

How firms structure gender inequality over careers

Aim

This PhD project examines how firms affect gender inequality over careers, with a particular focus on earnings trajectories and pathways into and out of positions of authority. It studies how gendered differences in wages, promotions, and leadership emerge and develop as workers move within and between firms. The project aims to advance our understanding of how organizational contexts shape gender inequality in both economic rewards and access to power.

Theoretical background

A growing body of research highlights the workplace—or firm—as a central site where labor market inequality is produced. Yet much of this work remains cross-sectional, focusing on wage differences at specific points in time. In the current project, we advance this literature by conceptualizing inequality as a dynamic process that unfolds over careers, emphasizing how early career contexts and firm-specific opportunities have lasting consequences. We hypothesize that firms are vital to understand this inequality through gendered sorting into organizations, unequal access to internal labor markets, or differential exposure to career shocks at critical life course moments such as labor market entry or parenthood. This project integrates social stratification and feminist theories, including theories on workplaces as gendered inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). Empirically, we focus on how firms affect gender inequality, both in wages and authority positions (Stojmenovska, 2023). Gender gaps are pronounced in authority positions: women are less likely to work in leadership positions. While studies have shown that firms affect this inequality, in this project, we move the lens to a career perspective. Instead of studying authority positions, we study authority trajectories, which enables us to shed novel light on an understudied question: who is more likely to *leave* or (re-)enter positions of authority

Research design

The project relies on the quantitative analysis of large-scale linked employer–employee register data. We use the data to study long-term career trajectories, combining information on wages, job mobility, and authority positions. The primary empirical focus is on the Netherlands and Germany, with the possibility of extending analyses to Norway depending on data access and feasibility. The PhD candidate will apply advanced quantitative methods to longitudinal data, including sequence analysis, growth curve models, variance decompositions, and models that distinguish within-firm from between-firm mobility. The project offers extensive opportunities for methodological training and international collaboration, but a solid background in quantitative data analysis is required.

Context

This PhD position is part of the ERC-funded project *FIRMS – Firms and Careers: How the Workplace Structures Career Inequality*. FIRMS investigates how workplaces shape careers. By combining a life course perspective with large-scale linked employer–employee data, the project studies how firms create and reinforce inequality across gender and ethnicity, and through which mechanisms these inequalities persist. In this project, you will work in a team together with 2 other PhDs and a postdoc, as well as other senior scholars who are yet to be determined.

Literature

- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441-464.

- Stojmenovska, D. (2023). Gender Differences in Job Resources and Strains in Authority Positions. *Gender & Society*, 37(2), 240–267.

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