

# Understanding and Assessing the Work Motivations of Employed Women: Insights Into Increasing Female Participation Rates in the Maltese Labor Market

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Frank Bezzina<sup>1</sup>, Rose Marie Azzopardi<sup>1</sup>, and George Vella<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This empirical study investigates the work motivations of employed women in the Maltese labor market. A self-administered questionnaire purposely designed for the present study was presented to a quota sample of 400 women employed in Malta. Statistical analyses revealed that (a) the most important work motivators are “financial independence” and “earning money for basic necessities”; (b) the 16 proposed work motivations could be grouped under two internally consistent and unidimensional factors, namely, “personal and professional development” and “social and economic well-being”; and (c) that the intention to continue to work in the future was associated with a higher level of “education,” and greater levels of work motivation related to “personal and professional development” and “social and economic well-being.” The findings are discussed and the study provides 10 important recommendations for Maltese labor market policy makers and employers aimed at boosting the participation of working women. These include a more supportive support system for working mothers, flexible educational and training opportunities, and tighter enforcement of laws to prevent gender discrimination and harassment at the place of work and nonobserved economic activity. The study concludes by providing some interesting avenues for further research.

## Keywords

work, motivation, labor market, women, Malta

## Introduction

In the year 2000, the European Council met in Lisbon to discuss possible ways of enhancing growth and sustainability across the European Union (EU). The strategic goal for the first decade was to create a positive strategy that combines competitiveness and social cohesion, so that the EU becomes “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Trade Union Confederation, 2006). To meet these goals, the targets set by the EU included an overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, an employment rate for women of over 60%, an employment of 50% among older workers, and an annual economic growth of 3%.

This empirical study, which is based in the Republic of Malta, seeks to gain a better understanding and assessment of the work motivations of Maltese female workers. Malta is an archipelago situated in the center of the Mediterranean. It has an area of 316 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 417,617 (National Statistics Office, 2011), thus making Malta one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Malta was admitted to the United Nations in 1964, and became a full member

of the EU and of the Eurozone in 2004 and 2008, respectively. Its major resources are a favorable geographic location and a productive labor force. The Maltese economy is highly dependent on foreign trade, manufacturing, tourism, and financial services (Falzon, 2011).

To respond to the targets set by the EU, the Maltese government launched a series of initiatives and programs in an attempt to boost women’s participation in the Maltese labor market. These include fiscal incentives concerning National Insurance and tax rates, extended maternity leave, the sharing work–life responsibilities program, and the setting up of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) to screen the labor market and make sure that gender equality regulations are adhered to. However, despite the fact that the employment rate of females in Malta for the

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<sup>1</sup>University of Malta, Msida, Malta

### Corresponding Author:

Frank Bezzina, Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, Management, and Accountancy, University of Malta, Room 403, Msida MSD2802, Malta.  
Email: frank.bezzina@um.edu.mt

15-64 age group increased from 33.1% in 2000 to 39.3% in 2010, the percentage reached in 2010 was clearly off target. In 2011, the employment rate of women in Malta stood at 43.4%, and this represented the lowest employment rate across all the member states within the EU (Eurostat, 2012). At the same time, the participation rate of men in Malta compares very well with that registered in other EU member states. The gender imbalance becomes even more disturbing when one looks at the percentage of women on corporate boards of large listed companies, with Malta standing at the bottom of the league across all EU member states with 3%. (European Commission, 2012a). This suggests that Malta needs to strive to implement new and more effective policies in an attempt to reach EU's 2020 objective set by the Europe 2020 strategy—that of increasing the number of women (and men) aged 20-64 to 75% by 2020 across all member states (European Commission, 2012b).

To increase the female employment rate, apart from attracting the unemployed and the inactive to the labor market, it is also important to retain those who are already engaged. This empirical study seeks to gain a better understanding of those factors that motivate Maltese women to engage in the labor market and to recognize the difficulties that Maltese employed women have to face to work. In the light of the findings that emerge, the study will set out to generate recommendations aimed at better guiding policy makers when devising strategies to boost the participation rates of women in the Maltese labor market. The study concludes by providing some interesting avenues for further research.

## Literature Review

### *Theories of Work Motivation*

Work motivation has been defined as “a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration” (Pinder, 2008, p. 11). Various theories of work motivation have emerged and here we review four broad categories—the needs-based, cognitive process, behavioral and job-based theories. These will be described briefly due to space limitations and because comprehensive reviews of work motivation theories are overwhelmingly available (e.g., Grant & Shin, 2012; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Mitchell & Daniels, 2003).

**Needs.** The needs-based theories posit that employees have a drive to satisfy a variety of needs through their work. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), employees strive to satisfy physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs that are hierarchically ranked, and once a lower need is satisfied, it no longer serves as a motivator. In the ERG Theory, Alderfer (1969) grouped Maslow's five basic human needs into three—existence (E), relatedness

(R), and growth (G)—which however do not necessarily need to be satisfied in hierarchical order. The Need for Achievement Theory (McClelland, 1961) focuses on individuals who strive to achieve their goals and advance in their organization and identifies three main categories of achievement motivation—affiliation, authority, and achievement.

**Behavioral.** Behavioral theories focus on observable behavior not on psychological processes. The Organizational Behavior Motivation Theory, also known as The Reinforcement Theory, was developed by B. F. Skinner in 1938. He extended Ivan Petrovic Pavlov's classical conditioning (stimulus leading to response) by identifying two types of behavior—the respondent (classical conditioning mechanism, with limited applications and use) and the operant (response leading to stimulus, and hence behavior is actually learnt). This theory suggests that an individual will behave in a manner that helps him or her to avoid potential negative outcomes and achieve agreeable outcomes. Thus, proper management of reinforcement helps chance the direction, level, and persistence of an individual behavior, and hence, to motivate employees, organizations need to indulge in systematic reinforcement of desirable work behavior.

