

# GENDER EQUALITY FROM THE POLICE RECRUITS' PERSPECTIVE: DOES THEIR GENDER MAKE THE DIFFERENCE?

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United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16 focus on gender equality, peace, justice, and strong institutions. One of these institutions is the police. Police work includes many opportunities to protect and promote gender equality. This study aims to find whether differences in attitudes towards gender equality between male and female police recruits before and after basic police training exist. The results reveal that the difference between male and female recruits is statistically significant both at the beginning and at the end of their basic police education. A statistically significant difference concerning the gender of the recruit was determined concerning the combination of three dependent variables that measured attitudes about gender equality, as well as about each individual variable. Furthermore, the research found that the influence of gender on differences in attitudes towards gender equality was stronger after education than before education for the police profession.

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**Ključne besede:**  
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# ENAKOST SPOLOV Z VIDIKA KANDIDATOV ZA POLICISTE: ALI JE SPOL POMEMBEN?

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Peti in šestnajsti cilj trajnostnega razvoja Združenih narodov se osredotočata na enakost spolov ter na mir, pravičnost in močne institucije. Ena od teh institucij je policija. Policijsko delo vključuje številne priložnosti za zaščito in spodbujanje enakosti spolov. Študija se osredotoča na vprašanje, ali obstajajo razlike v odnosu do enakosti spolov med policijskimi kandidati in kandidatkami pred osnovnim policijskim usposabljanjem in po njem. Rezultati kažejo, da je razlika med kandidati in kandidatkami statistično značilna tako na začetku kot na koncu osnovnega policijskega izobraževanja. Statistično značilno razliko glede na spol kandidatov smo ugotavljali tako glede na kombinacijo treh odvisnih spremenljivk, ki so merile stališča do enakosti spolov, kot tudi glede na vsako posamezno spremenljivko. Poleg tega so ugotovitve pokazale, da je bil vpliv spola na razlike v odnosu do enakosti spolov močnejši po izobraževanju kot pred izobraževanjem za policijski poklic.



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## **1 Introduction**

Gender equality and equal opportunities for women in all life segments are key principles of the European Union *acquis* and fundamental human rights in a modern society based on social equality (Balgač, 2017; England et al., 2020). Political decisions addressing gender equality have their origins in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 1979). These decisions are followed by other important documents such as the Beijing Declaration (United Nations, 1995), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (United Nations, 2000), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (United Nations Security Council, 2000), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2009), the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) (Council of Europe, 2011), the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2018–2023 (Council of Europe, 2018), and the European Union Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (European Commission, 2020). One of the latest documents addressing gender equality and equal opportunities for women is the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). Out of 17 goals, 10 have gender-specific indicators, and one goal (Goal 5) is specifically dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Considering the main roles and duties of the police in a democratic society – protection and respect for individuals' fundamental rights and freedoms (Murdoch & Roche, 2013), as well as ensuring the equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their individual characteristics – the police is one of the institutions that should ensure the building of a peaceful and inclusive society (Goal 16).

Regardless of the comprehensive legislation in the area of gender equality, experience and research show that discrimination against women and unequal treatment are still very present in society (Davis, 2005; Gauci et al., 2022; Holt & Lewis, 2011; Yang, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2020). The latest available Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 indicates that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. At the current rate of progress, it may take another 286 years to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in legal

protections for women and girls (UN Women, 2022). Considering the wide scope of police tasks and duties in a democratic society, the police are the most visible manifestation of government authority (Murdoch & Roche, 2013), and in the majority of cases, respect and protection of human rights are ensured by the police (Gjenero et al., 2002).

