

# Gender Disparities at Work over the Lifecourse: Are Women Less Satisfied with the Main Job of Their Working Career?

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## Abstract

Within the strand of the literature related to gender differences in job satisfaction a substantial part of the studies consistently proves higher levels of satisfaction with the currently performed job among women. This phenomenon is observed for a broad spectrum of countries, even when controlling for an extensive set of usual confounders. What is important from the perspective of this study, previous analysis concentrated solely on satisfaction with the job one has at the time of responding to the respective survey. This means that an important part of the working age population was not covered by them - those out of work at that certain time, which typically is a much bigger share of female than male working-age population. Using data from the retrospective part of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), we take a closer look at the working histories of individuals from 28 European countries. The main advantage of this study is a possibility to evaluate job satisfaction with the main job of one's working career for a more complete pool of workers - all individuals who ever worked during their lives. Leveraging this advantage we find that overall women are in fact less satisfied with the main jobs of their working careers than men. We argue that this result is likely driven by regional specificities related to gender norms prevailing in certain societies.

## Extended Abstract

### Motivation for Research

Contrary to astonishingly consistent findings on the gender pay gap, the literature on gender differences in job satisfaction provides far less than a consensus. If anything and since the earliest interests in the topic, the studies focused on gender differences in satisfaction with job observed higher levels of satisfaction among women, even after controlling for an extensive set of confounders that typically allow for a reasonable comparison of two workers with the same level of education, working experience, occupation and salary, who differ only in their gender ([Hodson, 1989, Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2003]). The seminal article in this strand of literature was published in year 1997 by professor Andrew Clark, who provided extensive evidence of the existence of the job satisfaction gap in favour of women, explaining this phenomenon with a theory of differential expectations. According to his rationale, since women in the past were less active in the labour market as compared to men, they hold lower expectations regarding their jobs than their male counterparts and thus are more satisfied with the jobs of the same conditions ([Clark, 1997]).

Some later studies challenge this concept through the examination of a broader spectrum of countries (Clark's work focuses solely on the UK), and the important developments that happened in the European labour markets in the late 1990s and early 2000s ([Kaiser, 2007, Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000, Green et al., 2018, Perugini and Vladisavljević, 2019]). While the first three of the mentioned articles deliver mixed results, the last one confirms Clark's hypoth-

esis, providing robust evidence that indeed women who were brought up in less gender equal settings (measured with past labour market attachment of women in their countries) manifest differential expectations regarding their jobs, which positively affects their overall satisfaction with it.

What is important from the perspective of this project, all of the past studies concentrated on current job satisfaction - satisfaction with the job one has at the time of responding to a respective survey. This basically means that an important part of the working age population is not covered by any of them - those out of work at that certain time, which is a much bigger share of the female than the male working-age population. Indeed, this limitation is widely acknowledged, with most of previous studies resorting to remedy their analyses with either the classical selection bias correction by James J. Heckman ([Heckman, 1979]) or some later revision of it (e.g. [Bourguignon et al., 2007]).

Thus, the most relevant contribution of this study is the advantage of employing individual job satisfaction in the main job of the working career, covering all individuals who ever worked, even if for a short period. This allows us to argue that satisfaction with the main job of one's career is conceptually different than satisfaction with a current job and therefore may bear different gender disparities. We intend to prove this argument by showing that different female satisfaction with the main job can be observed only in certain countries that reveal certain constraints related to the female labour market participation.

Given the above, one of the goals of this project is also to provide a thorough description of the gender-specific trajectories observed in the labour market over the life course, with a special focus on different birth cohorts, countries and countries aggregated into four regions of Europe (Nordic, Central, Southern, Eastern). Secondly, we aim to investigate the determinants of the differences in satisfaction with the main job of the working career between women and men. Finally, we utilize the international character of the underlying data to suggest the potential mechanisms behind the observed differences.

A set of research questions explored in this article boils down to the following:

- Are there substantial differences in working trajectories over the life course between men and women? Do they differ by birth cohorts and by country?
- Are women differently satisfied with the main job of their employment careers than men?
- Which characteristics related to the labour market participation over the life course have a significant impact on the level of satisfaction with the main job? Are these associations different for women and men?
- Do the systemic constraints prevalent in certain countries (including prevailing gender norms or labour market conditions) affect the individual satisfaction with the main job of one's career?