**Cognitive process.** Cognitive process theories postulate that people set goals and strategize ways to attain them on the basis of needs, values, and the situational context. According to the Equity Theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), employees try to strike a balance between the ratio of inputs to outcomes in exchange relationships. It describes how and why employees react when treated unfairly (e.g., through withdrawal or violence on others). Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) proposes that employees choose to invest in courses of action after weighing their relative utilities; hence, employees work harder if their efforts lead to valued rewards. The Goal Setting Theory, presented by Locke and Latham (1990), which is considered to be the “single, most dominant theory in the field” (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003, p. 231), posits that for goals to motivate, they must have clarity (i.e., be specific, measurable and time-bound), be challenging but realistic, require commitment (the harder the goal, the greater the commitment required), provide feedback opportunities (to clarify expectations, adjust goal difficulty, and gain recognition) and have attainable task complexity. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977, 1986) identifies human behavior as an interaction of personal psychological processes, behavior, and the environment. People learn by observing others, and Bandura established that the following four steps are necessary in the modeling process: attention (to something new), retention (remember what you paid attention to), reproduction (translate description into actual behavior), and motivation (the “will” to imitate the model). According to this theory, employees with high self-esteem anticipate success and show more effort and persistence, require feedback and adopt more effective task strategies (patterns of behavior

produced to reach a particular goal) than others. It has been acknowledged that the social cognitive theory is helpful in understanding, predicting, modifying, or changing individual and group behavior (Jones, 1989). The Self-Determination Theory, which comprises five mini theories (see Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010), posits that when the three basic psychological needs of employees—namely, autonomy (choice and discretion), competence (capability and efficacy perceptions), and relatedness (feelings of connectedness and belongingness with others)—are satisfied, employees tend to be more intrinsically motivated and internalize external goals and objectives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). More recent research suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations often coexist (Adler & Chen, 2011). In addition, when intrinsic and prosocial motivations interact, employees show higher levels of persistence, performance, and creativity (Grant & Berry, 2011).

*Job-based.* According to job-based theories, the key to finding motivation through one's job is to derive satisfaction from the job content. Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory (1959) posits that high levels of hygiene factors such as pay, status, working conditions, and job security do not create satisfaction but can only reduce dissatisfaction. The motivating factors that create satisfaction include recognition, responsibility, advancement, autonomy, opportunities for creativity, and the work itself. The Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) identified five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) that vary as a function of three critical psychological states (experienced meaningfulness at work, responsibility for outcomes and knowledge of results), which in turn influence work outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance quality and absenteeism. Within this context, job enlargement, job rotation, and job enrichment emerge as three possible ways of enriching the motivational content of jobs by adding variety and challenge.

All the theories of work motivation have their own strengths and limitations and despite efforts to develop an integrated model of motivation, it remains to be seen whether this is desirable or even possible. In line with this, Grant and Shin (2012) put forth the following recommendation:

Our own view is that given the complexity of psychological, social, and situational influences on motivation, researchers are best advised to develop, test, and elaborate middle-range theories (Weick, 1974) that are problem-driven—designed to explain particular phenomena and outcomes, rather than seeking to generalize to all outcomes (Lawrence, 1992). (p. 515)

### **Factors Affecting Female Participation Rates**

Various factors have been proposed in the literature that encourage or hinder women to engage in the labor market. In this subsection, we provide an overview of the foreign

literature on gender roles attitudes, work–life balance, flexible work-arrangements, and the role of significant others in supporting working mothers. We then focus on initiatives that have been proposed or implemented to reduce gender disparity in employment participation rates.

*Gender roles and attitudes.* Traditionally, the role of the husband was that of the main breadwinner (or primary economic provider) while the role of women was primarily as homemakers (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). In the case of neo-traditional marriages, although the men and women work, men and women are expected to have goals aligned to work centrality and family centrality, respectively; this being in sharp contrast with an egalitarian gender role orientation mind-set, where men and women can aspire equally to both roles (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005). Although it was expected that gender role attitudes would eventually be eradicated in the new millennium, particularly in the western world, studies at the start of the millennium showed otherwise (Sjöberg, 2004). More recently, Desai, Chugh, and Brief (2012) provided evidence of linkages among marriage structure, gender ideology, and workplace attitudes and behaviors, thereby unmasking a pocket of resistance to the gender revolution. They found that employed husbands in traditional and neo-traditional marriages (a) viewed unfavorably the presence of women at the workplace, (b) perceived that organizations with a higher number of female employees operated less smoothly, (c) that organizations with female leaders are unattractive, and (d) that they deny female employees the opportunities for promotion. Desai et al. (2012) argued that the posture of these men, who represent a potentially large and influential group, is unlikely to change until the structure of their marriage changes, something that is highly improbable. In an interview, Desai, as cited in Casserly (2012), argued that hope lies in the hands of the new generation of mothers and sons. She recommends to stay-at-home mothers to show their children that even they can participate in the so-called masculine domain finances whilst ensuring that the husband shares in the feminine domestic chores.

*Work–life balance and flexible working arrangements.* Studies show that stress related to the conflict between work and family has been increasing (Grzywacs, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002) and more evident in patriarchal societies (Aziz & Cunningham, 2008). In the EU, a strategy to reduce imbalance was the introduction of the Working Time Directive, which implemented a maximum 48-working time budget including overtime (Directive 2003/88/EC of November 4, 2003). The European Quality of Life Survey (Anderson, Mikulić, Vermeylen, Lyly-Yrjänäinen, & Zigante, 2009) found that although Europeans were generally satisfied and happy with life, the countries in South-Eastern Europe such as Greece and Croatia had the most problems with work–life balance. Crompton and Lyonette (2006) found that, apart from Scandinavian countries, there was no evidence that

state policies in Europe had an absolute impact on men in taking a larger share of domestic work. In this regard, more and more women are trying to find working time arrangements that are flexible rather than high powered careers, to combine family commitments and paid work; however, this results in poorer job content, reduced training opportunities, diminished promotion opportunities, and fewer entitlements to social protection (Connolly & Gregory, 2008; Lyonette, Baldauf, & Behle, 2010; McDonald, Bradley, & Brown, 2009). Glavin, Schieman, and Reid (2011) found that although women are able to juggle their work and family lives just as much as men, they feel guiltier of doing so, regardless of age, marital status, socioeconomic status or whether they had children, and even after statistically adjusting for work–family conflict. Women perceive their employment as preventing them from fulfilling family responsibilities and they have negative feelings about boundary spanning work demands (e.g., answering a work-related e-mail or phone call), and this role blurring (which emphasizes overlapping versus incompatible role domains), which is distinct from work–family conflict, “may have negative consequences for well-being” (p. 53).

