

AGE AND EDUCATION DIFFERENCES IN THE PARADOX OF GENDER JOB SATISFACTION IN SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates job satisfaction differences among employees in Serbia based on age and education. In the literature, it is commonly believed that, despite their disadvantaged position in the labor market, women tend to report higher job satisfaction compared to men. However, this gender-job satisfaction paradox is considered insignificant for younger and highly educated employees, as they are believed to have higher job expectations due to diverse role models from early childhood or favorable job experiences throughout their careers. Considering these factors, the primary objective of this research is to explore job satisfaction disparities between younger and highly educated employees in Serbia, considering the existing gender gap in the labor market. The survey involved 268 employees from the three largest insurance companies of Serbia, and data collection took place in March 2023. A structured questionnaire was utilized to gather information. The research findings indicate that younger employed women display lower job satisfaction compared to men, particularly among those at the early stages of their professional careers. This contrasts with older female colleagues who exhibit relatively higher job satisfaction levels. Interestingly, the study also confirms that gender differences in job satisfaction are insignificant among highly educated employees. Overall, this paper contributes to the existing understanding of the gender-job satisfaction paradox.

Keywords: job satisfaction, satisfaction with aspects of job, gender-job satisfaction paradox, gender, labour market

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INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have consistently indicated that women tend to express higher job satisfaction compared to men [1][2][3][4] despite facing more challenging objective working conditions, earning lower wages, encountering greater job market difficulties, experiencing lower political representation [5] and being underrepresented in high-paying positions and leadership roles [6]. The factors contributing to this apparent paradox remain uncertain and continue to be the focus of ongoing research in the field.

In his study, Clarke [1] explored the possible explanations for the variations in job satisfaction between women and men in Great Britain. The research showed that women tend to express higher job satisfaction compared to men. According to the author, this gender difference in job satisfaction cannot be solely attributed to variations in individual characteristics, job attributes, job values, income distribution, or selection bias, even though these factors do play a role. Instead, the greater job satisfaction among women is believed to be a result of lower job expectations stemming from their historically disadvantaged position in the labor market. According to Clark [1] the variations in job satisfaction between women and men will diminish as more women have access to better job opportunities and environments that challenge traditional gender beliefs, leading to higher job expectations. Additionally, he suggests that the differences in job satisfaction between women and men are not significant for younger and highly educated employees. Younger and highly educated women, in particular, exhibit higher job expectations compared to other women due to the influence of diverse role models during their formative years and their successful experiences in the workplace.

Perugini and Vladislavljević [7] suggest that gender inequality experienced during early life has enduring effects on women's beliefs and expectations. Consequently, women who grew up in more gender-equal environments may have developed job expectations and satisfaction more similar to those of men. Conversely, women raised in less egalitarian societies, witnessing lower female labor market participation, may have cultivated lower expectations regarding work. However, they might also place greater emphasis on aspects like flexibility and social connections, leading to higher job satisfaction compared to men when accounting for wages and other individual and job-related factors. According to the authors, education does not directly influence the gender-job satisfaction paradox.

Ward and Sloane [8] and Sloane and Ward [9] discovered that women under the age of 36 expressed lower job satisfaction compared to their male counterparts, whereas the opposite trend was observed among older women in the workforce. According to the authors, these findings can be attributed to varying job demands over time, with older cohorts facing less formal qualifications requirements, while younger women strive to meet the same standards as their male peers. Burone and Mendez [10] provide evidence that socio-demographic variables have distinct effects on job satisfaction for different genders. Both male and female respondents from younger cohorts reported higher overall job satisfaction. Specifically, younger males exhibited greater satisfaction with aspects such as salary, responsibility, benefits, and autonomy. On the other hand, younger women expressed higher satisfaction concerning promotion opportunities, responsibility, and the work environment.

Dilmaghani's [11] findings reveal that the gender gap in job satisfaction varies across different age groups. Among individuals younger than 35 years old, the gap is not statistically significant. However, it increases to 1.8 per cent for those aged 35 to 54 and becomes even larger at 4.5 per cent among individuals aged 55 and older. When examining the data based on educational attainment, Dilmaghani's research shows that among individuals without a university degree and those with a bachelor's degree, the gender job satisfaction gap is 2.3 per cent in favor of women. However, the statistical significance of this gap diminishes among those with a bachelor's degree. Interestingly, the gender gap is not statistically significant among individuals with a graduate university degree. Taken together, these results provide evidence supporting the notion that aspirations play a significant role in shaping the gender job satisfaction gap.

The primary objective of this study is to add to the existing literature on the gender-job satisfaction paradox by demonstrating its absence among younger and more educated women. To achieve this goal, we analyze data from survey respondents and incorporate various indicators of gender disparities in the labor market in Serbia.

GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN THE LABOR MARKET IN SERBIA

Based on the data from the labor force survey [12], it becomes evident that women's position in the labor market in Serbia is characterized by a higher level of inequality compared to men. Specifically, the activity rate among women aged 15-24 is significantly lower (22.7%) compared to men of the same age (36.2%). While women with higher education have a slightly higher activity rate (72.3%) than men with the same educational level (71.0%), the employment rate of women is notably lower at 41.9% compared to men (56.6%). Furthermore, young women (aged 15-24) experience a much lower employment rate (15.9%) compared to men of the same age (26.7%), and women aged 25-54 have an employment rate 10.8 percentage points lower (69.1%) than men of the same age (79.9%). These disparities illustrate the unequal position of women in the Serbian labor market.

According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia [13], in 2019, the employment rate of highly educated women was slightly higher (65.9%) than that of men with the same level of education (65.6%). However, when comparing employment rates between genders with secondary and lower education levels, there is a significant difference. Women with secondary education had an employment rate 15.4 percentage points lower than men with the same education (women: 45.3%, men: 60.7%). Similarly, for individuals with lower education, the employment rate for women (22.9%) was as much as 17.2 percentage points lower compared to men with similar educational backgrounds (men: 40.1%).

One concerning trend identified in the data is the higher unemployment rate among young women, particularly those aged 25 to 34, where the unemployment rate reaches a substantial 39.5%.

The labor market dynamics in Serbia regarding gender can be assessed by examining earnings. According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia [13], the wage gap between women and men aged 15-29 in 2018 was 4.6%. This means that women, in this age group, were paid 4.6% less than their male counterparts, representing the smallest wage gap compared to other age groups.

However, the situation changes when considering individuals with higher education, such as master's or doctorate degrees. In 2018, the pay gap between women and men with advanced education was much more significant, reaching 17.9%. The same gap of 17.9% is observed for employees who completed higher education, including first-degree college and professional studies.

These statistics indicate that even though the wage gap is relatively smaller for younger workers, it widens significantly for those with higher educational qualifications, highlighting disparities in pay based on gender in Serbia.

METHODOLOGY

The research aimed to investigate job satisfaction among employees in the three largest insurance companies operating in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. A structured questionnaire was utilized and distributed via email to 300 addresses during March 2023. The survey achieved a completion rate of 89.3%.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The first part covered demographic information, including gender, education, age structure, management positions, and years of work experience. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 8 closed-ended questions, designed based on the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire by Clark [1]. These questions measured the respondents' level of satisfaction with various aspects of their job, including their general satisfaction with their current job. The participants were asked to assess their satisfaction levels on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (completely satisfied), in response to statements related to seven dimensions of their job: prospects of promotion, total salary, relationship with supervisors, job security, self-initiative in work, the nature of the work itself, and working hours.

The survey was conducted with a sample of 268 employees, comprising 196 women (73.1%) and 72 men (26.9%). The higher representation of women in the survey can be explained by the fact that a larger number of women work in the insurance sector. It is worth noting that the survey completion rate might have been higher for women than men, possibly due to varying levels of willingness to participate.

The average age of the respondents was 45 years, and they had an average work experience of 14 years. Management positions were held by only 9% of the respondents, while nearly half (46.3%) had a higher education.

Data analysis was performed using factor analysis, and all research analyses were conducted using the SPSS software package for Windows, version 21.

RESULTS

Following Clark's [1] conclusions, the paper proceeded to examine "gender differences in job satisfaction for younger and highly educated employees" [7, p. 130]. The research utilized a two-factor analysis of variance to explore gender-age differences in overall job satisfaction, and the findings are presented in Table 1.

The results revealed significant differences between the three age groups, indicating that the responses of the youngest respondents differed significantly from those of respondents aged 30-40 (difference = -0.32) and those older than 45 (difference = -0.33). Among the youngest respondents, gender differences were observed, showing that women, on average, expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.504$) compared to men ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.000$). Interestingly, among the youngest female employees at the beginning of their careers, the average job dissatisfaction was higher than that of their older female colleagues.

One possible explanation for these findings could be attributed to the adjustment of women's expectations throughout their careers. The results align with Clark's [1] earlier findings, which suggest that younger women tend to have higher job expectations due to the influence of different role models during early childhood or their initial strong performance in the workplace.

When analyzing job satisfaction among a sample of male and female employees below the age of 29, who are at the beginning of their professional careers, we observe that their levels of expectations are quite comparable. However, as their careers progress, women's expectations tend to diminish due to encountering various challenges and shortcomings in the labor market. Consequently, this could explain the lower job satisfaction among women compared to men at the outset of their careers. As individuals advance in their careers, job satisfaction levels tend to increase in a similar manner for both genders. This trend may be attributed to women adjusting their expectations and experiencing improvements in job satisfaction as they advance in their professional paths.

