

Police training course for agents – entry into the profession and also into the distinction between men and women

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Abstract. An exploratory study was conducted about the initial training of the Public Security Police with the aim to understand the role of this initial training in the distinction between the work of men and women in the police force. This study is part of a broader study about the entry of women into typically male professions. After documental analysis and interviews to students, trainers and school board members, it was concluded that women face greater difficulties in the access to the profession. Moreover, female qualities like the capacity to dialogue are devalued. Nevertheless, women represent an important work tool for the police force. The stigma of physical strength was also encountered and identified in the previous study conducted with elements of the police force. This fact leads us to believe that these stereotypes usually associated with women are defended by elements of the institution.

Keywords: police, training, gender, professional path

1. Introduction

The entry of women into a typically male profession has been the central topic of some studies conducted in the last years ([13], [3], [12], [4]), in an attempt to understand the changes and questions which have arisen as a result of these new elements into a profession until now performed by men.

In the cases where the elements have an initial training, it is necessary to understand if it affects the distinction between the work of men and women and the spread of stereotypes usually associated.

The present study was conducted in the Public Security Police Training Course for Agents (TCA) and is part of a major study about the entry of women into the police force. The aim of this study is to understand the role of initial training for members of the police force in the topics previously mentioned.

Thus, this case study conducted in the Portuguese school that gives initial training of the Portuguese police forces seek to answer these questions highlighting a number of obstacles that the female candidates to the Public Security Police (PSP) have to overcome to become effective members of the institution; an institution that had already had female members, but only in 1972 did it start to accept women officially.

2. Entering the police force - an obstacle course

2.1. The selection process

With the entry of women into the police force new issues arose about the way the profession should develop [2], starting by the pre-selection test, a first

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barrier to overcome to enter into this typically male profession. In fact, in a study conducted by Cordeiro, Madureira, Durão and Leandro [5], some police members mentioned informally that the pre-selection tests were a way to eliminate women. On the other hand, the same authors verified that few women mentioned the injustice of the criteria or that they felt that these criteria were not appropriate for women. Also in France the female members faced a problem of “over-selection”, in other words, they face more rigid and rigorous selection processes that end up by excluding a huge number of women and perpetuate the logic subjacent to the discriminatory quotas officially in force until 1992 and unofficially after that date hindering their progression [11].

2.2. Gendered division of labor

Women learned to deal with “the fact that they are considered to be extra, as ‘guests’ in a profession that traditionally has managed without them” ([8], p.369) and quickly understood that equality can be accomplished by similarity to the virile gender [11], in other words, assuming characteristics of their male colleagues.

However, in this professional world it is consensual that:

“women reveal specific social skills, that are natural to them, that result in professional skills and expertise that prepare them for the police forces: greater capacity of dialogue (in detriment of the use of force), empathy with the victims and integration in the community” ([5], p. 187).

Perhaps this is why most of them seem to distinguish themselves in community-based services, where their professional skills act as a continuity of their social skills, of the role of women in the society while care provider of the family [10].

On the other hand, [1] highlights the existence of women that do not accept this sex-oriented division of functions and tasks and struggle to prove their professional skills, even in operational situations, where they usually encounter more difficulties regarding acceptance. The same author mentions as one of the strategies adopted by these members is to never talk with their colleagues, even when they are female, about the difficulty of dealing with emotions in complex situations nor the professional effects at the family level.

Women still continue to be associated with characteristics such as fragility which, in turn, explains dis-

trust behaviors regarding their female colleagues. That is probably why women face a greater need to prove their skills in order to be recognized as equals by their colleagues [11].

Similarly, a devaluation of the typically female qualities is noticeable, such as their capacity to resort to dialogue more easily and their sensitivity [4].

3. Methodology

In a broader research about women integration into the police forces, based on the theory of work psychology and ergonomics of the activity, we conducted an exploratory study about the training course for police agents, to understand how the first steps to access to this profession contribute to the differentiation in the professional evolution of the agents according to their gender.