## **Methods & Data**

This study is based on the data collected in the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe – SHARE, which is a panel survey conducted since 2004 and focused on individuals aged 50 years and over. On top of some important contemporary information, for most of the survey participants life histories were collected, describing childhood events, places they lived in, partnerships they maintained, and full working history. For each job spell the survey captures all the basic characteristics (e.g. sector, working arrangement, occupation), and additionally for the main job of the career also the quality of work and working conditions, including the overall satisfaction with that job.

In this project we first compiled a detailed labour market history for all individuals on yearly basis over their life course. Then we conducted a descriptive analysis with visual portrayal of working histories by gender, age cohort and region of Europe. This provided us with a strong basis for further OLS regressions where we explore the gender differences in satisfaction with

the main job, controlling for a large subset of likely confounders, in line with the previous literature on the topic. The linear regressions are further supplemented with conducting a matching procedure using the Propensity Score Matching scheme, in order to be able to compare only a subset of women and men in the sample who have similar work-related characteristics. The main idea behind running this type of a procedure is actually to identify those individuals who stay out of the common support - the unmatched ones, for whom it is impossible to find a suitable matching partner of the opposite gender. We are interested in examining their characteristics and their trajectory of activity on the labour market throughout their lives. All types of analyses are conducted for the full sample and separately by four regions of Europe (Nordic, Central, Eastern and Southern) to identify possible heterogeneity in the results related to some country- or region-specific factors.

At the later stages of the project we will also run the decomposition analysis to identify the characteristics that may drive the differences in job satisfaction between men and women. We also plan to investigate the advantages of exploiting some potential instruments related to the historical conditions existing in the labour market, in order to further disentangle the observed relationships.

### **Expected findings**

Already at the stage of the descriptive analysis we confirm some basic facts related to the gender differences in the labour market participation and some heterogeneity with respect to the regional specificities. While for men lifelong labour market histories prove extremely consistent, with most of their time spent in full-time employment, working histories of women are much more diverse depending on the country and region of Europe. When examining the share of women who never worked, share of those who worked part-time, the average time of entry to and exit from the labour market and the number and duration of the work gaps, one finds strong similarities in certain countries, which can be grouped into the above mentioned four regions (Nordic, Central, Southern, Eastern).

In Nordic countries women enter labour market at later ages, but also exit at older ages, and a stable share works part-time. In Central-European countries initially a very high percentage of young women enters labour market, but afterwards many experience in-between work gaps, with much higher incidence of part-time employment. In most countries of Eastern Europe female labour market histories resemble their male counterparts', with a majority of women consistently working full-time throughout their lives until an often premature leave already at the age of 55 years. These '*special*' working histories are a clear legacy of the communist regimes that prevailed in these countries until the early 1990s. Southern countries are characterized by a very substantial share of women who never enter the labour market. Moreover, while only a small fraction works part-time, women in these countries often experience long-term gaps in employment, with many leaving labour market early on (likely due to childcare obligations) and never returning.

These enormous differences in working career experiences between women and men and, within the first group - between countries, bear some important consequences for the levels of satisfaction with the main job of the career that we observe in the data. For the international sample pooled from all participating countries, we find a significantly lower satisfaction with the main job among women, and this result holds when controlling for an extensive set of usual confounders (basic socio-demographic information, but more importantly - detailed characteristics of the main job - the job of interest - and other work experiences). This result is contrary to the most influential studies of this strand of literature. Therefore, here we leverage the advantage of our dataset - having a possibility to observe a more complete pool of workers, including those who may have worked only briefly, at the very beginning of their working-age lives. This especially applies to women, and to women living in very specific settings - where leaving labour market is possible or even well-perceived by the society at large. We hypothesize that in the presence of specific constraints that influence only women (be it the societal constraints in the form of norms related to caregiving obligations or more general roles envisioned for women in the society), working career choices are heavily impacted. As a result, in certain countries, female and male workers who feel unsatisfied at the initial stage of their working experience are very likely to make completely different decisions regarding their further opportunities. This is yet another aspect of gender inequality in the labour market with a chance to improve if more egalitarian policies are widely implemented.

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