

# Gender pattern in job satisfaction: the Italian case

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The aim of this work is to study if and how similar levels of job quality elicit different levels of job satisfactions in men and women.

The intersection between job quality and job satisfaction of men and women workers has been a debated issue since the early 1960s, when the rise of the rate of women activity was characterized by “employment segregation”. This concept identified a twofold segregation: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal segregation refers to the under (over) representation of a certain group in occupations or sectors not ordered by any criterion (Bettio, Verashchagina, 2009). This phenomenon appears as universal characteristic of contemporary socio-economic systems (Anker 1998). In this light, women will be particularly crowded in ‘feminine’ jobs, and excluded by other types of occupations: if this behavior may be voluntarily pursued by women, reflecting their different tastes, could also be due to gender-based discrimination, with men voluntarily preventing women from acceding to male-dominated occupations.

The vertical (or hierarchical) segregation means that women are on average penalized in opportunities for career progression within a company or a sector. This phenomenon, known as the “glass ceiling”, prevents women from achieving desirable features (such as pay, control, autonomy, promotion, security) with respect to their masculine counterpart (Eurofound 2012).

Overall, both dimensions of segregation have characterized the occupational feminization as disadvantaged in terms of pay, prestige, power and attractiveness of the occupation (Jarman et al. 2012).

Different job quality affects the subjective work experience; indeed, according to the “job” model perspective, women workers will be less satisfied than men, in response to their penalizing objective job situation (Kanter 1977).

This prescription is challenged by the “gender” model; it states that job satisfaction can’t be explained without understanding the meanings attached to work, the motivation for working, and the place of work in the person’s life (Goldthorpe et al. 1969). Hence, since the relative importance of family responsibilities varies for men and women, work may occupy a different place in their life and they may experience differently their work situation (Gallie et al. 2012).

Furthermore, some studies have found that women workers are systematically more satisfied than men (Clark 1997); this evidence has been explained referring to low expectations that women put into the work, that may lead to women’s higher satisfaction than men in response to similar job quality.

Given the disagreement in the literature about the outcomes of the intersection between job quality and job satisfaction for men and women, we formulate two research questions: 1) whether the effect of job quality on job satisfaction is the same for men and women; 2) if it exists a gender pattern in the relation between job quality and job satisfactions, and, if so, in what dimensions of job satisfaction it is more evident.

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Regarding RQ 1, our hypothesis is that perception of job quality is gendered. Thus, same objective work conditions will result in different levels of job satisfaction if experienced by men or women.

About RQ 2, we believe that dimensions related to work-life balance are the most affected by gender pattern. Women will particularly appreciate jobs of high quality in that enable them to play the 'double-role' (Martin, Hanson 1985).

In order to answer the two research questions, we will apply OLS regression techniques to a pooled sample (N = 31.689) drawn from the ISTAT-Multipurpose Survey on Italian Families (waves 2003 and 2009). Peculiarity of this dataset is that it takes into account seven dimensions of job satisfaction (pay, security, working hours, work shift, ambient, work-home distance, interest of job), as well as the general concept of job satisfaction. Thus, differently from previous studies, we will be able to analyze to what extent different job characteristics are perceived as satisfying in different levels of job quality.

Using this data, we estimate two models. The first is a nested model with general job satisfaction as dependent variable and job quality, coded using the Sides05<sup>2</sup> (Meraviglia, 2012), as independent variable. In our analysis, we control for marital status (married/not married), higher title of study achieved (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary), having a young child, and type of contract (full/part time, fixed-term/open-ended).

The preliminary results show that hypothesis 1 is confirmed. Gender interacts with job quality, and the effect of higher levels of job quality on job satisfaction is stronger for women.

Hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed. Higher job quality impacts more strongly on women's job satisfaction for working hours and scheduling than men's. Otherwise, on job satisfaction for distance from home, another dimension strictly related to work-life balance, the impact is higher for men.

In the second part of our work, we repeat the analysis on a subsample of workers of different macro-areas (North and South Italy), in order to control for territorial effects. Indeed, historically women of North Italy have been more attached to the labor market, while women of South have been more socialized to roles of caregiving. This different selection of women workers in North and South may affect the relationship between job quality and job satisfaction (RQ1). Furthermore, while in the South Italy the stronger presence of 'enlarged families' can support caretaking, enabling women to play the 'double role', in the North Italy the limited availability of informal agencies of caregiving makes harder for women the chance of playing the 'double role' (RQ2).

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<sup>2</sup> It is a prestige scale built on the base of the DLS (De Lillo, Schizzerotto 1985).

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