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# **Gender gap in employment and education in Iran**

**Doctoral dissertation  
SUMMARY**

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# SUMMARY

## Introduction

The gender gap, or gender difference, in the areas of employment and education is one of the most pressing social challenges of the modern world. It manifests itself differently in different countries and cultures, but its consequences are always profound and long-lasting. Iran, as a country with a rich history and a complex social landscape, is no exception. Despite progress in many areas of society, gender inequality remains a significant problem, affecting the country's social and economic development.

In recent decades, Iran has gone through a series of political, social and economic transformations that have had a significant impact on the lives of its citizens. Educational reforms, changes in employment policies and the increasing role of women in various sectors of public life have contributed to some progress in reducing gender inequalities. Nevertheless, these disparities are still evident and their analysis provides a better understanding of the social and economic mechanisms governing contemporary Iran.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the gender gap in Iran in depth in the context of employment and education. This work aims not only to describe the current state of affairs, but also to identify the main causes of this inequality and its consequences for Iranian society. The study is based on an analysis of statistical data, legislation and literature, as well as interviews and field research conducted in Iran.

The first part of the thesis focuses on the historical and cultural context that has shaped current gender inequalities. Subsequent chapters focus on analysing the situation of women in the education system and the labour market, taking into account the specific challenges they face. The final section of the dissertation will present recommendations for policies and actions that can contribute to reducing the gender gap in Iran.

These reflections aim not only to provide insights into the specific case of Iran, but also to contribute to the global discussion on gender equality and how to achieve it. I believe that this dissertation will contribute to a better understanding of this complex issue and inspire further research and action for gender equality worldwide.

## Research Goals

Filling this research gap, the aim of this study is to assess the educational gap among Iranian female workers. Specifically, the main research problem is to understand and explain the differences in achievement motivation and attribution in the pursuit of career processes among Iranian women working or studying at universities, taking into account parents' motivational expectations regarding their children's educational achievement. The difference between this study and other studies is that it addresses the relationship between gender inequalities and differences and women's motivation to progress, which has not been considered before, and with a comparative approach, parents and children are also compared in terms of their motivation for achievement. This study provides in-depth information about Iranian families involved in work or study and provides a background for other studies for other researchers.

The main objective of the empirical research is to identify gender differences in employment and education in Iran and to identify the determinants of these differences. The main objective of the research has also been assigned specific objectives:

Application objective - to identify obvious obstacles to gender equality which can inform managers and organisations. Becoming aware of women's and men's opinions and attitudes towards women's work and income, and becoming aware of the importance of having a job for women, especially educated women, may be important application objectives.

The predictive objective - attempts to identify trends in gender equality in Iran, which are highly dependent on access to education and employment opportunities.

In relation to the empirical objective, the following research problem was formulated: what are the gender gaps in employment and education in Iran and its determinants? The research problem is detailed in the following research questions:

1. How have gender differences evolved from a gender perspective in four key dimensions (participation and economic opportunities, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment) among Iranian women and men?
2. How do gender stereotypes and gender socialisation practices in Iran?
3. How are beliefs formed in the context of society's norms and values about women's and men's work and education in Iran?
4. What is the educational and occupational gap among women and men in Iran?

5. How are gender differences shaped regarding career prospects (career decision) vs. family obedience?
6. How are gender differences shaped regarding education (need for educational achievement) vs. family attachment?
7. How are gender differences shaped regarding having a job vs. a man's role in supporting the family (breadwinner)?

### **Research tasks**

This empirically-based dissertation will focus on the following research objectives:

Research task #1: In this section, the data from the World Value Survey Waves 2005 and 2020 are presented and analyzed to better understand women and men regarding their gender differences attitudes in Iran. Research task was an inquiry into all international studies Iran participated in. The query is included in Chapter 3, Comparison of males and females in Iran based on survey results. Three surveys were recognized: GLOBE study in 2004; World value survey in 2005 and 2020, and World economic forum from 2006-2022. Unfortunately, our request remained without any response, so the theoretical model was tested based on World Value Survey. Finally, it will be compared with the raw data available from World economic forum.

For the analyses, the following were used :

- Dataset A: World Value Survey 2005- IRN (N= 3585)
- Dataset B: World Value Survey 2020 - IRN (N = 4356)

The Iranian sample was (M2005 =32.3 and M2020 =39.5) and the average age is higher in 2020 than in 2005. The education system operationalised in years of education is similar, given the change in World Value Survey coding in 2005. The maximum value was 17 years and in 2020. 21 years.

Research task #2: Structured interviews with members of 100 Iranian families (parents with adult children who are students or graduate of universities) exploring the differences professional achievement motivation

The second research task is aimed to further explore and deepen the understanding of the gender differences in achievement motivation and attribution in pursuing professional carrier in Iran and Poland. For this purpose a mixed method approach is chosen to, firstly, support the results obtained in the first task and secondly, to reduce the variance stemming from convenience sampling method, by interviewing respondents of the same families, finally using a new indirect method for examining the gender differences in Iran.

