Article

Superwoman in the Security Field: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Female Security Guards

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Abstract

The study investigates the lived experiences and challenges of female security guards in Bulacan, highlighting their significant role in the security sector and the broader context of gender equality. Through in-depth interviews with fifteen female security guards, the research reveals key themes such as the considerable personal sacrifices made by these women, many of whom are single mothers, who navigate demanding 12-hour shifts while striving to maintain family connections. Despite their essential contributions, findings indicate they often receive minimum wage, may lack awareness of available benefits like hazard pay, and prioritize timely salary payments. The study also documents persistent discrimination from clients and colleagues, which can undermine their recognized value in providing empathy and a nuanced understanding of security. The research advocates for implementing targeted support systems and inclusive policies aimed at enhancing workplace conditions, ensuring fair compensation, and fostering greater recognition of the unique contributions of female security guards. The study underscores the potential to empower these women by addressing these issues, thereby contributing to community stability and promoting gender equality in the workforce.

Keywords: *Career, Challenges, Experiences, Gender Equality, Opportunities, Security Guard, Women*

Introduction

Mental tranquility is of utmost importance, with security being a fundamental objective for individuals, as indicated by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Security encompasses various elements, including personal assets, family, financial stability, and the psychological and physical assurance of safety. In the context of businesses and organizations, management needs to ensure patrons' and employees' health and safety. Security personnel are tasked with protecting property and individuals, often at significant personal risk, underscoring the necessity for legal protections to ensure their safety and prevent exploitation by employers.

Over the past fifty years, the societal role of women has undergone considerable transformation across various sectors. Fields historically dominated by men have gradually opened to women, allowing them to demonstrate their capabilities as equals. This evolution is evident in diverse roles, including female tricycle drivers, factory workers, and police officers. The presence of female security officers in shopping centers, distribution facilities, and other venues is also increasingly common. However, women continue to encounter numerous challenges in pursuing equality and competence in the workplace. Significant shifts have occurred in women's roles within the home, where they traditionally provide familial care, and in broader societal sectors like business, government, and the private sector, including the security industry. Despite these advancements, the security field remains largely male-dominated; Farley (2021) notes that only 9% of security officers are female. Compounding this, women in security often face disparities; for instance, in the United States, women earn less than their male counterparts, and 64% of women in security report experiencing workplace bullying (Frost and Sullivan, 2017). This issue extends to the Philippines, where male security guards earn approximately 15% more than their female colleagues, as reported by Salary Explorer in 2022.

Despite the limited number of women in the security industry, it is recognized that female security personnel provide valuable insights and address unique security needs, particularly for women, children, and older people. Female guards are often perceived as more approachable and less intimidating, possessing a greater capacity for peaceful conflict resolution. Nevertheless, they continue to encounter various challenges that require attention and resolution. Consequently, this study aims to assess the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of female security guards in Bulacan, focusing on their relational and career significance. The research posits that women can effectively demonstrate their skills and make meaningful contributions to peacekeeping efforts by promoting a diverse workforce.

The study is grounded in the Theory of Change, which was popularized by Carol Weiss in the 1990s, mainly through her work on program evaluation. This theory is also utilized as a framework for planning social change initiatives (Gadsgen et al., 2024). It is particularly relevant to the study's objectives, emphasizing that promoting gender equality and empowering women in the security sector can significantly benefit the women involved and the overall effectiveness and public perception of security services. By incorporating more female security personnel, organizations can leverage their unique attributes, such as compassion and approachability, which are crucial for fostering a safer environment for diverse groups, including women, children, and older people. The study's focus on the experiences and challenges faced by female security guards aligns to create a more equitable workplace, ultimately contributing to peacekeeping and community stability. By adopting targeted support systems and inclusive policies, organizations can cultivate a more balanced and effective security workforce, showcasing the positive effects of gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Related Literature

Historically, women have encountered considerable obstacles when entering predominantly male careers. Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) explained that Western countries show that legislative actions, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 in the U.S. and similar laws in Europe, were pivotal moments for achieving gender equality in the workplace. Moreover, Parmaxi et al. (2021) stated that organizational policies that foster diversity and inclusion have played a significant role in boosting female representation in STEM fields, with women now making up about 28% of the workforce in these areas, an increase from 8% in the 1970s. These initiatives established mentorship programs and professional development that aided women's career progression in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