This study aims to determine the effects of gender on the attitudes of police recruits towards gender equality, violence against women, and the role and position of women in the police. Research on the influence of police education on police recruits' attitudes toward human rights and gender equality has never been conducted in Croatia. Police education in Croatia has a long tradition and provides recruits with a review of fundamental human rights (Balgáč & Borovec, 2022). Basic police education in Croatia is conducted in mixed-gender classes. In addition to classroom teaching on human rights, recruits jointly participate in practical exercises dedicated to human rights, including gender equality. The purpose of our study is to assess the effects of gender on police recruits' attitudes toward gender equality.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Police Organisations, Police Officers, and Gender Equality**

Police organisations around the world are still described as strongly male-dominated environments (Balgáč, 2017; Chu, 2013; Davis, 2005; Novak et al., 2011; van der Lippe et al., 2004; Yu & Lee, 2020; Zveržhanovski & Balon, 2012). In the last few decades, police organisations have implemented numerous reforms and changes (Bloksgaard et al., 2020; Brown & Silvestri, 2020), and introduced new policing models to meet the needs of all citizens and fully implement human rights and gender equality legislation. Additionally, police organisations around the world have started to recruit and employ more women (Ward & Prenzler, 2016). Research suggests that higher representation of women in police organisations considerably improves public trust and confidence, as well as legitimacy and public support for the police (Bergman et al., 2016; Schuck et al., 2021; Silvestri et al., 2013). Similar reform processes have also been present in the Croatian police, and for the past three decades, the overall transition towards a democratic social order has been ongoing.

New policing models and reforms require police officers to refrain from any form of discrimination and to be impartial in their behaviour towards all citizens, regardless of personal characteristics. Their attitudes toward diverse groups can influence their decision-making (van Ewijk, 2011), behaviour, and actions toward women in society (Chu, 2013; Davis, 2005; Miles-Johnson, 2021; Montgomery, 2012). Additionally, new skills and knowledge are required of police officers, such as communication skills, non-violent conflict resolution, empathy, openness to cooperation, and partnership with all community members (Borovec et al., 2019; Haarr, 2001). Research indicates that these competencies and skills are most often attributed to female police officers (Balgač, 2017; Chu, 2013; Wagner et al., 2017). Indeed, studies show that women police officers are less likely to use force in resolving problems and that increased participation of women in policing reduces misconduct and the number of citizen complaints (Boateng et al., 2021; Corsianos, 2011; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013; Prenzler et al., 2023; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Consequently, numerous advocates of police reform have recommended the recruitment of female officers as both a source of more responsible conduct and a disruptive influence on male corruption networks (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). However, recent studies (Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2023a, 2023b) suggest further exploration of the origin of such findings in different social contexts.

The new policing philosophy and diverse communities seek to increase the number of women police officers. A review of the existing literature shows that the attitudes of police officers towards women and gender equality in police organisations are frequently researched (Bloksgaard et al., 2020; Chu, 2013; Davis, 2005; Holland, 2020; Kakar, 2002; Miles-Johnson, 2021; Montgomery, 2012; Muftić & Collins, 2014; van Ewijk, 2011). However, few of these studies focus on the attitudes of police officers in Croatia (Balgač, 2017; Delač Fabris & Borovec, 2019; Southeast Police Chiefs Association – SEPCA, 2010).

According to Kutnjak Ivković et al. (2023a, 2023b), early research on gender differences in police work focused on the role and position of women in the male-dominated profession of policing and the resistance to female entry by their male counterparts. Research has shown that the attitudes of male police officers are the most significant obstacle to the full integration of women into police organisations (Davis, 2005). Female respondents were found to be more positive toward policewomen than males, and overt attitudes toward policewomen correlated

positively with general attitudes toward working women (Koenig, 1978). Over time, male police officers have come to believe that women have a place in the police, although they still believe that men and women cannot perform all police work equally well (Bloksgaard et al., 2020; Davis, 2005; Holland, 2020; Hussain et al., 2022; Kakar, 2002; Muftić & Collins, 2014). More recent studies revealed that, although male police officers doubted the abilities and effectiveness of female officers, they felt that equal treatment was necessary (Chu, 2013).

Although considerable improvement has been noted regarding the status of women in police organisations (Chu et al., 2020; Nielson et al., 2020) and in the process of police education, many female police officers have had negative experiences related to their promotion and harassment at work (Spasić et al., 2015). Female police officers face numerous challenges and barriers to full integration into the police force daily (Nielson et al., 2020; Shelley et al., 2011) and they are still significantly underrepresented, despite the scientifically proven benefits they bring to the organisation and the fact that they can perform police work just as successfully as men (Kakar, 2002; Sims et al., 2003). While female police officers still face significant disapproval from male colleagues, citizens show greater acceptance of women in the police organisation and greater confidence in their abilities (Leger, 1997).

