

7. Work-related gender norms in the Netherlands.

Aim

To investigate the potential impact of work-related gender norms on female labor force participation in the Netherlands, in particular parttime work.

Theoretical background

The sociological debate about the normative underpinnings of gendered practices and behaviors has been mainly based on measurements of gender role attitudes (Cotter et al., 2011). This involves, for example, the attitudes people have towards statements such as “mothers make for better parents than fathers”. However, recent advancements in the measurement of social norms (Bicchieri et al., 2014) suggest that measuring gender role attitudes can only partly capture the normative underpinnings of gendered practices and behaviors. Measuring gender norms rather than gender role attitudes allows one to identify discrepancies between people’s beliefs of how men and women should participate in the labor force, these people’s beliefs of how other people think how men and women should participate in the labor force, and their perceptions of how men and women actually participate in the labor force. Capturing normative beliefs, behavioral expectations and informal sanctions will make it possible to identify collective misperceptions (e.g., pluralistic ignorance) of how men and women should and do participate in the labor force. For example, it could be that while women do believe that most people expect them to assume the main caregiving roles, they do not personally believe that this is what they should do. Identifying these discrepancies, in turn, will inform the design of more nuanced, coordinated and cost-effective policies that aim at increasing (full-time) female labor force participation. For example, the Dutch government is aiming to offer free daycare to families from 2025 to tackle social inequalities and increase female labor force participation. However, if pluralistic ignorance keeps women from participating more in the labor force, mere information campaigns may suffice for promoting female labor force participation and use of daycare facilities.

Research design

The research project will start with a review of the literature that uses measurements of gender role attitudes to explain female labor force participation (study 1). The review will set the ground for the second study (study 2) that will combine Dutch survey and register data to investigate how respondents’ gender role attitudes and the proportion of females working (full time) in these respondents’ private and professional contexts are related. The second phase of the project will design survey instruments to measure work-related gender norms to be administered to a representative sample of the Dutch population via the LISS panel. The aim of this study (study 3) is to identify the causes of female part-time work and, in particular, potential collective misperceptions of how men and women should and do participate in the labor force. In the third phase of the project, study 4 will explore potential effects of planned policies (e.g., “free daycare”) by means of vignette experiments administered to a representative sample of the Dutch population via the LISS panel.

Project

This project is part of the Stevin prize awarded to Tanja van der Lippe.

Literature

Bicchieri, C., Lindemans, J. W., & Jiang, T. (2014). A structured approach to a diagnostic of collective practices. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*, 1418.

Cotter, D., Hermsen, J. M., & Vanneman, R. (2011). The End of the Gender Revolution? Gender Role Attitudes from 1977 to 2008. *American Journal of Sociology, 117*(1), 259-289.

Project initiators

Wojtek Przepiorka (UU), Tali Spiegel (UU), Tanja van der Lippe (UU)

Location

Utrecht University, Department of Sociology / ICS