*Significant others in supporting working mothers.* An important role in encouraging and supporting mothers to work is that played by significant others (often referred to as “strong ties”) such as fathers, grandparents, close friends and older children, particularly when it comes to take care of their younger ones (Abela et al., 2012). Millar (2008) also highlighted the importance of the relationship with “weak ties” such as employers. The attitude of employers toward family-friendly measures and social relationships at work were crucial to enable lone mothers to sustain their employment. She found that informal cooperation from employers and colleagues, as in the case when children were sick, was “a common theme in managing work, and far more important than any statutory rights or formal agreements” (p. 10).

*Initiatives to reduce gender disparity.* Organizations have been depicted as playing a key role in generating and sustaining inequality in the workplace (Fernandez & Mors, 2008). Various initiatives to reduce gender disparities in the workplace include maternity leave programs (Kelly & Dobbin, 1999), merit-based pay practices (Castilla, 2008), and job-training arrangements (Kalev, 2009); Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006) found that practices designed to moderate managerial bias through training and feedback were the least effective, practices designed to reduce the social isolation of women and minority workers to be moderately effective, while programs designed to establish organizational responsibility for diversity were the most effective, yet they only produced modest effects.

Hakim (2004) argued that there are four important factors that a country must adapt to increase the female involvement in the labor market. These are: (a) ideological reform:

promotions to make females aware of the importance of employment participation; (b) legislation: increasing female employment involvement and favoring a free market policy; (c) fiscal policy: altering tax rates that are attractive to current and prospective female employees, and (d) institutional change: employers offering employees flexi-time or working from home possibilities, and with schools providing child-care provision after school hours.

Slocum and Hellriegel (2009) recommended the following approach: (a) meet basic human needs, (b) design jobs that motivate people, (c) enhance the belief that goals can be reached, and (d) treat people equitably. They also add the importance of making sure that employees do the type of employment they applied for, rather than duties that make them feel underutilized, and to help them be innovative so that they move away from routine jobs.

The European Commission has recently adopted gender quotas, which would see women represent 40% of nonexecutive board member positions in public companies by 2018 and private companies by 2020. As the Commission put it “opening the doors to senior positions will act as an incentive for women to enter and stay in the workforce, helping to raise female employment rates . . . and to achieve the targets set by the Europe 2020 strategy” (European Commission, 2012a).

### *Women and Work in the Maltese Context*

According to the National Commission for Promotion of Equality [NCPE] (2011), the working environment in Malta is characterized by a combination of gendered welfare regime, strong patriarchal social structures, strong family traditions and Catholic faith. In addition, the Maltese welfare system is a compromise between the Mediterranean (characterized by traditional gender roles—providing husband and caring wife), the liberal (comprehensive social welfare) and the corporatist-conservative (which encourages motherhood). The gendered welfare state links with the culturally constructed ideology, which is still strong in the Maltese islands. Despite incentives for women to engage in the labor market, these characteristics are potentially presenting a hostile environment for Maltese women. Reference is made by NCPE (2011) to the Labour Force Survey of 2010, where 41% of inactive women in Malta reported that they did not work due to “other family or personal reasons” while an insignificant number of men indicated this reason for being inactive. This scenario clearly questions the relevance of Anglo-American literature to Maltese workers’ work motivation and work ethic. In this section, we overview the major findings related to work motivation and work hindrances that emerged from Maltese studies.

The NCPE (2011) also study provides a comprehensive overview of the Maltese literature on work hindrances and highlighted multiple disadvantages that Maltese women face in the Maltese labor market. These include (a) the gender gap in pay, with lower pay rates for women, (b) lower

qualification levels of women despite a significant increase in tertiary education for women in the last decade, (c) lower percentages of inactive women participating in training and education when compared with inactive men and corresponding EU27 figures, (d) a downward trend in vulnerable employment since the economic crisis of 2008, which historically has been dominated by women, (e) lack of awareness of employees rights by employers, and (vi) short school hours.

NCPE (2011) conducted a descriptive study with inactive Maltese women and found that 65% of those surveyed claimed that they would prefer to raise their children themselves and to give up paid employment rather than using a childcare facility. In addition, 40.5% claimed that if they leave their children for long hours at a childcare facility, they feel that they are actually abandoning their children and hence they are not good mothers. In all, 75% of the 61.5% who plan to seek work were mainly motivated by money, and 54.5% were interested in part-time work to help them attend to work and family life. A total of 68% of respondents were not aware of government incentives aimed at helping inactive women to work, while many felt that such government incentives were offensive as they underestimated their role as homemakers and mothers. The NCPE (2011) study with labor inactive women concluded that such incentives would not work unless there was a change in culture.

Borg and Vella (2007) set out to identify the work aspirations of Maltese working women. They found that employment helps women to enhance their quality of life and of their dependents, to gain financial independence, to enhance skills and personal development, to be productive and to feel satisfied that they are contributing to society. More recently, Borg (2011) argued that by working, women become more independent as they are more able to satisfy their own needs and to enhance their standard of living. Moreover, work allows women to gain self-confidence that helps in nurturing talent and socialization and provides mothers with the opportunity to inspire their children and to instill in them a positive attitude toward working from a young age.