3.1. Institution description

The Public Security Police (PSP) is a police force uniformed and armed that provides a public service with administrative autonomy. The PSP mission is to ensure the democracy, the internal security and the citizen’s rights according to the Constitution and the Law [7].

The access to the profession can be either through the career of agent or police officer and the initial training is mandatory – The PSP Training Course for Agents and the PSP Training Course for Officers, respectively.

3.2. Training course for agents

The Training Course for Agents (TCA) takes place in the Public Security Police Training School (PSPTS) and usually lasts a school year. The course aims at preparing the students to become independent police agents, namely regarding the required skills such as: to know how to carry out a routine patrol, to police a Rapid Intervention Team, know how to receive at the police station, carry out identification procedures and arrests, manage crime scenes, control traffic as well as specific technical-professional procedures [9]. The course is divided into two parts: the first that covers subjects like, for example, Criminal Law; PSP History; Police Organizational Techniques, evaluated separately and the second organized according to the above mentioned skills and evaluated according to the skill in question.

Table 1
Characterization of the participants

ID	Gender	Function	Seniority (April 2011)
D1	male	school board	25
D2	male	school board	18
F1	female	trainer	23
F2	male	trainer	22
F3	male	trainer	(13)
A1	female	student	0
A2	female	student	0
A3	male	student	0
A4	male	student	0
A5	female	student	0
A6	male	student	0
A7	female	student	0
A8	male	student	0
A9	male	student	0
A10	female	student	0

3.3. Methods adopted

A documental analysis was conducted regarding the methods adopted (law analysis, PSPTS documentation, application manuals for admission to TCA, students manuals and statistics of the different application procedures), as well as interviews to the students (N=10), trainers (N=3) and school board members (N=2). Please refer to table 1.

4. Results and discussion

In order to better understand the results, they are presented together according to the three subjects that

became evident from the analysis of the contents of the data collected: the selection process, the stigma of physical strength and the devaluation of typically female qualities.

4.1. The selection process

The difficulties encountered by the elements applying to the TCA start in the selection test as shown in the table bellow (cf. table 2).

The data presented in table 2 shows a huge disparity between the number of elements that apply and the number of elements that succeed.

The table also shows a selection process between men and women. In fact, only 6% of the female candidates succeed comparing to the 25% of male candidates.

Table 2
Data concerning the application process for 2010 Training Course

TCA 2010	female		male		Total No.	% female	% male
	No.	%	No.	%			
Total applications	1453	21,03	5456	78,97	6909		
Excluded applications	360	24,10	1134	75,90	1494	24,78	20,78
Eliminated in the physical tests	912	30,81	2048	69,19	2960	62,77	37,54
Eliminated in the knowledge tests	4	2,45	159	97,55	163	0,28	2,91
Eliminated in the psychological tests	90	12,35	639	87,65	729	6,19	11,71
Eliminated in the interview	0	0,00	22	100,0	22	0,00	0,40
Eliminated in the medical exams	7	6,73	97	93,27	104	0,48	1,78
Approved candidates	80	5,57	1357	94,43	1437	5,51	24,87
Total excluded	1373	94,49	4099	75,13	5472	94,49	75,13

Note: source: Public Security Police Training School

Table 3
Physical tests applicable to the 2010 Training

Physical tests	Male	Female	No. of attempts
100 meter sprint	14,80 seconds	16,80 seconds	2
Long jump	2 meters	1,80 meters	3
2 jumps "on the fence"	1 meter	0,80 meters	3
Arm push-ups on the bar	3	--	2
Extensions of arms on the ground	--	12	2
Push-ups (45 seconds)	30	25	2
1000 meter race	3 minutes 40 seconds	4 minutes 35 seconds	1

Note: source: Student manual – admission to the Training Course for Agents

Another distinction between male candidates (38%) and female (63%) is the number of failures in the physical test. Students and trainers associate the failure rate in this test to the lack of preparation ("candidates either lack preparation or are not concerned or they come to train on the day they come to do the test", F3; "it is the *playstation* generation (...) nowadays there is no longer the cult of sport", A4). The higher male and female failure rate occurs in the physical test, although the female failure rate is higher. These results do not reflect the fact that the evaluation criteria adopted differ between men and women in an attempt to reflect physiological differences between genders as it is shown in the table below (cf. table 3):