To prepare myself to writing interview's questions I began with a small non-formal "ethnographic study" exploring the experiences of women who pursue academic career in Iran i w Polsce. An ethnographic approach has been adopted to undertake this research, where participant observation, interviews and an auto-ethnographic account of the researcher's experiences in the culture of universities.

One hundred and twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with 57 Iranian families [44 men, 81 women, 50 parents and 75 adult children]. Respondents specified the duration of the interview, but it could not exceed one hour. Two Iranian PhD students collected the data and conducted the interviews. They used voice or video recordings for the online interviews. In addition, demographic, family and occupational data and responses to the Schwartz Values Questionnaire were collected. All interviews were translated into English. The transcription was double-checked by Iranian lecturers to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the messages conveyed by the questions.

The researchers provided respondents with descriptions of 'situational dilemmas' in which respondents' values could be manifested. The descriptions were constructed and tested as part of a Polish-Iranian doctoral seminar. This dissertation focuses on six situational dilemmas, the others of which were discussed in Afsaneh Yousefpoor's dissertation. Respondents were asked to freely express their opinions about the situational dilemma and how they would behave in such a situation.

### **Description of the methodological paradigm**

The results of human resource management (HRM) research do not lead to fixed and immutable laws. They are only generalizations that have their limitations due to the social, cultural and historical context. Developing a research program in this field requires a precise definition of the research area and a clearly defined research problem and objective.

The research tools were tried to be chosen according to the purpose of the research and the possibilities of its implementation. Since the tasks focus on phenomena that can be observed, measured and analyzed experimentally, and the basis of science is empirical evidence, the research program begins with defining a clear problem and setting a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound objective. And the choice of research methods and tools is tailored to the specifics of the problem under study and the possibilities of its analysis. As empirical evidence is the foundation of science, an attempt was made to reliably obtain the data necessary to formulate conclusions and recommendations. The authors of the study were mindful that this particular research area required a flexible approach that took into account the variability of social, cultural and historical contexts.

The research procedure was preceded by the selection of a methodological paradigm, because, as Ł. Sułkowski notes, "the choice of paradigm largely determines: the approach to theorizing, the research problem, the preferred methodology, as well as the axiological orientation"<sup>1</sup> (Sułkowski, 2013, p. 270). M. Lisinski defines a methodological paradigm as "a model-template of research conduct, which, being a kind of instrumentarium, determines not only the basic sequence of activities, but also the principles, methods and techniques used in the course of implementing these activities. All this refers to the essential types of problems to be studied and indicates the sources and effects of cognition related to these problems" (Lisinski, 2014, p. 271). Research paradigms can be classified into four categories: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Quantitative research derives from positivism, which assumes that reality is objective and measurable, and that research aims to test theories and predict phenomena. Realism assumes that reality can be understood through fixed mechanisms and procedures, while interpretivism is based on social constructs such as language and self-perception. Pragmatism is best suited for research that combines conceptualization and model testing with quantitative and qualitative methods, as it emphasizes practical implications and the impact of mental perceptions on research activities. Pragmatism rejects both anarchism, which is the acceptance of arbitrary methods, and methodological fundamentalism, which prohibits the mixing of different research methods. It postulates that research methods in HRM should be applied reflexively due to their heuristic nature, which prevents algorithmization. Therefore, it recommends methodological pluralism and eclecticism, accepting the use of methods from different disciplines and theoretical approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Sułkowski, Ł. (2013). Paradygmaty nauk o zarządzaniu. *Współczesne Zarządzanie*, 2.

This dissertation takes a pluralistic approach that combines two paradigms:

- Functional-system paradigm, which refers to sequential cause-and-effect relationships and is suitable for quantitative research<sup>2</sup>
- The interpretative-symbolic paradigm, which focuses on interpreting organizational acts immersed in networks of meaning and is appropriate for qualitative research.<sup>3</sup> The interpretative paradigm, popular in the field of human resource management, allows the use of a wide range of qualitative methods. Among these methods are in-depth interviews, text analysis and methodologies drawn from sociology, such as grounded theory. This allows us to gain valuable insights into processes within organizations.

### **Terminology**

It has been assumed that the data obtained from male and female respondents through questions are referred to as survey data, which has been analyzed. Measurement results can be presented in the form of numbers, which is typical of quantitative research, or words, which is characteristic of **qualitative research**. **Quantitative data consists** of numbers and is analyzed statistically. Qualitative data, on the other hand, includes words that are used to describe different perspectives on the phenomenon under study, which the researcher interprets. **Qualitative analysis** can include objectifying elements, such as the classification of statements by independent judges or counting the frequency of certain phrases. And quantitative analysis concerning relationships between variables. Qualitative research, on the other hand, aims to understand individual perceptions of reality.

### **Triangulation of methods**

A triangulation method was used to gain a better understanding of the topic.<sup>4</sup> Five types of triangulations were adopted: (1) methods, (2) data, (3) operationalization, (4) modes of analysis, and (5) researcher.