## Method

### *The Research Gap in Malta*

As mentioned earlier, the specific context of Malta and the relatively hostile environment for women to work raises questions on the relevance of the Anglo-American literature for Malta. Although quite a few studies have been conducted in Malta on work motivations and hindrances, the majority of them lack methodological rigor, or else the data analysis they conducted was quite simplistic as it generally consisted of a basic descriptive summary with the use of counts, percentages, and/or means. In addition, most of the research conclusions drawn are in the form of suggested explanations with little empirical basis.

In view of the above, the primary aim of this empirical study is to gain a better understanding of the work motivations of Maltese female workers. This study will extend the Maltese literature on work motivation by examining the underlying dimensions of work motivation among Maltese female workers. The study also attempts to identify the work hindrances faced by working women (as previous Maltese studies focused exclusively on the unemployed or the inactive) in an attempt to provide useful recommendations that might better guide Maltese labor market policy makers in their quest to increase the employment rate of women in Malta. In this study, any explanations that we provide are supported by empirical evidence.

### *The Research Questions*

This empirical study attempts to answer the following five research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How important are the various work motivation factors for employed women in Malta?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the underlying dimensions (or components) of work motivation of employed women in Malta?
- **Research Question 3:** Can the work motivation components adequately predict the intention of women to keep on working in the future (at least up to the retirement age), after controlling for the demographic variables?
- **Research Question 4:** What are the main challenges that Maltese female workers face to work?
- **Research Question 5:** What should be done by Maltese policy makers to increase the participation rate of women in the Maltese labor market?

The study is exploratory in nature and so no hypotheses have been set.

### *Population and Sample Characteristics*

Table 1 exhibits a breakdown of the female working population in Malta by age and occupation, according to the “Labour Force Survey: Q4/2011” (National Statistics Office, 2012). The Labour Force Survey was used because the Census of 2005 was relatively outdated and the Census of 2012 had not yet been published by the National Statistics Office.

The National Statistics Office was not in a position to provide us with the names and contact details of the employed women due to the Malta Statistics Authority Act (Malta Statistics Authority, 2000). Hence, with no sampling frame available, we had to resort to a nonprobability sampling technique, namely, quota sampling. Quota sampling is similar to stratified sampling but leaves the choice of the elements to the discretion of the researcher (Hair, Money,

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Working Women in Malta by Age and Occupation.

Age group	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total
15-24	29	193	1,754	1,310	2,973	3,580	0	64	797	477	11,177
25-34	78	1,160	4,626	3,760	4,954	3,707	0	86	1,668	724	20,763
35-44	20	1,153	2,440	3,192	2,381	2,717	0	60	356	1,136	13,455
45-54	0	724	924	1,599	1,489	2,243	35	24	368	1,321	8,727
55-64	0	221	527	1,205	463	732	50	71	81	738	4,088
65+	0	0	62	34	23	86	0	0	0	24	229
Total	127	3,451	10,333	11,100	12,283	13,065	85	305	3,270	4,420	58,439

Source. Labor Force Survey (National Statistics Office, 2012).

Note. A = armed forces; B = legislators; senior officials and managers; C = professionals; D = technicians and associate professionals; E = clerks; F = service/shop/sales workers; G = skilled agriculture and fishery workers; H = craft/trade workers; I = plant and machine operators and assemblers; J = elementary operations.

Samuol, & Page, 2007). Although the elements are not selected at random, the representativeness of quota sampling is still reasonable to high (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). In determining sample size for this study, we focused on those variables in the questionnaire that were likely to have the greatest variability (De Vaus, 2002)—these being the dichotomous categories (e.g., YES vs. No). Using the confidence interval of a proportion dialog box in the “Java Applets for Power and Sample Size” (Lenth, 2012), we specified a population of 58,439 employed women, a 95% degree of confidence, a 5% margin of error and a true sample proportion of 50% (assuming a worst-case scenario for the percentage belonging to a specified category). The required minimum sample size with the preset criteria was 383, and this was rounded up to 400. In selecting the 400 participants, we sought help from our network of friends from the Malta Employers Association and from the Trade Unions who voluntarily agreed to help us in the process.

After establishing contact with the participants, the vast majority (72%) provided us with their e-mail address, and we forwarded to them a link to our survey on surveymonkey.com. The other respondents preferred to provide the responses *via* a telephone interview (24%) or using traditional mail (4%). The respondents were informed that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers to the statements and that the individual responses would be used by researchers to see the “big picture.” Confidentiality was guaranteed and the respondents were assured that all information gathered was to be used solely for research purposes. All data were collected during July 2012. Table 2 exhibits the population and sample distributions by age and occupation.

### The Survey

Before constructing the survey, three focus groups were conducted with 10 active women, 10 inactive women, and 10 relatives living in households with working women. The members had different ages that ranged from 18 to 64 and occupied various roles in the labor market. The moderators tried to elicit

the primary motives for working from the group members without influencing them. The participants declared that they were more than happy to discuss the topic and to present their views on the subject. The sessions were transcribed, but we assured the participants that their names would not be disclosed in any way to guarantee confidentiality. From these focus groups, 16 distinct work motivations emerged: (a) financial independence, (b) earning money for basic necessities (or day-to-day needs), (c) meeting people and making new friends (socialization), (d) keeping busy, (e) for skill/ability utilization, (f) to gain a sense of achievement, (g) to feel responsible for their work, (h) to be recognized for their work, (i) to enhance their self-esteem, (j) for career advancement, (k) to supervise or guide others, (l) to climb up the social ladder, (m) to be creative/innovative, (n) to do something different from housework (variety), (o) to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle, and (p) to escape from personal problems and/or bad habits (protection). We did not attempt to classify these motivators as intrinsic or extrinsic due to the general difficulty in identifying purely intrinsic and extrinsic factors and the nature of the interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Instead, we subjected the responses pertaining to these 16 statements to exploratory factor analysis, to identify the underlying latent structure of work motivation for employed women in Malta.