In the Philippines, Manebo et al. (2024) indicate that despite cultural barriers, Filipino women have made notable progress in fields once dominated by men. Their study reveals that women now hold 35% of executive roles in Philippine companies, exceeding the global average of 29%. Nonetheless, challenges remain, especially in engineering and technology. Local efforts, such as the Women's Empowerment Act and various NGO-led initiatives, have been crucial in fostering more inclusive workplace environments and offering opportunities for professional advancement (Regalado, 2024).

In terms of the security sector, men have historically dominated it. However, the role and significance of female security guards have notably increased in recent

decades. The inclusion of women in security positions gained traction during World War II when they took on roles typically occupied by men (Staab et al., 2024). Research shows that female security personnel are becoming more common across various industries, including corporate security, retail, and government facilities (Andrade, 2022). Vasko (2024) highlights that female security officers often possess unique skills, such as improved communication and de-escalation techniques.

Meanwhile, Dewanto et al. (2023) emphasized that female security guards tend to excel in specific situations where their presence is particularly beneficial, such as in gender-sensitive security screenings, managing incidents involving female suspects or victims, customer service-focused security roles, and surveillance and loss prevention. These specialized skills have increased the demand for female security personnel in various sectors. Likewise, in the Philippines, there has been a consistent increase in female participation in the security industry. Yuzon-Chaves (cited by the Philippine Commission on Women, 2023) reported that 795 female officers and 3,777 women soldiers, including battalion commanders, make a huge impact and create more spaces for women in the security sector. These statistics indicate that female security personnel, usually seen in shopping malls, retail establishments, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and corporate settings, are especially valued.

Unfortunately, female security guards encounter challenges that reflect the broader issues women face in male-dominated fields. According to Smith and Sinkford (2022), women in security roles often deal with gender-based stereotypes, doubts about their physical abilities, and implicit biases from both coworkers and the public. These difficulties are exacerbated by organizational cultures that traditionally influence masculine norms and expectations. Angehrn et al. (2021) highlight that female security guards often face "double-standard scrutiny," where their competence is questioned despite having equal or even superior qualifications compared to their male peers. Furthermore, Stephens (2024) shared that women in security positions frequently feel pressured to demonstrate their physical capabilities, even though modern security work primarily relies on technological skills and interpersonal communication rather than physical confrontations. O'Reilly (2015) suggests that organizations that adopt targeted support systems and inclusive policies have seen positive outcomes in retaining female security personnel. The existing research indicates that companies with robust mentorship programs and gender-sensitive policies could increase female security staff's job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. Additionally, organizations may benefit from diverse perspectives in security strategies, as female security guards often exhibit better de-escalation skills and community engagement. These findings are consistent with broader studies on

women in male-dominated sectors, emphasizing that organizational support and cultural change are essential for fostering more equitable work environments.

Methodology

The study employs narrative inquiry and a phenomenological approach as its primary research methodologies, aiming to uncover and articulate the lived experiences of female security guards in Bulacan. Narrative inquiry focuses on enabling participants to convey their life experiences through comprehensive and detailed accounts, as noted by De Marco (2020). In parallel, phenomenological research seeks to explore the daily experiences of the female security guards, facilitating a deeper understanding of their social realities, as highlighted by Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) regarding the adaptability of qualitative research in elucidating aspects of human social experience. Additionally, the researchers utilized structured interviews to collect information from the participants. These interviews aim to explore the respondents' experiences, perceptions, opinions, or motivations (Deakin University, 2023). The interview guide was developed based on relevant literature and studies, and experts reviewed the questions for refinement and enhancement. Following these modifications, the instrument was submitted for validation.

