and midwife educators, researchers, students and stakeholders, from 19 European countries. The aim of this project was:

1. to build a European network of midwife and nursing educators,
2. To share knowledge and skills in spiritual care to develop:
 - a) Core competences for spiritual care
 - b) A matrix for spiritual care education in nursing
 - c) A toolbox to support spiritual care education.

Using the Delphi Process participants discussed and developed the project outcomes. Four Core Spiritual Care Competences emerged from this process. The identified competences are flexible and applicable to various nursing and midwifery care settings. They include:

1. Intrapersonal spirituality
2. Interpersonal spirituality
3. Spiritual care
4. Spiritual care.

By integrating spiritual care into their practice, midwives can significantly enhance the birthing experience, support the mothers' emotional and mental well-being, and provide meaningful support during both joyous and challenging times. This approach not only benefits women but also aligns with the ethical and professional standards of midwifery.

Keywords: Ethics of Care, Non-Governmental Organisations; women in public life – Malta

*Jolanta Klimczak, University of Silesia, Poland

Online

Title: Gender stereotypes and the representation of care for the elderly - media analysis

Abstract: The representation of gender stereotypes and care for the elderly in the media is a topic worthy of further investigation. The ongoing demographic changes present a significant challenge for European social policy, with old age becoming a prominent issue in mainstream political and economic debates. This is reflected in media discourses, whereby seniors are the main characters of TV series and films; the number of seniors shown in traditional and social media is increasing; the popularity of thematic media addressed directly to seniors is growing; and finally, old age is becoming a target category of the developing senior market and a topic of promotional and advertising messages.

In this presentation, I will focus on this last issue, analysing and describing those representations of old age in which care is the focus. The analysis of promotional and advertising materials allows us to identify the spectrum of normative patterns of care for the elderly and to ascertain which components of gender stereotypes are actualised in these patterns of care.

Keywords: gender, stereotypes, elderly, media, ads.

*Anne Marie Mangion, University of Malta

In person

Title: The value of unpaid labour in separation proceedings in Malta

Abstract: This presentation will explore how the law and the Courts view people who choose to stay at home (or work on a part-time basis/reduced hours) to take care of the household and/or children. It will explore whether such decision will materialise in a financial packet upon separation including spousal maintenance, or whether upon separation the spouse who chose to stay at home will be financially poorer than the spouse who continued working outside home.

Keywords: Maltese law; division of labour; equality; motherhood.

Ana Buljan, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek

In person

Title: Gender and power in the novel *Unterstadt* by Ivana Šojat – Kuči

Abstract: This paper will analyze the novel *Unterstadt* by the author Ivana Šojat - Kuči. The methodology of this research is the theoretical analysis and application of the concept of identity, and that of gender, through the prism of the concept of power. Since each individual consists of different identities that disappeared through the past, gradually changed and ultimately were permanently built, this work will present the thematic framework of the anti-essentialist approach, and the concept of gender and power will contribute to the determination and shaping of one's own or individual identities. Based on the story of a bourgeois family with German roots in Osijek from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, the difference in the concept and operation of masculinity and

femininity will be highlighted within the framework of the nation as a system of power in which identities are located. The purpose of this work is to analyze the dependence of gender and power in the context of identity formation using the example of the novel *Unterstadt*.

Joslyn Magro, Charlene Abela, Lara Ann Xiberras, Erika Scerri, National Statistics Office, Malta.

Title: An overview of the care workforce in Malta

Abstract: The aspect of permutations of care shall be tackled using data produced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Malta Skills Survey (MSS). Both surveys were carried out amongst the resident population living in private households. When it came to the definition of 'care', ILO criteria was used. Results produced from the LFS shall focus on those who are in paid care work where a face-to-face service is provided. Estimates from this survey indicate that those who provide care work made up one fifth of the employed population. The first part of the presentation shall look into the development of care work over the past ten years and then focus on various demographic and employment characteristics during 2023. The second part of the presentation shall draw on the findings of the MSS where a profile of skills that persons with care-related occupations shall be given and compared to non-care-related occupations.

Keywords: care work, skills, Labour Force Survey, Malta Skills Survey

Rita Pace Parascandalo, University of Malta

In person

Title: Self-compassion and Compassion for Others among Student Midwives: A Cross-Sectional Survey

Abstract: This study explores the relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others among student midwives, providing insights into how they perceive compassion throughout their four-year undergraduate training at the University of Malta. All undergraduate midwifery students at the University of Malta were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire using the Sussex-Oxford Compassion Scale (SOCS-S) and the Sussex-Oxford Compassion for Others Scale (SOCS-O). Ethics approval was obtained from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and data collection has just been completed and analysis is in progress.

Understanding self-compassion and compassion for others among student midwives is crucial for identifying their educational needs and preparing them for the emotional demands of midwifery practice. Self-compassion has emerged as a key factor in enhancing resilience against stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. It involves treating oneself with kindness during challenging times, which is essential for midwives who often face emotionally demanding situations. Compassion for others is also critical in midwifery, as it affects the quality of care provided. Despite its importance, there is limited research on the interplay between self-compassion and compassion for others within midwifery. This study aims to fill this gap by examining these aspects in midwifery students, thereby identifying strategies to support their emotional well-being. Promoting environments that foster both self-compassion and compassion for others may significantly benefit student midwives, enhancing their

resilience and capacity to provide compassionate care throughout their education and professional practice.

Keywords: self-compassion, compassion for others, student midwives, resilience, midwifery education.