The survey consisted of three sections. Section A consisted of the 16 statements related to the work motivations and respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a standard five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (e.g., “A job gives me the opportunity to provide for the day-to-day needs”). Section B consisted of the following two open-ended responses: (a) What are the main challenges that you face to work? (b) What strategies would you like to see implemented by policy makers to increase the chances that you will keep on working in the future and also to attract new women to the Maltese labor market? Finally, in Section C, the respondents were requested to provide demographic information regarding their age, marital status (single and never married, married or other), number of children (as dependents), occupation, level of

**Table 2.** Population and Sample Distributions by Age and Occupation.

Occupation	Age group					Total
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	
Legislators, senior officials and managers	<i>193</i> (1)	<i>1,160</i> (8)	<i>1,153</i> (8)	<i>724</i> (5)	<i>221</i> (2)	<i>3,451</i> (24)
Professionals	<i>1,754</i> (12)	<i>4,626</i> (32)	<i>2,440</i> (17)	<i>924</i> (6)	<i>527</i> (4)	<i>10,271</i> (71)
Technicians/associate professionals	<i>1,310</i> (9)	<i>3,760</i> (26)	<i>3,192</i> (22)	<i>1,599</i> (11)	<i>1,205</i> (8)	<i>11,066</i> (76)
Clerks	<i>2,973</i> (20)	<i>4,954</i> (35)	<i>2,381</i> (16)	<i>1,489</i> (10)	<i>463</i> (3)	<i>12,260</i> (84)
Service and shop/sales workers	<i>3,580</i> (25)	<i>3,707</i> (25)	<i>2,717</i> (19)	<i>2,243</i> (15)	<i>732</i> (5)	<i>12,979</i> (89)
Plant and machine operators	<i>797</i> (5)	<i>1,668</i> (11)	<i>356</i> (2)	<i>368</i> (3)	<i>81</i> (1)	<i>3,270</i> (22)
Elementary occupations	<i>570</i> (4)	<i>888</i> (6)	<i>1,216</i> (9)	<i>1,401</i> (9)	<i>859</i> (6)	<i>4,913</i> (34)
Total	<i>11,177</i> (77)	<i>20,763</i> (143)	<i>13,455</i> (92)	<i>8,727</i> (60)	<i>4,088</i> (28)	<i>58,210</i> (400)

Note. Population sizes are in italics; Sample sizes are presented in brackets.

education and type of employment (full-time, full-time with reduced hours, or part-time). They were also requested to rate their intention to continue to work in the future (at least up to the retirement age) on a dichotomous scale with “No” (coded as “0”) and “Yes” (coded as “1”) categories.

### Data Analysis Procedure

For the closed-ended responses of the survey, we started by determining, *via* descriptive statistics, how important the 16 proposed reasons to work (which emerged from the focus groups) were in motivating Maltese women to work. Then, the responses to 16 work motivation statements were subjected to exploratory Factor Analysis, to investigate the underlying factor structure of the work motivations of Maltese female workers. Finally, hierarchical binary logistic regression was used to investigate which of the work motivation factors (as suggested by Factor Analysis) emerged as significant predictors of the intention of Maltese women to continue to work in the future (at least up to the retirement age) after controlling for any effects of the demographic variables (i.e., age, education, number of children, employment type, and marital status). The above statistical analyses were conducted in the IBM SPSS V20 package.

For the open-ended responses, a thematic approach was adopted to analyze the primary data in an attempt to identify key themes that would prove to be helpful in identifying strategies for attracting and retaining female workers to the labor market and in providing some interesting avenues for further research.

## Results

How important are the various work motivation factors for employed women?

With the scale for each statement ranging from “1” (for strongly disagree) to “5” (for strongly agree), descriptive statistics of the responses to the 16 work motivation statements revealed that the respondents:

1. strongly agree (median = 5) that a job gives them the chance to pay for basic necessities and to be financially independent;
2. agree (median = 4) that a job gives them the opportunity to socialize, to utilize their skills/abilities, to gain a sense of achievement, to be responsible/accountable for their work, to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle, to keep busy, to enhance their self-esteem, to advance in their career, to be recognized for their work, to be creative in their work, and to climb the social ladder;
3. neither agree nor disagree (median = 3) that work gives them the opportunity to escape from problems or bad habits, and to supervise (or guide) other workers.

A summary of descriptive statistics is presented in Table 3.

What are the underlying dimensions (or components) of the work motivation of employed women in Malta?

Factor analysis is a method for investigating whether the information provided by a large number of variables can be condensed into a smaller set of unobservable factors or components (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). In preliminary analysis, we examined the statistical assumptions of Factor Analysis. The Bartlett Test of Sphericity,  $\chi^2(20) = 2151.45, p < .001$ , revealed that the correlations (when taken overall) were statistically significant. In addition, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO = .908) measure of sampling adequacy was acceptable (Hair et al., 1998). Hence, the Factor Analysis proceeded.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) revealed that there were two eigenvalues (or  $\lambda$ s) greater than “1,” with Factor 1 ( $\lambda = 6.30$ ) accounting for 39.4% of the variance and Factor 2 ( $\lambda = 1.32$ ) accounting for 8.3% of the variance of work motivation. After applying Direct Oblimin (an oblique factor rotation that extracts correlated factors), Factor 1 comprised nine work motivation aspects (skill/ability utilization, sense of achievement, for career advancement, supervision,

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of Work Motivation Scores.

Motivators	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Money for basic necessities	5	1	5
Financial independence	5	1	5
Meeting people and making new friends	4	1	5
Skill utilization	4	1	5
Sense of achievement	4	1	5
Responsibility	4	1	5
To afford a more comfortable lifestyle	4	1	5
Keeping busy	4	1	5
To increase self esteem	4	1	5
Career advancement	4	1	5
Recognition	4	1	5
Variety from housework	4	1	5
Creativity	4	1	5
To climb social ladder	4	1	5
Escape (protection)	3	1	5
Supervision	3	1	5

Note. Valid  $N = 400$ ; scales are ordinal and range from 1 to 5.