It should be mentioned that the above mentioned tests and criteria had already been changed according to the previous competition. The 100-meter sprint was added half second (for all candidates) and the arm push-ups on the bar reduced from five to the current three (male candidates). However, these changes were not sufficient to reduce the failure rate in the physical test, especially for females. Bearing this in mind it is important to rethink the functions of this type of tests in a profession where intelligence and perspicacity have a leading role. In light of the above, some trainers and members of the school council are considering new changes in the physical tests, as mentioned by one of the trainers:

"From a physical test point of view (...) we have to do make small changes. As things are now, the tests are oriented for physical training and activity, in other words, for an athletic police element and that is not our intention", F3.

Therefore the doubt about the legitimacy of physical tests imposing a limited number of women in the institution prevails. In the French police a quota system was introduced in the access of women to the

profession [11]. Demers and Messing [6] argue that the adoption of tests or selection processes reduce or even prevent women from entering into the profession.

4.2. The stigma of physical strength

However, associating women to less physical strength or great fragility is the major difficulty they face not only in the physical tests but also in TCA subjects that involve the use of force.

In fact, this fragility often justifies distrust behaviors on the part of some police elements as is evident in excerpt that follows:

"I can trust a woman but she may not correspond in terms of physical capacity, but some men would. (...) In muscular terms, a man and a woman are completely different. Of course there are exceptions, but generally speaking, women do not have the same muscular strength that men have." Man working for 19 years in PSP.

In this excerpt, collected for the previous research carried out with police elements that work in the institution, the difficulty some encounter in trusting a woman is evident, especially when they are working with them for the first time. In these cases, the policemen resort to the information they have at the time – a quick evaluation of the physical constitution – to evaluate the degree of trust they can invest on the work partner.

In the present research, however, physical strength can, in some cases, be replaced by police intervention tactics, as well as by the use of equipment and work tools (e.g. gun, pepper spray).

4.3. Devaluation of typically female qualities

Regarding the course subjects, the more practical like shooting and police intervention tactics, closer to the imaginary of the police force as a reactive power, are the ones that attract the students as opposed to the subjects that deal with interpersonal relations and reception. Nevertheless, these subjects are closer to the daily routine of a police agent than shooting and handcuffing; even bearing in mind that the criminality rate is growing. The data collected during this research shows that the skills associated with these subjects, usually underestimated by students, are the ones associated with women: greater sensitivity and dialogue capacities. If, in the actual practice, the capacity to dialogue is not exclusive to women, it is also true that it is a typically female characteristic and that the great majority of police elements recognize their importance in the softening of conflict situations, by using dialogue in detriment of more aggressive approaches.

Thus, we observe a clear difference between what male elements value and what is common in their daily interventions. The physical aspect continues to be valued, an aspect that not unusually acts as lack of confidence in the female members. This disparity is also visible in the following trainers' evidence. The first, says that all approaches are taught "despite the overlap of the physical one with the communication aspect" (F3) and another one which also refers to the subject of police intervention and reception techniques: "when they start to learn the tactics, they start to take action ... here [reception] is the rule and that [police intervention] is the exception, because most of them are not going to do that in their lifetime" (F2).

5. Conclusion

The difficulties of the candidates that apply to PSP start in the pre-selection test for the TCA, a first barrier for joining the profession. Although the physical test is the Achilles' hell for the great majority of the candidates, women face greater difficulties at this level, presenting a higher failure rate.

It is also evident that the devaluation of typically female qualities in the TCA, but also in the PSP, especially since this is not the favorite subject of the students, although dialogue is crucial in daily routine of a police element.

It is necessary to further study the hypothesis presented in this study given the exploratory nature and the restricted dimension of the sample in order to achieve a better understanding of the impact that the initial training has on the options adopted during the professional career of men and women in the PSP.

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