## **2.2 Police Recruits and Gender Equality**

Every police organisation seeks tools to predict police officers' behaviour and change their attitudes and behaviour when necessary. Police education on human rights, including gender equality, is the first and most important step towards shaping more effective and professional policing (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2013). Therefore, the basic police education of future police officers is of utmost importance and an essential element of global efforts to promote and protect human rights in every country. Such education should ensure that police officers are familiar with national and international human rights standards and that they are taught how to perform their daily work in line with those standards (Jankuloski et al., 2002; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000).

A review of the existing literature shows that there are few studies on police recruits' attitudes toward diversity, minorities, and vulnerable groups (Miles-Johnson & Pickering, 2018; Viduoliene & Ruibyte, 2020). Research on police recruits' attitudes

toward gender equality is even rarer (Chu & Tsao, 2014; Kim & Gerber, 2019). According to Platz et al. (2017), the Values Education Program did not improve recruits' attitudes toward diversity in the workplace but did prevent the decline in support for diversity associated with the standard recruit training experience. Examining the impact of training at the Midwest Police Academy in terms of training atmosphere, curriculum, and classroom interaction, Schlosser (2011) determined that there were no significant changes in the racial attitudes and beliefs of the recruits. In additional research, Schlosser (2013) found that the negative attitudes of police recruits about equality do not decrease after attending training at the academy, and a possible explanation was found in the duration of the training. Zimny (2012) also confirmed the results of Schlosser's study and concluded that more significant changes in the curriculum are necessary. Additionally, Zimny (2015) proposed that the best way to improve police-minority relations is not to send officers to multicultural or implicit bias training but rather to engage them in activities that bring them into close contact with average citizens in neighbourhoods populated by members of minority groups.

Female police recruits have more positive attitudes toward gender integration than male recruits do, and they assess their competence in performing police work more positively (Chu & Tsao, 2014; Kim & Gerber, 2019). Although male recruits think that women cannot do all police tasks as well as they can, they still believe that women should be represented in the police (Chu & Tsao, 2014; Kim & Gerber, 2019). Some studies on police recruits (Andreescu et al., 2012; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2021) indicate that female recruits, compared to their male colleagues, view police misconduct as a more serious problem and are therefore more willing to report such behaviour, which also represents a positive contribution to the police organisation. The only Croatian survey on the attitudes of future police officers toward gender and minority rights (Balgač, 2020) also confirmed that recruits generally have positive attitudes toward gender equality and minority and vulnerable groups.

Only a few research studies have been conducted on the attitudes of police recruits toward gender equality during or after their education (Chu & Tsao, 2014; Kim & Gerber, 2019). Chu and Tsao (2014) demonstrated that although male recruits had reservations about women's ability and physical strength in performing certain aspects of police work, they supported women being assigned equal or similar duties

to men upon entering the police force. Compared to male recruits, female recruits were more likely to perceive women as competent as men and, therefore, adequate for police work. Inconsistent with previous studies, Kim and Gerber (2019) found no significant difference in attitudes toward gender integration between male and female recruits, and cluster analysis results indicate that only a small portion of police recruits support giving women specialised assignments.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Data Collection

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Police College, Police Academy, and was conducted with the consent of the Croatian Ministry of the Interior. Before the survey, respondents were informed by their teachers that participation was voluntary and anonymous and that only aggregate data obtained from the survey would be used. All teachers were familiar with the survey method to provide uniform instructions to the participants. In addition, detailed instructions were provided in an introductory letter to the survey questionnaire, which contained information about the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey, assured participants that participation posed no risk, and clarified that participants would not receive any benefits from participating in the survey.

The research was conducted at two different points in time. The first wave of the survey was conducted at the beginning of the education process (November 2020), while the second wave was conducted at the end of the education process (September 2021). Conducting measurements at two different points in time enabled monitoring changes in the researched areas under the influence of education and the work environment in which the participants performed their internship. Due to the global pandemic and the uncertainty of holding face-to-face activities, it was decided that the research would be conducted online. Both surveys were conducted online via a Google Forms link provided to respondents through the e-learning platform.