**Table 4.** Pattern Matrix (Direct Oblimin With Kaiser Normalization).

Work motivators	Component	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
For skill/ability utilization	<b>.733</b>	.057
To gain a sense of achievement/success	<b>.843</b>	-.006
Career advancement	<b>.723</b>	.041
Supervision	<b>.572</b>	-.022
Creativity	<b>.790</b>	-.103
Recognition	<b>.879</b>	-.086
Increase self-esteem	<b>.727</b>	.049
Responsibility	<b>.576</b>	.212
Climbing social ladder	<b>.597</b>	.126
Financial independence	-.111	<b>.683</b>
Meeting people and making new friends	.005	<b>.702</b>
Keeping busy	.141	<b>.606</b>
Escape (protection)	-.048	<b>.594</b>
Money to pay for basic necessities	.031	<b>.595</b>
Money to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle	.266	<b>.436</b>
Variety from housework	.118	<b>.400</b>

Note. Rotation converged in 5 iterations; Factor loadings greater than  $\pm 0.3$  are presented in bold.

creativity, recognition, self-esteem, responsibility, and social status), while Factor 2 comprised the remaining seven work motivation aspects (financial independence, socialization, keeping busy, escape, earning money for basic necessities, enjoying a more comfortable lifestyle, and variety from housework). A summary of the Pattern matrix factor loadings is presented in Table 4.

Factor 1 was interpreted as *Personal and Professional Development* while Factor 2 was interpreted as *Social and Economic Well-being*. There was a substantial correlation between the factors ( $r = .56$ ). No variable loaded significantly on more than one factor (i.e.,  $\geq .30$ ). Reliability analysis revealed that the internal consistency reliability of the Factor 1 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ,  $N = 9$ ) and Factor 2 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ,  $N = 7$ ) measures were acceptable as they both exceeded .7 (Hair et al., 1998). Therefore, we concluded that the two work motivation components that emerged from Factor Analysis were internally consistent and unidimensional.

Can the work motivation components adequately predict the intention of women to keep on working in the future (at least up to the retirement age), after controlling for the demographic variables?

Preliminary analysis, *via* zero-order correlations, revealed that the intention to continue working in the future was:

- significantly correlated with “personal and professional development” ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ), “social and psychological well-being” ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ), level of education ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and number of children as dependants ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), single but never married status ( $r = .12$ ,  $p = .02$ ), and chronological age ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = .05$ ); and
- not significantly correlated with the employment categories—full-time ( $r = .02$ ,  $p = .67$ ), full-time with reduced hours ( $r = -.01$ ,  $p = .78$ ), and part-time ( $r = -.01$ ,  $p = .79$ )—and two of the three civil status categories—married ( $r = -.04$ ,  $p = .49$ ) and “other” ( $r = -.12$ ,  $p = .02$ ), which comprises those who are divorced, widowed, separated, or had their marriage annulled.

Binary logistic regression is a statistical technique that is similar in many respects to multiple regression analysis, but is more appropriate when the criterion variable is qualitative or binary (Cramer, 2003). In hierarchical binary logistic regression, it is possible to know what additional proportion of variance in intention to continue to work is explained by the two work motivation components after external factors such as demographic variables are controlled. Intention to continue working in the future (No = 0, Yes = 1) was included as the dependent variable, while the two work motivation components and five demographic variables of age, education, number of children as dependants, employment type (a categorical variable) and marital status (a categorical variable) were included as covariates. Here, the demographic variables were entered together in the first step, while the work motivation components were entered together in the second step.

Prior to the interpretation of hierarchical binary logistic regression results, a summary of which is presented in Table 5, a residual analysis was conducted. All DFBETAs were less than 1, the leverage statistics were close to the

**Table 5.** Variables in the Binary Logistic Regression Equation (Final Step).

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	Significance	Exp (B)	95% CI for Exp (B)	
							Lower	Upper
Employment type			2.61	2	.271			
Full-time (1)	-0.51	0.47	1.16	1	.281	0.598	0.234	1.524
Reduced hours (2)	0.16	0.58	0.07	1	.781	1.176	0.374	3.697
Children as dependents	-0.31	.20	2.41	1	.120	0.729	0.489	1.086
Level of education	1.19	0.20	34.20	1	.000	3.295	2.209	4.913
Chronological age	-0.01	0.01	0.57	1	.448	0.987	0.955	1.020
Marital status			2.57	2	.276			
Single, never married	0.22	0.53	0.18	1	.670	1.255	0.442	3.566
Married	0.68	0.45	2.24	1	.134	1.981	0.809	4.848
Factor 1 <sup>a</sup>	1.53	0.35	18.36	1	.000	4.654	2.304	9.403
Factor 2 <sup>b</sup>	1.20	0.39	9.42	1	.002	3.350	1.548	7.249
Constant	-11.89	1.85	41.31	1	.000	0.000		

<sup>a</sup>Personal and professional development.

<sup>b</sup>Social and economic well-being.

average value (i.e., no. of predictors divided by the sample size = 3/400 = .0075) and none were greater than three times this average value, no values of Cook’s distance were greater or equal to 1, and only 4.7% (which does not exceed the threshold of 5%) of the cases had absolute standardized residual above 2. Hence, according to the guidelines provided by Field (2009), there was no evidence of isolated points that might have fitted the model poorly or exerted an undue influence on the logistic regression model.

When the constant was entered into the model (Block 0), the regression weight for the constant in Step 0 was statistically significant,  $\beta = 1.33$ ,  $SE(\beta) = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ . The classification table indicated that 79% of the cases were correctly classified and hence, the proportional by chance accuracy rate is 66.8% (i.e.,  $.79^2 + .21^2 = .6682$ ). When the demographic variables were introduced in Step 1,  $\chi^2(7) = 69.65$ ,  $p < .01$ , education,  $\beta = 1.07$ ,  $SE(\beta) = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ , accounted for 24.9% of the variability in intention (based on Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ). The classification table indicated that 81.3% of the cases were correctly classified at this stage.

