

FEMALE INSPECTOR FOCUS

Women's Month

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FEMALE LIQUOR INSPECTOR

There are countless career fields known to be male dominated, and the Liquor Inspector is no exception. To commemorate Women's Month in August 2021 the Western Cape Liquor Authority (WCLA) pays tribute to the female Inspectors in its ranks.

These women continue to overcome the gender barrier in law enforcement daily, despite unspoken social constraints encountered along the way. It is important to share their experience of forging lasting, reputable careers as women in law enforcement.

The Liquor Inspectors of the WCLA perform an essential role in monitoring and enforcing compliance of licensed premises in the province according to the provisions of the Western Cape Liquor Act. All while driving alcohol harms reduction and creating safer communities for residents living in the Western Cape.

When business owners choose to legally trade in a regulated substance (alcohol), their liquor licence conditions along with the relevant legislation provide the required operational guidelines of the business.

The job of a Liquor Inspector is strenuous.

Firstly, you are required to have practical experience and background knowledge in law enforcement. Secondly, you must be a walking encyclopedia when it comes to the Western Cape Liquor Act. Both of these attributes are the backbone of the Liquor Inspector's job. Out in the field, Inspectors depend heavily on experience and knowledge when conducting compliance inspections in locations that may be high-risk crime areas in the Western Cape.

From 1 April 2021 until 18 August 2021, eight female Liquor Inspectors conducted 330 routine inspections across various district municipalities. In addition, they participated in 99 integrated operations. These joint operations with the South African Police Service (SAPS) and local Law Enforcement are essential in strengthening relations between relevant agencies working side by side to ensure responsible trading by licence holders.

The two women profiled in this feature share more than 13 years of experience working as Liquor Inspectors and they have seen it all. Due to the nature of enforcement and the safety of our inspectors, all identification has been removed from this article. However, the information they have shared is accurate and relevant, while being their own opinion and not that of the WCLA.

1. Name one misconception about female inspectors that you have experienced?

Female Inspector 1: That females won't be able to handle the fast pace or pressure of being a liquor inspector as much as our male colleagues. Especially when it comes to the type of work we do on a daily basis. Even though it can be dangerous, the risk remains the same for both male and female liquor inspectors alike.

2. Of all the premises you have inspected in your career, how many do you estimate were a male licence holder versus a female licence holder?

Female Inspector 1: Based on the inspections I have conducted, 90% of the premises is owned by males. The experience would however be somewhat the same. There were many challenges depending on a variety of factors. Some licence holders would be very friendly while others remain difficult to work with based on a previous negative engagement they might have had. At times, I may be disrespected as a liquor inspector but I've learned to take it in my stride – after all it comes with the territory of the job.

Female Inspector 2: I have been a liquor inspector for almost 10 years and in my experience being in the field all these years both male and female licence holders have always been polite and co-operative.



3. What are the challenges you face in the field when conducting an inspection as females in a male dominated world?

Female Inspector 1: Depending on the area and time the inspection should be conducted, one needs to consider whether it is safe to enter that specific area. The fact that our job requires us to work hand-in-hand with external agencies, it is not always possible to enter certain areas when law enforcement agencies are absent. Access to important information is also a challenge when third parties are not willing to share that information with us.

Female Inspector 2: I conduct inspections by myself and safety is a priority for me. I won't work alone in a high crime ridden area without the assistance of SAPS or Law Enforcement. Safety comes first!

4. What words of encouragement would you give potential female entrepreneurs interested in opening a liquor outlet?

Female Inspector 1: Seeing that we're living in a so called male dominated world, females should just take the challenges as they come and have the relevant beliefs, willpower and goals in wanting to obtain something. Hard work and dedication are also key.

Female Inspector 2: Apply for a liquor license if you wish to be in the industry. Opportunities are there for females to start any kind of business.

5. What are the most frequent questions received from licence holders when you are conducting routine inspections?

Female Inspector 1: Whether we have been to "other" areas as well, and whether they have done something wrong. We are also challenged a lot when it comes to certain requests in terms of the Liquor Act. Many of these licence holders do not take cognisance of or read through the Liquor Act in order to stay informed.

6. What is the most fulfilling aspect of your job?

Female Inspector 1: What fulfills me is to be able to do my work and go home to my family. Especially during the times that we are facing now. The co-operation from other stakeholders is also seen as a fulfilment when we're faced with specific challenges.

Female Inspector 2: For me it is that I'm not office based. Everyday I'm out in the field in a different area and meeting new people.

7. What are the day-to-day operations involved for a liquor inspector?

Female Inspector 1: The day-to-day operations would be normal routine inspections, lots of administrative duties and working with other external agencies. Sometimes these operations are unplanned and immediate "action" needs to be taken in that instance.

Female Inspector 2: My daily function is conducting Routine Compliance Inspections at all the various Licensed premises in the Western Cape Province.

8. Being a female inspector, do you think the job affects you differently than your male colleagues?

Female Inspector 1: I would not really say that. In terms of stats we are all measured on the same level and the hard work and effort is totally dependent on the individual regardless of the gender.

Female Inspector 2: Yes, I am married with a young daughter, so I need to juggle my family responsibilities with my working responsibilities, if I need to work on a Saturday or at night or away from home, I need to get a baby-sitter to look after my daughter. My male colleagues do not have this challenge and added stress.

9. What words of advice would you give a female interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement?

Female Inspector 1: She needs to be assertive when necessary, do not be intimidated at all. And work hard.

Female Inspector 2: If it's what you want to do, Go for it Lady!!

10. How has the pandemic had an impact on the daily operations of liquor inspectors?

Female Inspector 1: The pandemic has at times made it very difficult to stick to planning, because it sometimes involves external role players, and it also makes specific monitoring difficult.

Female Inspector 2: The Covid-19 Pandemic has been a challenge. I am mostly working from home now and I do not see my colleagues as much as before.