During the first survey, the Police School respondents attended classes face-to-face. In contrast, during the second survey, they attended classes online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between the two surveys, the respondents completed nine months of theoretical education at the Police School and two months of professional



internship. During the nine-month theoretical education, future police officers were taught about gender equality and violence against women from legal, criminal, and psychological perspectives covered in subjects such as: The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, European Union law and human rights; Police powers and their application; Basics of Misdemeanour and Criminal Law; Basics of Criminology and Criminal Investigation, and Psychology. In addition to theory, future police officers performed case study analyses and problem-solving exercises related to gender equality and violence against women as part of each mentioned subject. This education program represents an intervention through which changes in the respondents' attitudes in the researched areas are measured.

### **3.2 Sample**

Participants in the research were police recruits enrolled in the Adult Education Program for the Profession of a Police Officer, and participation was offered to all 732 enrolled police recruits. In the first wave, all 732 police recruits voluntarily joined the survey, so the sample of the first survey consisted of 732 respondents. The high response rate, in this case, a hundred per cent, can be explained by the fact that the survey was conducted during school hours and at the beginning of the educational process. A similar high response rate was recorded in other surveys conducted by the Croatian police, especially those conducted during working hours of police officers (Balgač, 2017; Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2023a, 2023b). In the second wave, 706 respondents also voluntarily participated in the survey. Out of the 732 students enrolled, five dropped out, while 21 students did not respond to the second survey. The characteristics of the convenience samples (1st and 2nd wave) are presented in Table 1.

In both samples, slightly more than 72% are male recruits, and the rest are female recruits. All respondents are between the ages of 18 and 28, with the largest number of respondents being under 20 years of age (51%) in the first wave and from 21 to 25 years (45%) in the second wave. The minimum requirement for entering the education program is completion of a three-year high school. Most of the respondents completed a four-year high school (77% and 79%, respectively). The vast majority of respondents (79% and 77%) have an average living standard.

**Table 1: Sample**

		First wave of survey		Second wave of survey	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	male	528	72.10%	513	72.70%
	female	204	27.90%	193	27.30%
Age	up to 20 years old	376	51.30%	294	41.60%
	from 21 to 25 years old	282	38.50%	316	44.80%
	more than 25 years old	74	10.20%	96	13.60%
Level of education	three-year high school	106	14.50%	88	12.50%
	four-year high school	564	77.00%	561	79.40%
	higher education	62	8.50%	57	8.10%
Size of residence	village	332	45.50%	57	8.10%
	smaller city	177	24.20%	82	11.60%
	medium-size city	71	9.70%	92	13.00%
	bigger city	80	10.90%	203	28.80%
	City of Zagreb	71	9.70%	272	38.50%
Life standard	significantly lower than average	5	0.70%	5	0.70%
	slightly lower than average	48	6.60%	52	7.40%
	average	575	78.60%	541	76.60%
	slightly higher than average	95	13.00%	97	13.70%
	significantly higher than average	9	1.20%	11	1.60%

### 3.3 Research Instrument

The questionnaire used for data collection in this research was created by the research team of the Police Academy in Zagreb. Besides socio-demographic variables that describe the sample, the questionnaire contains six scales: “Components of professional identity”, “Reasons for choosing a police profession”, “Position of Women in the Police”, “Attitudes towards Gender Equality”, “Attitudes towards vulnerable groups – LGBT population, migrants, and asylum seekers”, and “National exclusivism, social distance, national identity, and attitudes towards national minorities”. Ultimately, the questionnaire contained 61 closed-ended questions, with answers given on Likert-type scales.

This chapter presents the results of research related to the area of gender equality and the position and role of women in the police, which were measured using two scales: “Attitudes toward the position of women in the police” and “Attitudes toward gender equality”. The scale “Position of women in the police” was operationalised using four items/claims:

- Women have no place in the police. (Factor loadings [FL] =  $-.643$ )
- Women in the police can only do professional work in administrative duties. (FL =  $-.687$ )
- Women in the police can do all the work just like their male colleagues. (FL =  $-.867$ )
- Equality between male and female police officers is important. (FL =  $-.810$ )

Items featured a 4-point Likert-type response ranging from “1 – absolutely agree” to “4 – absolutely disagree”, as a measure of agreement. “Position of women in the Police” was a summated scale that exhibited an adequate level of internal consistency ( $a = .80$ , Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy [KMO] was  $.862$ ) and was coded so that lower values corresponded to greater levels of perceived positive attitudes of future police officers.

