

What gendered title should be used to address or talk about a female lawyer?

The weight of female professional names

March 31, 2023

Gendered language suggests that also many names of professions have recently been adapted to be used for women. However, research shows that there are still setbacks and prejudices in this regard.

If you needed professional advice on a legal matter, would you be more likely to turn to lawyer that uses for herself the **masculine or the feminine form** of the word lawyer?

A recent [study](#) conducted by Trento-based *Fondazione Bruno Kessler's* [IRVAPP](#) research center, investigated to what extent the feminine declension of the professional title affects perceptions of a professional's competence and showed that the **feminine title leads to lower consideration by colleagues and potential clients.**

The study, commissioned by the [Equal Opportunities Committee of the Bar Association of Rovereto](#), involved a sample of about **250 male and female professionals** from Trentino. Respondents to the survey analyzed a series of scenarios where, in a hypothetical situation of need, they were asked to indicate the likelihood with which they would approach certain professional figures (lawyer, accountant, physician), whose professional titles and a set of characteristics (such as gender, age, experience etc.) were indicated. For female lawyers, either male or female titles were used. In this way, the research team was able to answer this question: **being all other conditions the same, how likely are people to seek assistance from a lawyer who uses the male title against one that uses the female title?**

The **results** of the study show that the impact of female declension is huge: **presenting a profile as a lawyer with the female title weighs (negatively) as much as presenting one with 10 years less experience.** This effect is particularly negative for younger female professionals and lawyers with less experience, or without special characteristics, such as being part of a law firm or having passed the advocate before higher court exam.

These results offer an explanation for why many women continue to prefer the male lawyer title in the various legal professions, even if now most figures in the field are women. For example, **in the Province of Trento, only 15% of women use the feminine title**. The female professional title continues to be associated with a negative stereotype and leads to a lower competence perception. These data indicate that **to encourage the use of the female title**, the grammatically correct one, it is essential to **take into account the associated cost** for professionals. Based on this analysis, the [study](#) suggests a potential role of public policy interventions, at the professional or administrative level, that be aimed at raising awareness of the correct use of gendered language and at reducing the stereotype and cost associated with the female title.

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AUTHORS

- Alessandro Tondini