The study involved fifteen (15) female security guards with at least two (2) years of experience. The researchers utilized non-probability sampling techniques, precisely convenience and purposive sampling, to select the participants. As Etikan et al. (2015) explain, convenience sampling is a non-random sampling method where individuals are included based on practical criteria such as accessibility, geographic location, availability, or willingness to participate. In this research, convenience sampling was chosen due to the availability of female guards. Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to identify those who specifically met the criteria of having worked as security guards in Bulacan for at least two (2) years. Palinkas (2015) indicates that purposive sampling is often employed in qualitative research to focus on specific traits within a population. This combination of sampling methods ensured that the participants were pertinent to the study's aims and offered valuable insights into their lived experiences.

The recordings from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method, as described by Braun and Clarke (as cited by Mihas, 2023), involves a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process typically includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The use of

thematic analysis is relevant to the study as it aids in organizing and clearly articulating the lived experiences of the female security guards.

Ethical considerations for the research included obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring that their personal information would remain confidential and not be used for purposes outside the study. The researchers clarified that participation was voluntary and that respondents could withdraw at any time without any repercussions. Additionally, the interviews were recorded only with the participants' consent, and measures were taken to protect the anonymity of the respondents during data analysis and reporting. These ethical practices were essential to uphold the research's integrity and respect the rights and dignity of the security guards involved in the study.

Results and Discussion

Relational Significance

Lack of Time. In today's fast-paced society, individuals face difficulties in managing their time. Achieving a balance between work and personal life can be particularly tough, especially for those in demanding jobs with extended hours. For female security guards, the primary challenge related to their families is the lack of time due to their 12-hour shifts. They struggle to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers, which hampers their ability to connect with their families. Many of them sacrifice significant amounts of time to make ends meet and often find themselves too exhausted to meet the needs of their loved ones. They typically leave home early and return late at night. As stated by the informants:

LG 2: "I struggle with not having enough time for my family. I leave for work early, leave my children without assistance, and come home late at night when they are already asleep. Our job as guards requires us to work 12-hour shifts."

LG 5: "My work takes away time from my children. I'm trying my best to provide them a good life."

LG 7: "I often can't care for them anymore; I have no time because our shifts are 12 hours long, which creates a significant gap in my family life, making being a female security guard quite sad."

LG 10: "I've lost the opportunity to call my family back in Mindanao because I'm exhausted from standing all day, and getting a day off can be challenging due to staff shortages. Being a female guard

is tough, especially during emergencies when I can't return home to my family quickly."

LG 11: "Sometimes, it's unavoidable to lose time with my family and husband, especially when we're understaffed and working long hours... but we still manage to understand each other."

LG 15: "There's a lot of miscommunications; we no longer have time to talk. Our conversations have become superficial; we chat instead of having meaningful discussions like we used to. I eat, sleep, and use my phone when I get home. There's no real conversation about how we are, or if we're tired, and since my child is far away, I have no idea what they are doing."

Women globally face more significant challenges in securing employment compared to men. When they do find work, it is often in low-quality, unsafe, or demanding roles, which exacerbates the gender gap. The ability to work in environments that uphold dignity, safety, and fairness is crucial for human welfare (International Labour Organization, 2017). Security guards typically endure long working hours, with benefits varying based on their permanent, temporary, or part-time employment status. In the Philippines, the government permits 12-hour shifts for security personnel due to their rotating schedules. However, these extended hours and limited job opportunities for women lead to personal sacrifices, particularly regarding family time. According to Wise Family Group (2023), insufficient time spent together results in superficial conversations among family members, which can diminish family values such as affection, empathy, understanding, and shared activities. This aligns with Aydin's (2017) findings that long shifts disrupt social and family life.

Time Management. Effective time management is crucial due to the extended hours spent at work. It can enhance productivity, help meet deadlines sooner, and alleviate workplace stress. In personal life, it supports goal achievement, relaxation, and increased quality time with loved ones. While managing time effectively can be difficult, it is particularly vital for female security guards as it enables them to fulfill their family responsibilities and household tasks. As noted by the informants:

LG 1: "I can only do the household chores once I get home."

LG 3: "It doesn't impact our relationship; it's just a matter of adjusting to the time. I take care of my responsibilities at night."

LG 6: "On my day off, I clean the house, give baths to the dogs and cats, and prepare meals for my parents."