The scale “Attitudes towards gender equality” was operationalised using two sub-scales, each containing four items/claims. The first sub-scale “Attitudes towards gender equality” contained the following items/claims:

- The most important role of a woman is to take care of the household and cook for her family. (FL =  $.598$ )
- A man should have the last word on decisions at home. (FL =  $.765$ )
- Most household chores are more suited to women. (FL =  $.850$ )
- It is good that there is equality between husband and wife in marriage, but the husband should have the last word. (FL =  $.819$ )

All items in the questionnaire are oriented equally so that a lower score represents more positive attitudes of the respondents about the examined areas.

The second sub-scale “Attitudes towards violence against women” contained the following items/claims:

- A woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together. (FL =  $.880$ )
- A woman should be the one to take care of not getting pregnant. (FL =  $.782$ )

- When a woman is raped, it usually means that she did something careless or got herself into such a situation. (FL = .893)
- In some rape cases, women wanted it to happen. (FL = .623)

Items featured a 4-point Likert-type response ranging from “1 – absolutely agree” to “4 – absolutely disagree”. The scale “Attitudes towards gender equality” was a summated scale that exhibited an adequate level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .84$ , KMO = .862) and was coded so that lower values corresponded to greater levels of perceived positive attitudes of future police officers.

### 3.4 Analytic Plan

The data collected by the survey were processed in the statistical program SPSS. For the purposes of this study, items (12) related to gender equality and the role of women in the police were subjected to Principal Components Analysis (PCA) using orthogonal (Varimax) rotation, and three components were extracted: “Role and position of women in the Police”, “Attitudes towards violence against women”, and “Attitudes towards gender equality”. These components represent dependent variables in the conducted discriminant analysis. For Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), the sample was divided into male and female respondents from the first and second waves of the survey. Furthermore, a MANOVA was conducted to determine the differences in the set of dependent variables between men and women at the beginning of the education program and the differences between men and women at the end of the educational process. In addition to multivariate analysis of variance, univariate analysis was also conducted for individual components of gender equality.

## 4 Results

In this section, the results of the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) will be presented, the purpose of which is to determine the differences in attitudes toward gender equality between women and men attending the Adult Education Program for the Profession of a Police Officer, before and after the education program at the Police Academy, measured at two points in time. Attitudes towards gender equality were measured through three composite variables (components):

“Role and position of women in the Police”, “Attitudes towards violence against women”, and “Attitudes towards gender equality”.

First, an analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in the attitudes of women and men, police recruits, toward gender equality before the implementation of the educational program. Preliminary analyses were conducted to check the assumptions for the MANOVA analysis, and it was determined that the assumptions of multicollinearity and singularity were not violated. The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient show a small correlation between “Role and position of women in the Police” and “Attitudes towards violence against women” ( $r = .262$ ), and a medium correlation between “Role and position of women in the Police” and “Attitudes towards gender equality” ( $r = .352$ ); “Attitudes towards violence against women” and “Attitudes towards gender equality” ( $r = .388$ ). The results of the mean on the components of gender equality for men and women, shown in Table 2, indicate that women have more positive attitudes about gender equality compared to men in both waves of the survey.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Components of Gender Equality for Men and Women**

Wave of survey		Male		Female	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1st	Role and position of women in the Police	1.42	0.47	1.18	0.30
	Attitudes towards violence against women	1.25	0.34	1.12	0.23
	Attitudes towards gender equality	1.95	0.58	1.51	0.47
2nd	Role and position of women in the Police	1.81	0.63	1.25	0.38
	Attitudes towards violence against women	1.43	0.58	1.14	0.32
	Attitudes towards gender equality	1.97	0.64	1.42	0.51

Regarding the assumption related to the normality of the distribution, it should be noted that Multivariate Analysis of Variance is resistant to moderately impaired normality, and a large number of respondents in each sample ensures robustness. If the sample sizes are different, robustness cannot be assumed, especially if the Box test is significant at  $p < .001$ . However, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggest that if larger samples produce larger variances and covariances, as is the case in this study, then multivariate test probability values will be conservative, so significant findings can be trusted. Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted at the level of three components, which are standardised variables whose distribution approaches a normal distribution.

