

Workshop - Education and labour market

Title

Job quality in a gender perspective

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Abstract

Over the last years a combination of factors, such as globalisation, the widespread adoption of digitalisation and deregulation, has made new forms of work organisation more pervasive. Employment condition has developed into a more fluid concept, a continuum of varying degrees of labour force statutes, where the unemployment rate captures only the most visible part of labour underutilization. Thus, the requirement to extend conventional labour market statistics with quality-centred objectives have become a central issue at the institutional and academic level. Labour transformation has coincided with the fact that the majority of women joining the paid workforce, influencing the dynamics of labour supply, work opportunities and work organization. The constant overall growth in female employment rates in recent decades has surely increased occupational opportunities for women, but they tend to have less favourable conditions than men's, mainly for the gender gap and horizontal and vertical segregation. These changes in the nature of work challenge us to rethink how work may impact the well-being and health of workers. Structural change of the labour market has transformed the social patterns and implied new health and safety risks for workers, caused by alienation, work intensity, precariousness.

Against this background, this paper investigates gender inequalities in job quality using the Swiss Household Panel data from the years 2004 to 2016. The Swiss context is peculiar from a gender and labour market perspective. The overall labour regulations, indeed, are relatively flexible, with a weak protection against dismissals, an adaptable legislation on overtime and no statutory minimum wage regulation. The country has observed a substantial rise in the total number of hours worked thanks mainly to female labour force. However, although a remarkable rate of female participation in the labour market, Swiss women overwhelmingly work part-time, and progress has been slow in reducing the wage gap that favours men. These aspects challenge women in terms of job quality, health and reconciliation opportunities, especially if we consider the traditional view of women's childcare commitments and a general lack of childcare facilities in Switzerland.

The paper investigates gender inequalities in job quality adopting an objective interdisciplinary approach to the issue and using the Alkire-Foster technique to deal with a multidimensional definition of job quality. Thus, we examine six job quality deprivation indicators for the more frequent job quality domains in the literature by carrying out hybrid non-linear models for the whole sample and specific sub-groups.

Looking at the overall job quality, the findings show that women are more likely to work in poor jobs. In particular, they tend to perform lower pay, security and the use of skills and discretion. On the other hand, women seem to have higher advantages over men in ergonomic dimension, working time quality and work-life balance. The analysis by sample subgroups, which aims at understanding in which subgroups gender inequality are more pronounced, corroborates the hypothesis of compensating differentials for mothers with dependent children and self-employed. On the other side, a situation of 'glass ceiling' associated with women's vertical segregation seems to rise with age and qualification.

Job quality is important for policy purposes because policies that influence the nature of employment are likely to impact health. Most importantly, the nature of work should be taken into account in the field of labour policy that, in the current workfare priority, aims exclusively at a quick placement into a job. In addition, to tackle gender inequalities should be a key policy priority in order to provide all workers over the life course with adequate opportunities for self-validation, self-development and meeting their material needs and meeting their material needs.