In today's world, being constantly busy has become the norm. Striking a balance between work and personal life can often be more complicated than it appears, and the best approach to achieving this balance can differ for each individual and family due to their unique circumstances (Emadi, 2018). Security guards are primarily responsible for safeguarding property, staff, and customers, ranging from mere presence to responding to incidents like robberies and assaults and maintaining peace and order (Hemalatha, 2022). This is also true for female security guards, who must understand their responsibilities to ensure the safety of what they protect. Similarly, as women, they must safeguard their families, which results in them juggling two significant responsibilities: excelling in their professional roles and fulfilling their family obligations.

Personal Sacrifices. A notable finding in the study is that many respondents are single mothers. A significant factor in this situation is the amount of time they can spend with their loved ones. When there is a mismatch between workplace demands and an individual's capacity to fulfill personal responsibilities, sacrifices are made. These sacrifices can be made to support others or to achieve specific goals. A personal sacrifice refers to what someone gives up, whether it is something substantial or something minor and temporary.

LG 1: "As I mentioned, I have been a single mother since 1999 and continue to be one."

LG 9: "I take on my responsibilities as a mother and solo parent to my three kids, doing my utmost to support them."

LG 14: "I have been separated from my husband since I started working as a female security guard."

The working conditions of female security guards have resulted in various negative consequences. Female security guards experience high stress levels, face numerous challenges, and often feel unhappy with their jobs and compensation. Despite their hard work, they remain dissatisfied with their earnings. Female security guards encounter more significant occupational stress than their male counterparts, as they struggle more to balance work and family responsibilities. This imbalance leads to difficulties not only in their professional lives but also in their relationships (Kiran and Nisha, 2015).

Career Significance

Risky Job. Working as a security guard is inherently risky. Guards face various dangers, including violence, firearms, hazardous materials, and accidents, while performing their duties to protect people and property. Shaw (2018) noted that security guards often lack representation in economic communities and may be unaware of their rights regarding on-the-job injuries. The informants expressed similar concerns:

LG 1: "I can say that being a female security guard or security guard is comparable to being a police officer or soldier, as we are always on duty with no days off or holidays."

LG 4: "As a security guard, sacrifice and the risk of danger are ingrained in us. We must take care of those we are responsible for."

LG 6: "Working 12-hour shifts is risky and challenging."

LG 7: "As a guard, I monitor all the property of my employer and ensure their safety, protecting them as a security guard."

LG 9: "Being a security guard is a significant sacrifice, especially when faced with accidents or theft; safety is always the priority. It can be frustrating when you have to reprimand employees, but what I appreciate most is when people recognize your efforts, even in small ways, whether they are employees or customers."

Security personnel are a ubiquitous, often unnoticed, part of the infrastructure supporting daily life, involved in tasks from checking baggage to verifying identities and interacting with a public that may respond with varying degrees of engagement (Wiatrowski, 2012). A secure work environment is crucial for business success, and security guards are vital in providing this safety. Thus, it is critical for guards to be aware of the risks they face and to take protective measures. Employers must prioritize employee health and safety, which can save lives, enhance productivity, and lower costs. According to Jonathan and Mbogo (2016), a safe working environment positively influences employees' behaviors and productivity, enabling female security guards to perform their duties effectively.

Gender Equality. In a rapidly evolving world, women increasingly forge their opportunities, recognizing that these are earned through effort rather than given. Many respondents challenge societal norms, driven by a desire to demonstrate equality with men and by economic necessity. This pursuit is often a pathway to a better life, a sentiment the female security guards echoed.

LG 1: "I can say that anything men can do, women can also do."

LG 3: "There's no difference; the responsibilities of male and female security guards are the same, only the gender differs."

LG 5: "Some people believe that women lack the capability of male guards, but our work is equal; whatever men can do, we can do too."

LG 10: "While men may be physically stronger, women can accomplish the same tasks. In this profession, men tend to dominate."

LG 13: "As a woman, I can confidently say I am strong."

LG 15: "Nowadays, there is equality; we can perform the same tasks as men or even surpass them, and they can do what we do. It comes down to understanding between men and women, although the Bible states that women should submit to men."