The first multivariate analysis of variance examined the differences between male and female police recruits’ attitudes toward gender equality at the beginning of the education process for the police profession. Three dependent variables were used in the analysis: “Role and position of women in the Police”, “Attitudes towards violence against women”, and “Attitudes towards gender equality”. A statistically significant difference was found between male and female recruits regarding the combination of dependent variables;  $F(3,732) = 35.404, p < .01; \lambda = 0.873; \eta^2 = .127$  (Table 3). The results indicate that gender explains 12.7% of the variance in attitudes towards gender equality.

**Table 3: Results of Multivariate Test**

Wave of survey	Effect	Pillai’s Trace	Wilks’ Lambda	F	df	p	Partial Eta Squared
1st	Gender	.127	.873	35.40	3	.000	.127

In addition to the Multivariate Analysis of Variance, a univariate analysis of individual variables was also performed. The results of the univariate analysis of variance for individual components, presented in Table 4, show that the differences in the first wave of the survey between men and women are statistically significant on all three variables, with the largest difference observed on the variable “Attitudes towards gender equality” and the smallest on the variable “Attitudes towards violence against women”. The proportion of the variance in the variable “Attitudes towards gender equality” explained by gender is .114, indicating that gender explains 11.4% of the variance in these attitudes. Furthermore, gender explains 4.9% of the variance in attitudes toward the role and position of women in the police and 2.5% of the attitude towards violence against women. According to the results shown in Table 2 (mean and standard deviation), it is evident that in all three areas, the attitudes of female recruits are more positive than those of male recruits.

**Table 4: Results of Univariate Analysis of Variance (1st Wave of Survey)**

Dependent variable	F	df	p	Partial Eta Squared
Role and position of women in the Police	37.52	1	.000	.049
Attitudes towards violence against women	18.61	1	.000	.025
Attitudes towards gender equality	93.72	1	.000	.114

The second Multivariate Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine the differences between men and women at the end of their education. MANOVA was again performed for three variables of attitudes towards gender equality. In the second wave of the survey, a statistically significant difference was found between male and female recruits with the combination of dependent variables;  $F(3,706) = 55.26; p < .01; \lambda = 0.805; \eta^2 = .195$  (Table 5). Gender explains a total of 19.5% of the variance of the dependent variables, indicating a stronger influence of gender on the difference in male and female recruits' attitudes towards gender equality after education compared to before.

**Table 5: Results of Multivariate Test**

Wave of survey	Effect	Pillai's Trace	Wilks' Lambda	F	df	p	Partial Eta Squared
2nd	Gender	.195	.805	55.26	3	.000	.195

After the multivariate analysis of variance, a one-factor analysis of variance was again performed, the results of which are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Results of Univariate Analysis of Variance (2nd Wave of Survey)**

Dependent variable	F	df	p	Partial Eta Squared
Role and position of women in the Police	115.36	1	.000	.149
Attitudes towards violence against women	35.13	1	.000	.047
Attitudes towards gender equality	84.37	1	.000	.130

In the second wave of the survey, conducted at the end of the educational process, statistically significant differences were again found on all three composite variables. However, the largest difference between men and women was observed on the variable "Role and position of women in the Police" ( $F(1) = 115.36; p < .01; \eta^2 = .149$ ), followed by "Attitudes towards gender equality" ( $F(1) = 84.37; p < .01; \eta^2 = .130$ ), while the smallest difference, as in the first wave of the survey, was on the variable "Attitudes towards violence against women" ( $F(1) = 35.13; p < .01; \eta^2 = .047$ ). These differences in attitudes in the second wave of the survey again show that, in all three areas, the attitudes of women are more positive than the attitudes of male police recruits.

