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Key Points

- Studies on women participation in the workforce show inequalities and distinguish vertical and horizontal segregation. Despite their progress in education and training, the gender pay gap and glass ceiling phenomenon persist.
- Women's labour force participation rates have increased in the last decade, but nevertheless women earn less than men and are more likely to work part-time than men and to obtain career advancement and representation in political and business leadership positions.
- Unequal distribution of family duties could hindrance female presence in labour market leading to situations of work-family conflict (WFC), which represents one of the main psychosocial risk factors leading to poorer health and reduced psychological well-being.
- Considering the increase in the studies that confirm the health implications of work-family conflict, it is important to shift attention to the positive side of work-family relationship. Work and family could benefit from each other rather than being conceptualized as conflicting.
- In order to promote good work-family role conciliation, scholars and practitioners could purpose interventions both at individual and organizational levels.

Despite the increase of women participation in workforce over the last few decades, their presence still remains affected by numerous hindrances and mechanisms of segregation. As stated by the last OECD report [1], gender gap persists in all areas of social and economic life, even if the size of this gap has often changed.

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The cultural, social and demographic studies on gender inequalities distinguish two kinds of segregation:

- Vertical segregation, corresponding to the scarce presence of women at the top positions of organizations, institutions and workplaces in general; this is also called “hierarchical segregation” ([2], p. 32). This form of segregation is described through the metaphor of “glass ceiling phenomenon” an invisible obstacle inhibiting or blocking women to the access of power and decision-making roles.
- Horizontal segregation is the unbalanced distributions of women and men workers in certain sectors [2]: in all OECD countries women are more likely to be present in work fields related with care or education and are underrepresented in the STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) sectors.

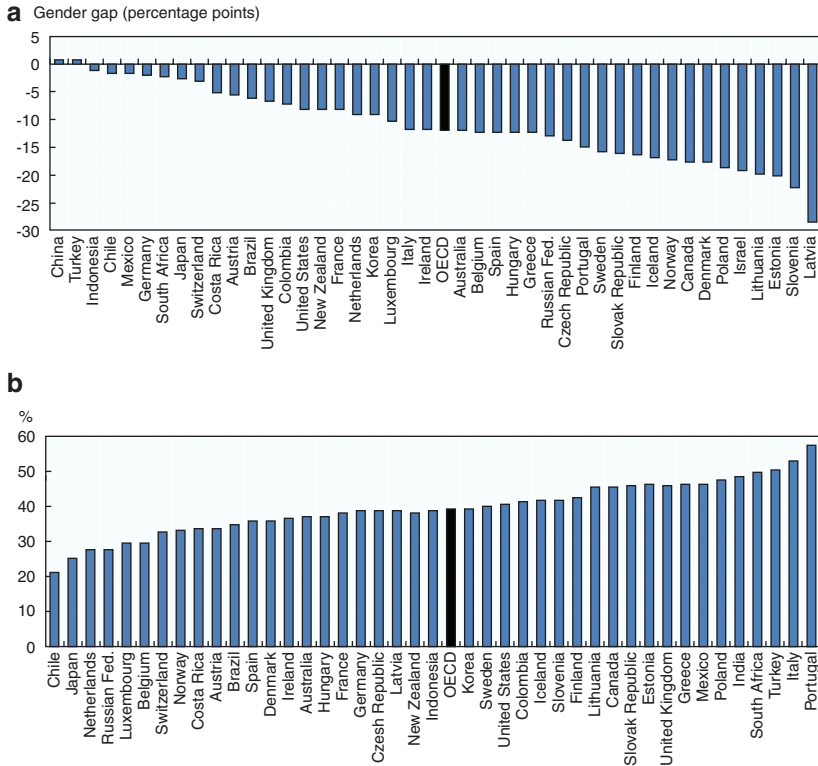
These mechanisms of segregation also explain another phenomenon of gender segregation in labour market: the gender pay gap, the differences in salaries of women and men occupying the same position in the same organizations [3].

The data published in the last OECD [1] report make very evident that gender segregations still persist even if young women in almost every country now get more years of schooling than young men (see Graphic 7.1). Despite their good results at school, girls are much less likely to study in the STEM fields. Women’s labour force participation rates have increased in the last decade, but nevertheless women earn less than men and are more likely to work part-time than men and to obtain career advancement and representation in political and business leadership positions.

The report underlines a few progresses made in crucial policy areas, such as the paternal leaves: OECD countries increased the incentives for fathers, considering this male commitment in unpaid work as an essential mean for the increase of father’s and mother’s well-being and to combat gender stereotypes. Moreover, about two thirds of OECD countries have introduced since 2013 new pay equity initiatives and measure such as gender quotas to increase the number of women in political and private sector leadership [1].

In the document “Strategy for equality between women and men—2010–2015”, the European Commission [5] also put into evidence the two opposite trends: the increase of women on the labour market and their progresses in education and training and the persistence of gender pay gap, gender horizontal and vertical segregation and glass ceiling phenomenon. According to the analysis provided by the European Commission, parenthood and the unequal division of unpaid domestic work are the first cause of gender segregation in the labour market as you can observe in the following graph (Graphic 7.2).