Despite prevalent gender discrimination narratives highlighted on social media, where traditional roles often confine women to domestic tasks and men as primary breadwinners, the current feminist era sees women capably performing tasks traditionally assigned to men. Women are no longer universally viewed as weak and can excel in roles such as female security guards. White (2020) notes an often-overlooked issue regarding women's participation in the security sector, where some women actively address gender issues while others seek equal treatment alongside male colleagues. The female security guards in Bulacan largely expressed confidence in their roles and responsibilities, perceiving a degree of gender equality in their profession. Their ability to perform these roles effectively challenges traditional gender paradigms in labor, particularly within a male-dominated field.

Personal Development. The female security guards asserted that they perform their duties honestly and diligently, sometimes perceiving themselves as more so than their male counterparts. They clearly understood their responsibilities and committed to working with warmth, concern, trustworthiness, and dependability. These qualities are often cited as reasons for preferring female security guards.

LG 2: "As a female security guard, my responsibility is to fulfill my duties and protect the company I work for."

LG 3: "I conduct observations at my post, take over responsibilities from the outgoing night shift guard, monitor my area,

and assist VIP personnel. This role fosters self-discipline, particularly in how I interact with others."

LG 5: "The role of a female security guard involves overseeing her assigned area. In my position, I concentrate on monitoring the entry and exit of employees at the entrance, including conducting employee checks and body frisking."

LG 6: "I expand my network, make new friends among fellow guards, and most importantly, learn about the responsibilities of being a guard."

LG 7: "As female security guards, we have the advantage of holding a license, allowing us to apply for guard positions anytime and anywhere."

LG 8: "My role as a guard benefits my family, myself, and our community by providing security in our markets."

Some female security guards derive enjoyment from their roles, maintaining a positive outlook despite the routine nature of the work. They use their positions to expand networks and build confidence. While striving for gender equality involves asserting equal capability in shared tasks, personal development in this context relates to individual growth, skill acquisition (like self-discipline and networking), and professional identity cultivated through performing their duties. According to the WeAreTechWomen Team (2020), female security guards often work alongside male colleagues, addressing situations on equal terms. While the physical presence of male officers can deter threats, not all female guards possess the same physical attributes. However, women in these roles can excel at responding to situations and resolving conflicts effectively without physical confrontation, demonstrating a different, yet equally valuable, skill set. This capacity for non-confrontational resolution and responsible conduct reflects a key aspect of their professional development and contribution.

Issues and Challenges

Discrimination. Sefalafala (2012) notes that security guards are often among the most exploited, oppressed, and vulnerable workers. Their work is marked by precarious conditions filled with tension, uncertainty, and significant insecurity. Many individuals perceive them as if they are paying for their services, overlooking that security guards are also human beings. They sometimes face similar treatment from their coworkers, who fail to provide the necessary support for adjustment.

LG 3: "People who take advantage of others."

LG 5: "Yes, mistakes do happen sometimes."

LG 8: "Stubborn employees and customers require constant vigilance due to missing items; the responsibility falls on the guard, especially during sudden influxes of customers when careful observation is essential."

LG 9: "It's tough. There are rude individuals and customers. Sometimes, it can be frightening, as they might suddenly grab you, and everyone, including the managers, is watching."

LG 12: "Yes, I've been questioned, especially since I'm older. People seem to think, 'You're old; why are you still working as a guard?' Wealthy customers often act superior, as if they are above others. They look at you and make gestures that imply disdain. When their bags are checked, they often ask, 'Are you sure?'"

It can be observed that female security guards frequently encounter discrimination and harassment in the workplace. These obstacles can hinder their ability to perform their duties effectively, as they are responsible for ensuring their safety, the people they protect, and the property under their care against potential threats and dangers. To execute their roles efficiently, female security guards must meet their physiological, economic, and social needs as they take on this challenging responsibility.