The research confirms that after the eleven-month training as part of the Adult Education Program for the profession of a police officer, there were greater differences between men and women in attitudes towards gender equality than those that existed at the beginning of their education. The results show that women's attitudes are generally more positive than the attitudes of their male counterparts.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study showed some unexpected results. Differences in attitudes of male and female recruits towards gender equality increased after their basic police education, with the biggest change occurring in attitudes towards the role and position of women in the police organisation. Basic police training in Croatia is carried out in such a way that future police officers acquire the necessary knowledge in law enforcement and the use of force, and the education is strongly focused on physical fitness and strength, which are segments of police work characterised as exclusively male. Such education could cause future female police officers to feel more segregated and not to belong in the police organisation, thus creating a more negative image of their role and position in the police.

Differences can also be explained by narrowly focused education and socialisation in the police culture, which is characterised as male-dominated. Male police officers have been found to create a sexualised work environment to ensure the survival of male dominance (Shelley et al., 2011). The results of this study showed that the differences in male and female recruits' attitudes towards gender equality, which existed at the beginning, increased even more after the completion of the education process and all the activities and interactions that this process includes. It is not possible to determine precisely what caused the increase in differences the most: the process of education that included continuous stay (24/7) at the Police Academy, classroom education, practical exercises, peer interaction, interaction with teachers and instructors, and/or internship in police stations. To determine the separate connection between education and changes in the attitudes of police recruits, a research design should include experimental and control groups of recruits, which was not possible in this study due to a predefined, unique curriculum for all participants.



When it comes to attitudes about violence against women, the research showed concerning results. The attitudes of male police recruits are slightly more negative than those of female police recruits. Although these differences are small, they are still statistically significant. Police officers around the world generally show conservative attitudes about domestic violence and violence against women (Ashlock, 2019; Gölge et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Serrano-Montilla et al., 2023). Research in Turkey has shown that police officers are more tolerant of physical and verbal violence toward women in the family than judicial officials and are less supportive of the idea of a woman leaving such a family. Similarly, research has shown that male police officers are more tolerant of violence against women than female police officers (Gölge et al., 2016). In fact, studies have shown that police officers' attitudes about violence against women and domestic violence are influenced by socialisation in the police culture (Fleming et al., 2021) as well as broader cultural and social stereotypes surrounding gender-based violence (Garza & Franklin, 2021). The fact that future police officers begin their socialisation into the police culture at the very beginning of their education and conduct two months of internship can explain the changed attitudes of male recruits, supported by the aforementioned evidence and research results.

Basic police education in Croatia aligns with the majority of international recommendations and best practices. In general, the attitudes of future police officers, both male and female, towards gender equality are positive. Practical training, working on projects, and solving problems of the most sensitive and vulnerable groups of citizens (e.g., victims of gender-based violence) can be integrated into the educational process. Additionally, the positive impact of sharing knowledge and experience on the importance of women's role in the police during education has been noted (Chu et al., 2020). This helps to increase their self-confidence and promotes full integration. On the other hand, when recruiting and selecting new candidates, special attention should be paid to minority representatives, including women, so that the police organisation becomes as close as possible to a "mirror" of the society in which it operates.

This research has several limitations. The first limitation could be connected to socially desirable answers. Miles-Johnson and Pickering (2018) suggest that research on police recruits' attitudes, such as this one, could be subject to providing socially desirable or acceptable answers because police recruits are focused on performing

well and motivated to achieve the best possible results. Additionally, it should be pointed out that the statements used to measure attitudes about gender equality are formulated negatively and can be considered a measure of gender inequality in a certain way.

Future research should explore the role of other socio-demographic variables of police recruits in shaping differences in attitudes on gender issues, as well as how further socialisation into police culture affects changes in attitudes on gender equality issues. This research should especially consider the immediate work environment and professional experience of police officers.

Police reforms and new policing models demand greater integration of women into the organisation. Such reforms require additional education of police officers, clear transmission of organisational values and new rules to all police officers, and consistent implementation of new policies, primarily by police leaders, and then by every individual officer. Considering that the expected changes imply new organisational values and policies, it is necessary to develop a new police culture that encourages the adoption of positive attitudes about gender equality. For police organisations, it is essential that new police officers have the right attitudes and values and behave according to organisational principles because they are crucial for the future of the police organisation (Karp & Stenmark, 2011). Therefore, the attitudes of future male and female police officers toward gender equality, violence against women, and the role of women in the police are exceptionally important.

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