When the work motivation components were introduced,  $\chi^2(2) = 71.98$ ,  $p < .01$ , “Personal and Professional Development,”  $\beta = 1.54$ ,  $SE(\beta) = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ , and “Social and Economic Well-Being,”  $\beta = 1.21$ ,  $SE(\beta) = .39$ ,  $p < .01$ , were entered into the model. The work motivation components accounted for an additional 21.5%, resulting in a total Nagelkerke  $R^2$  of 46.4%, and an overall holdout accuracy rate of 86.5%. Therefore, it was concluded that the probability of working in the future (at least up to the retirement age) was associated with (a) a higher level of education, (b) a greater motivation for *Personal and Professional Development*, and (c) a greater motivation for *Social and Economic Well-Being*.

The final overall accuracy of classification of the model (86.5%) exceeded the proportional by chance accuracy rate (66.82%) by more than 25%, thus confirming the

utility of the logistic regression model (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000).

What are the main challenges that Maltese female workers have to face to work?

The responses to this open-ended question could be grouped under the following seven headings: (a) not being accepted to work in male dominated jobs, (b) facing a lot of resistance from male colleagues at work, (c) difficulty when compared with their male counterparts to get promoted at the place of work, and hence a lower salary, (d) difficulty in finding suitable and affordable childcare facilities for children, (e) time management related to work and family responsibilities, (f) difficulty to find a job with reduced hours and flexi-time, and (g) husbands or partners who do not give a helping hand at home and so the work at home has to be done by the women irrespective of whether they work.

What should be done by Maltese policy makers to increase the participation rate of women in the Maltese labor market?

The recommendations provided by the respondents could be grouped under the following seven headings: (a) enforce harassment laws at the place of work, (b) increase opportunities for flexi-time and reduced hours, particularly for parents with young children, (c) longer school hours, (d) more affordable childcare centers and close to the place of work, (e) to continue investing in education, and provide additional support to women to keep studying beyond a first degree or a postgraduate diploma, (f) increase tax incentives for working mothers, and (g) enforce laws to ensure that no-one abuses of social assistance so that there will be a better distribution of social assistance to those who deserve it.

## Discussion and Recommendations

This study identifies 16 aspects that motivate employed women in Malta to work. These are: for financial independence; to pay for basic necessities (or day-to-day needs); to meet people and making new friends (socialization); to keep busy; for skill/ability utilization; to gain a sense of achievement; responsibility; recognition; to increase self-esteem; for career advancement; for supervision; to climb up the social ladder; to contribute to the economy of the country; to be creative; variety from housework; to enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle; and to escape from personal problems or bad habits (protection). The study confirms the findings by Borg and Vella (2007) that employed women are primarily motivated by financial independence, but they are also highly interested in their career, social status, self-esteem, among others. This is clearly a sign that we are in the right direction, particularly in view of the fact that the Maltese context has been described as a hostile environment for working women (NCPE, 2011).

The most important contribution of the present study is that it provides empirical evidence that the 16 work motivations of Maltese female workers could be grouped into two internally consistent and unidimensional components, namely, “personal and professional development” and “social and economic well-being.” This classification was very logical and it solved the original problem that we had, prior to conducting the factor analysis, in grouping the 16 motivations into intrinsic or extrinsic. This mainly resulted from general difficulty in identifying purely extrinsic and extrinsic factors and due to the nature of the interaction between the two.

The study also shows that those who have a greater intention to continue working in the future (at least up to the retirement age) had a higher level of education and reported a higher motivation for “Personal and Professional Development” and for “Social and Economic Well-Being.” Education provides many opportunities to acquire a range of skills and abilities, and in overcoming the ever-increasing competition in today’s job market. This is because education pays in higher earnings and lower employment rates (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2013). The fact that work motivations produced a significant impact on the intention to continue working has important implications for organizations. The work motivations of female employees may be enhanced at the workplace through organizational strategies and managerial practices. This would not only benefit the women in achieving their motivational goals but also the companies in overcoming the shortages of skilled labor resulting from ageing populations that are putting an increasing brake on economic growth (European Commission, 2012b).

Finally, this study identified that the main challenges that female workers face to participate in the labor market are mainly related to (a) discriminations at the place of work (lower pay, fewer promotions gap, and harassment), (b) a

strong culturally constructed ideology in the Maltese islands (husbands or partners who do not participate in home chores or disapprove of their wife/partner working), and (c) an inadequate support structure (lack of affordable childcare centers, relatively short school hours, difficulty to find employers who commit to flexible work arrangements). Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations to labor market policy makers and employees:

1. To increase the supply of childcare centers and with extended opening hours to accommodate those working on a shift basis. In addition, it is important that these childcare centers are located close to the places of work, particularly in areas where there is a large concentration of employees.
2. To enact policies to increase childcare availability: Companies employing a sizable number of employees should be encouraged to have in-house facilities for childcare or to make agreements with childcare centers nearby.
3. To increase school hours to accommodate office hours: Extra school hours could include extracurricular activities such as football nurseries and dance lessons. Alternatively, students may have the chance to do their homework at school in the presence of a qualified learning assistant. However, although Malta has one of the lowest rates of school hours in the EU, the Malta Union of Teachers has been against the extension of school opening hours.
4. Invest further in education and training: There needs to be increased public awareness of the factors underlying low female participation in Malta and the benefits of working legally. The government of Malta needs to invest further in tailor-made vocational training and nonformal education for the needs of women who would like to be productively employed and to reduce the skills gap. It would also make more sense if courses targeted for mothers are offered during school hours rather than during the evening. In addition, if we ever want to have more women on corporate boards of listed companies, as recommended by the European Commission (2012a), educational policy makers need to provide additional support to women to help them to keep studying beyond a first degree or a postgraduate diploma. As Bezzina (2010) put it, if Maltese society succeeds in identifying and nurturing talented persons, regardless of gender, that would help boost our economy.
5. Amendments to Educational Policy: In line with the NCPE (2011) study, it is clear from the present study that cultural issues need to change to combat the hostile environment women have to face to work. In this regard, we recommend amendments in the educational policy whereby new “learning” is provided from a young age to change the existing attitudinal

environment that distinguishes between the roles “assigned” to men and women in society. In addition, the suggestion made by Desai (as cited in Casserly, 2012) is relevant to the Maltese case—to recommend to mothers to show their children that even they can earn money and/or have a career (traditionally considered as pertaining to the male domain), whilst ensuring that their boys as well as their husbands share in domestic chores (traditionally considered as pertaining to the feminine domain).