Coping Mechanisms

Patience and Calmness. In any security situation, the security guards must always practice maximum tolerance. Their patience and calmness must always be put into practice. Many male security guards have a physical presence, which is advantageous in avoiding threats, but not all ladies are built similarly. Women may not be the same size or have the same physical strength as men, but women can be more adept at reacting to situations. Many people test their patience and provoke them, as stated by the informants,

LG 1: "Calmly engage with them. Remind them to adhere to the company's rules and regulations and avoid getting into arguments."

LG 5: "Minimize errors, think critically, explore new ideas, and seek advice from others."

> LG 8: "It's essential to remain calm; maintaining focus is crucial for us, along with being alert in our actions and communicating properly."

> LG 9: "I strive to do my utmost to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to me."

According to Farley (2022), there is a critical need for female security officers in the field. Women constitute 50% of the population and have specific security needs that require female protection in spaces designated for women. The presence of male security personnel in areas such as bathrooms, dressing rooms, and changing rooms can cause discomfort and fear among women. Therefore, female security officers are preferred and essential in these environments, particularly for pat-downs and body searches. Women, children, and young people often find female security personnel less intimidating and more approachable, which helps create a more comfortable atmosphere for them.

Support and Assistance Received

According to Pinzo and Rosel (n.d), security officers are allowed three days off every fifteen days. Their employment benefits include a clothing allowance, double pay on legal holidays, and a 30% bonus on Sundays and special holidays. Additionally, the 13th month's pay should be automatically included in the guards' monthly salaries. Most security agencies comply with legally mandated benefits, such as contributions to the Social Security System (SSS), PhilHealth, and PAG-IBIG, to ensure fair pay and treatment. However, some security firms do not follow these government regulations despite them being legally required. As one female security guard noted, "It depends on the agency. Some agencies do not provide benefits, like not contributing to SSS and PAG-IBIG." On a positive note, all the interviewed female security guards receive their 13th-month pay, as law mandates. The female security guards also indicated that bonuses vary based on the company's willingness to provide them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As global society progresses towards gender equality, barriers are diminishing, fostering more balanced rights and opportunities across genders. The female security guards in Bulacan are participants in these societal shifts. However, this study reveals that, for many, working as a female security guard in the province is driven more by economic necessity than solely by the pursuit of equality. These women dedicate

substantial time to their work, often sacrificing valuable moments with loved ones and attention to household responsibilities. A notable consequence of these demanding conditions is that many of the interviewed female security guards are single mothers.

The findings indicate that female security guards bring a unique perspective to their roles, often being perceived as more approachable and less intimidating than their male counterparts. This perception, while beneficial in many interactions, can unfortunately be exploited by some individuals, leading to experiences of discrimination. Overall, the study affirms that female security guards are invaluable assets to the security sector due to their inherent qualities of compassion, interpersonal connection, and understanding. They also play a crucial role in fostering peace and stability within society. Empowering women enables them to contribute positively to their families and communities, which can aid in reducing poverty, enhancing education and healthcare outcomes, and promoting peace and security. Consequently, women's empowerment is vital for creating a better future. This study contributes to understanding women's roles and challenges in the security sector.

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that Local Government Units consider initiatives to assist security guards in receiving fair and just compensation. While the study suggests that most security agencies in Bulacan comply with legal standards for benefits, some do not appear to do so. Therefore, it is suggested that relevant authorities inspect these agencies to ensure all security guards receive their entitled benefits, such as SSS, PhilHealth, and PAG-IBIG contributions.

It was also noted that female security guards generally receive no additional benefits beyond those mandated by law. Considering the inherent risks they face in protecting people and properties, as highlighted in the "Risky Job" theme, providing hazard pay would be a reasonable measure. The female security guards themselves indicated that a salary increase commensurate with their 12-hour shifts would be highly valued. Working as a female security guard is challenging due to the nature of the job. Although there is a demand for private security, the current pay is often low and inadequate to support a family, a particular hardship for the single mothers identified in this role. Addressing these compensation and benefits issues is crucial for these essential personnel's well-being and fair treatment.

Finally, the researchers acknowledge certain limitations in this study. For instance, a triangulation method could enhance the representation of perspectives from local government units (LGUs) and security agencies, providing a more comprehensive understanding.

Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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