In line with this, it could be useful to go deeper with the relationship between family and work roles. Beyond the fact that unequal distribution of family duties could hindrance female presence in labour market, this could also lead to situations of work-family conflict (WFC), namely, a form of inter-role conflict in which work and family roles are in some cases incompatible [6], especially for female workers. As outlined by Hagqvist et al. [7] even when working force is sustained by equality policies and anti-discrimination laws promoting women participation in labour

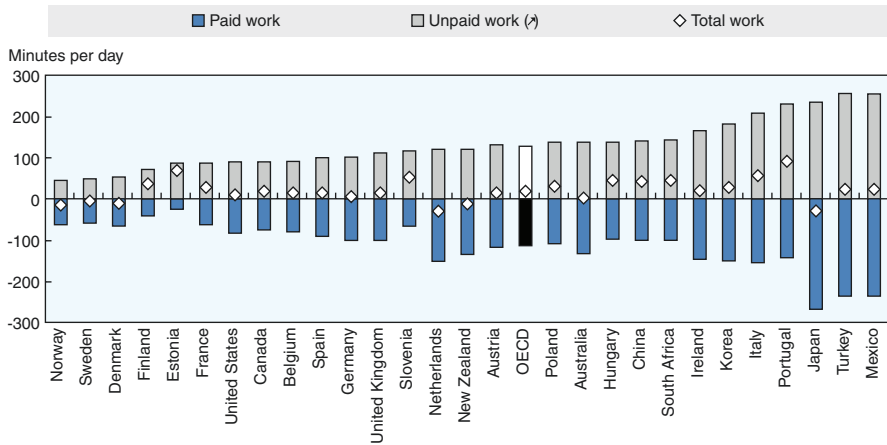


Graphic 7.1 Gender gap. Source: OECD [4], OECD Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris. Panel a: Gender gap (male minus female) in the share of the population that has attained tertiary education, 25–34 year-olds, 2015 or latest available year^a. Panel b: Female share (%) of tertiary graduates in science, mathematics and computing, 2014 or latest available year^b

market, female workers are still more expected to carry out family duties than men, thus experiencing stronger negative relationships between WFC and well-being. Interference between family and work responsibilities represents one of the main psychosocial risk factors leading to poorer health, reduced psychological well-being and negative organizational outcomes.

According to the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey, women have a greater amount of paid (working) and unpaid (nonworking) hours than men, resulting in more exposed work-family interferences and its negative outcomes such as lower life and family satisfaction, psychological strain as well as lower levels of engagement, commitment and job satisfaction [8].

Therefore it also seems important to shift attention to the positive side of work-family relationship and to many theoretical constructs, such as positive spillover, work-family enrichment, work-family facilitation and work-family enhancement reflecting the idea that work and family could benefit from each other rather than



Graphic 7.2 Gender gap in minutes spent per day on paid and unpaid work, female minus male, 15–64-year-olds. Source: OECD Gender Data Portal, <http://www.oecd.org/gender/data/>

being conceptualized as conflicting. This change in perspective could be useful for scholars and practitioners in understanding how workers (and women with family caring duties in particular) could be facilitated to balance their working and non-working lives and the interventions to be carried out both at individual and organizational levels for good work-family role conciliation. Such interventions could allow women workers to invest the resources gained in one role to enhance performance in the other role. Considering the increase in the studies that confirm the health implications of work-family conflict, these interventions, at the same time, could lead to an improvement of the health of working women managing work-family interaction.

On the organizational level, companies could offer many resources in order to balance working and nonworking roles beyond classic work arrangements such as flexitime. For example, as reported by Morganson et al. [9], managers and supervisor with a positive leadership style may inspire, by means of positive communication, their employees to reflect how job-related resources and skills (e.g. perseverance, pressure-coping skills) could help them to cope with nonworking demands and duties. Moreover, positive leaders could act as a role model for their employees by transmitting them practices in effective management of work-family commitments and by encouraging them to carry out such practices. Leadership training could be included in organizational family-work culture development interventions such as family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) training, aimed to foster, among others, role modelling behaviours through examples and exercises about positive strategies and experiences in facing work-family conflict and fostering work-family conciliation and enrichment. Odle-Dusseau et al. [10] found out that FSSB training had positive effects on employees' job satisfaction, turnover intention and supervisor-evaluated employee performance.

At an individual level, Morganson et al. [9] suggested that psychological capital, a multidimensional positive mental state combining self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency, may be beneficial to cope with, among others, work-family interface demands. Psychological capital could counteract WFCs, by enhancing confidence to handle them, optimism to reframe them as temporary, hope to set up different strategies to face them and resilience to mobilize one's resources to come over setbacks and failure in conciliating his own commitments. Therefore, authors indicated psychological capital intervention (PCI, developed by [11]) as a useful intervention boost. In an enrichment/spillover perspective, increasing psychological capital in order to cope with WFC could be useful even to gain better health and well-being seeing the relationship between psychological capital and health.

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Suggested Reading

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