6. Provide incentives to companies that offer family-friendly measures such as teleworking and flexible hours, to help women better reconcile family and work responsibilities, particularly in view of the fact that most of the companies in Malta have a negative attitude toward such measures. Hewlett (2009) provides evidence that a number of international firms that committed to flexible work arrangements coped better with tough times during the economic recession (via reduced payroll costs) while the employees who opted for these arrangements had more control over their destiny, resulting in a win–win situation for employees and employers.
7. Promoting men in the family sphere: The traditional gender ideology, with women as caregivers and men as breadwinners is still strong in Malta (NCPE, 2011). More initiatives similar to the “sharing work–life responsibilities” program (a social marketing campaign funded by the EU) are needed to challenge traditional roles and to promote the benefits of men’s involvement in the family. In addition, policy makers could consider introducing the father to the picture when it comes to maternity leave. After all, the father also bears child-bearing responsibilities and paternity leave could possibly reduce discrimination against women in the recruitment stage as such leave is currently only associated with women.
8. Awareness and practicality of measures. Measures that are introduced should be heavily communicated and promoted to ensure that females are aware of them. At the same time, such measures need to be practical and do not involve a lot of bureaucracy for women to benefit from them.
9. Trade-off between welfare and work—increase minimum wage? The respondents reported that the minimum wage is so low that it is not worth working. However, raising the minimum wage, as some suggested is not as simple as it might seem. This proposal needs to be studied further. An industrial impact analysis could be conducted to determine whether firms are in a position to absorb the additional costs, or whether this would reduce Malta’s competitiveness resulting in many jobs being lost (Bezzina, Falzon, & Zammit, 2012). The respondents’ concern on the low pay is not limited to Malta. In a foreign

study, Edin and Lein (1997) found that employed lone mothers spent substantially more each month to keep their families together (with childcare, commuting or double tax on earnings) than welfare recipients did, and “instead of achieving their goals, they were getting further and further behind in their bills” (p. x). Our recommendation here is that if we want to see more women engage in the labor market, we need to provide women with jobs that act like ladders not chutes. In addition, prevention of nonobserved economic activity should not only increase tax revenue but also a means to support lawful entrepreneurship and employment.

10. 10.Fighting Discrimination and Harassment: Although there are sufficient laws in place to safeguard against discrimination and harassment, enforcement needs to be strengthened. It is the critical responsibility of the government to promote adherence to the law by discovering and punishing persons who violate the established rules.

To stand a better chance of being implemented successfully, all the above measures and recommendations need to be part of a new integrated strategic labor market plan. More close collaboration between the government and the private sector is required. Having the government striving to promote effective policies and the private sector not willing to collaborate will not yield any benefits.

## Conclusion

There are some limitations to the findings, however, that must be noted. First, this study focused exclusively on female workers and thus excluded men, an equally important segment of the labor force. Second, the findings were based on a quota sample of employed women, and so the sampling characteristics might not have represented the population well. Third, the study was based on self-reports. It could be that some respondents might have encountered difficulty to answer with objectivity and precision on a five-point Likert-type scale, or might have given answers that were desired, and this might have biased in some way or other the findings. Fourth, to avoid problems associated with a lengthy questionnaire, we only asked a single question related to each work motivation aspect, and hence we are not in a position to test the reliability of the individual work motivation aspects assessed. We did however test the reliability and validity of the two work motivation constructs that emerged from this study. Finally, the study was conducted in the specific social, cultural, and economic context of Malta. Hence, the findings/implications of this study might not lend themselves to generalizations over other cultures and societies.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to a better understanding and assessment of the work motivations of Maltese workers, particularly for Malta where such research

is lacking. It addresses 10 practical recommendations that could better guide Maltese labor market policy makers in their quest to attract more women to the labor market, whilst ensuring that those who are currently working continue to work in the future (at least up to the retirement age).

Following this study, interesting avenues for further research emerge. Researchers interested in examining further the work motivations of women (employed, unemployed, or inactive) might wish to combine an interpretative approach with a quantitative analysis like this one to tease out the intricacies of individual and group behaviors and motivations. This study could be extended by examining work motivations by occupation, to identify the specific needs of each distinct occupational group. Finally, there is a need for research that examines strategies for increasing women's participation in the labor market so that societies do not continue to underutilize the many talents and skills that women bring to the workplace. Such research would better inform theory and practice.

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### Author Biographies

**Frank Bezzina** [PhD] is Head of the Department of Management and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy at the University of Malta. He teaches Business Statistics, Decision Modelling and Research Methods. Dr Bezzina's research interests focus on data analysis methodologies applied to business and management research.

**Rose Marie Azzopardi** [PhD] lectures in international economics at the University of Malta. Her research focuses on small states, economic integration, labour market, EU issues and international trade. Dr Azzopardi is a member of the Advisory Council of the International Small Islands Studies Association.

**George Vella** [BA (Hons), MBA(Executive)] is an administrative assistant with the Academic Programme Quality and Resources (APQRU) Unit at the University of Malta. His research interests focus on tourism and labour market issues in the Mediterranean.