Table 1: Gender - age differences in job satisfaction

| (I) Age | Mean Women | Std. Deviation | Mean Men | Std. Deviation | (J) Age | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|----------------|------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------|-------|
| 29 and younger | 3.58 | 0.504 | 4.00 | 0.000 | 30 to 45 | -0.32* | 0.106 | 0.007 |
| | | | | | 45 and older | -0.33* | 0.114 | 0.011 |
| 30 to 45 | 3.95 | 0.542 | 3.91 | 0.517 | 29 and younger | 0.32* | 0.106 | 0.007 |
| | | | | | 45 and older | -0.01 | 0.057 | 0.995 |
| 45 and older | 3.92 | 0.361 | 4.00 | 0.676 | 29 and younger | 0.33* | 0.114 | 0.011 |
| | | | | | 30 to 45 | 0.01 | 0.057 | 0.995 |

source: Author's research

The results of the two-factor analysis of variance examining gender-education differences in overall job satisfaction are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that there are no significant differences among the three education groups. This outcome aligns with the conclusions drawn by Clark [1] and Perugini and Vladislavljevic [7], who similarly found that "gender differences in job satisfaction are not significant for highly educated employees" [7, p. 130]. The researchers noted that women in these highly educated groups tend to have higher expectations from their work compared to other women. This could be attributed to their exposure to different role models during early childhood or experiences of witnessing successful careers during their professional lives [7].

Furthermore, the research results are in line with the conclusions drawn by Dilmaghani [11], who also found that the gender difference in job satisfaction is not statistically significant among individuals with a university degree.

Table 2: Gender - education differences in job satisfaction

| (I) Education | Mean Women | Std. Deviation | Mean Men | Std. Deviation | (J) Education | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|----------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|-------|
| Secondary education | 3.91 | 0.361 | 3.88 | 0.957 | College education | 0.00 | 0.076 | 1.000 |
| | | | | | Higher education | -0.04 | 0.053 | 0.743 |
| College education | 3.88 | 0.334 | 4.00 | 0.000 | Secondary education | 0.00 | 0.076 | 1.000 |
| | | | | | Higher education | -0.04 | 0.075 | 0.871 |
| Higher education | 3.95 | 0.720 | 3.94 | 0.525 | Secondary education | 0.04 | 0.053 | 0.743 |
| | | | | | College education | 0.04 | 0.075 | 0.871 |

source: Author's research

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our study builds upon Clark's [1] conclusion that among younger and highly educated employees, gender differences in job satisfaction are not significant, given that women tend to have higher expectations from work due to different role models in early childhood or positive job experiences during their careers. In light of this, our research aims to explore the influence of age and education on the paradox of job satisfaction among employees in Serbia, and it reveals two main findings.

Firstly, our study demonstrates that younger women exhibit lower levels of job satisfaction compared to men, and specifically, younger employed women (at the beginning of their professional careers) tend to be more dissatisfied with their jobs than their older female colleagues. This finding challenges the gender-job satisfaction paradox typically observed, as labor force data in Serbia suggest that younger women hold a disadvantaged position in the labor market when compared to men, evident in areas such as earnings, activity rate, employment rate, and unemployment. Based on these labor force indicators, one might have expected younger women to be more satisfied than their male counterparts.

However, the higher dissatisfaction among younger women implies that there are no significant differences in job expectations between male and female employees, suggesting that younger women have similar job expectations as their male colleagues. We believe that younger women in Serbia are exposed to an environment that enables them to challenge traditional gender beliefs. This transformation has been significantly influenced by the efforts of state institutions and independent bodies in establishing a legal and institutional framework to promote, affirm, and achieve gender equality and protect against discrimination in the labor market. These initiatives have focused on highlighting the economic role of women in Serbian society.

Existing legal solutions clearly uphold the principle of equality between men and women in the labor market, ensuring equal job and position availability for both genders, equal opportunities and conditions for establishing employment relationships, and equal enjoyment of work-related rights, such as the right to choose employment freely, access to education, training, and professional development, equal remuneration for work of equal value, and fair and satisfactory working conditions. Additionally, equal protection against unemployment is guaranteed for both men and women. These measures have likely contributed to creating an environment that allows younger women to challenge and overcome gender-related obstacles in the workplace, leading to their heightened job dissatisfaction compared to their male counterparts.

Secondly, we have demonstrated that gender differences in job satisfaction are not significant among highly educated employees. Thus, the gender-job satisfaction paradox disappears when considering highly educated women, despite their position on the labor market not being entirely equal to that of men with higher education, except for the employment rate. This can be attributed to the higher job expectations of highly educated women compared to other women, influenced by various role models during early childhood or their successful performance throughout their working lives.

The theoretical implications of this paper contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the absence of the gender-job satisfaction paradox among younger and educated women. Despite the current inferior position of women in the labor market, shaped by gender stereotypes and prejudices, their job expectations seem to be converging with those of men.

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