Triangulation of methods refers to combining - to study the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives - qualitative and quantitative methods. We analyze numerical responses to closed-

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<sup>2</sup> Sulkowski, Ł. (2014). W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi. ZZZ (HRM), 3-4 (98), 79-90).

<sup>3</sup> Sulkowski, Ł. (2013). Paradygmaty nauk o zarządzaniu. Współczesne Zarządzanie, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Y. S. Denzin, N.K., Lincoln (Ed.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Sage, Thousand Oaks.

ended questions using quantitative methods, and verbal responses to open-ended questions using qualitative methods.

Data triangulation has been expressed as the use of different sources or types of data, collected using a variety of methods, including interviews, surveys, observations and pre-existing documents.

Triangulation of operationalizations: In socio-cultural conditioning, there are no standard operationalizations of variables. Operationalizations should be carefully selected, taking into account the specifics of the sample; for example, the statement "Women should pursue education" may be an indicator of low responsiveness among young women, but not among mothers. Even when using standardized measurement tools, their psychometric properties must be tested on a given sample.

Triangulation of analysis methods: In quantitative analysis, the researcher must make decisions about cleaning the dataset, building indicators, choosing levels of measurement and statistical tests. Different approaches can lead to different conclusions. For the qualitative method, selection methods were used to analyze the data; data were coded independently by at least two researchers.

## **Conclusion**

In the eyes of the Iranian people, women have a special and unique place in society. Consequently, society and their men or their husbands have special expectations from them. For example, according to the results obtained from this research, from the point of view of Iranian men, the ideal conditions for an Iranian girl who they want to marry is to have a beautiful appearance, a noble and civilized family, and a high education (university degree). These are the expectations from an Iranian man; having a job and owning a house and supporting the family financially.

These statements state that women are expected to have a degree, but they are not expected to work or be employed outside the house. Of course, it must be said that there are many men who welcome having a working wife with income but in specific field of work. On the other hand, Iranian society and customs consider a woman's first duty to maintain the family center and raise children and create a suitable platform for the growth of her husband and children. These thoughts can be seen in the comments which believe women face legal, organizational and



institutional, religious and cultural discrimination on the path of their progress. As a result of these attitudes, these beliefs have emerged that women have the most participation and role in doing household and children's affairs. Even their expectations have gone beyond them and they are asked to provide conditions for the growth and prosperity of their husbands so that they can maintain and strengthen the financial and social status of the family. This has more stressful effects on women who work outside the family.

For example, some male colleagues working in the university stated that female university professors have a role of conflict between the role of a professor in the university and the role of a mother at home. Consequently, they do not have enough time to evaluate the scientific works of their students and this reduces the quality of their research work. They also believed that men have more time and energy to do educational and scientific work, and as a result, they are more successful in these jobs. Therefore, they come to the conclusion that women should do simpler and less challenging jobs. It is interesting to know that participants believed that women should work hard and prove themselves and their abilities in order to improve their position in important jobs such as being a professor. Some go further and say that women do not have enough self-confidence and self-esteem for such jobs. They also believe that women do not believe in themselves. Although to prove the ability and to put more effort, a lot of time and energy must be spent, which women in Iran spend it to their families, their husbands and children.

Women have been responsible for these tasks for centuries, and that's why they are the best at doing these tasks. For these reasons, some interviewees said that women are the most suitable option for home affairs, and men are the best option for outside work and are responsible for breadwinner affairs.

**In another** part of the research, some people stated that women's desire for independence is considered as a threat to the stability of marital and family relationships. They stated that a woman who has two children and her husband does not earn much, by choosing a job that requires domestic and foreign travel, she no longer obeys her husband, and instead of taking care of the family, she focuses on her future career. Others stated that this lady cannot support the children emotionally and this is harmful for the family. It was interesting that the respondents saw this opportunity for women's advancement not only as a threat to the stability of marriage, but also believed that by travelling, women become completely different people and forget their past lives.

They considered the success of a well-paid working woman to be harmful to the family. Especially if that woman is married with children. These opinions are also found in Iranian customs and laws. For example, it is stated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, that the head of the family and the breadwinner is the man.

The law also states that women cannot travel outside of Iran without their husband's permission. On the other hand, it is clearly stated in the law that if the man of the family sees his wife's job as a threat to preservation of the family or considers it bad, he can prohibit the woman from working. As pointed earlier, this job position and the conditions created for that woman are contrary to Iranian men's opinion of a suitable woman for marriage. Because law, custom and men in society expect women to obey them while, an educated woman with a high-ranked job or with a high salary is not a right person to do so. Respondents said that these conditions hurt a man's pride and self-esteem. Some men stated that a woman who has a well-paid job than her husband may make her husband jealous and as a result, he may create obstacles to her success and career advancement. They believed that the reason for this was that the woman might show off her income to her husband.

In general, these can be seen as aspects of the patriarchal culture in Iran, which believes that men should always earn more than women. And they consider the dominance of women over men in jobs and incomes as a reason for the decline and weakening of men's position in society and family. On the other hand, it shows that men see women's desire to succeed as a danger. Some men said that the woman should choose the job only if the man is unable to take care of the family's financial problems. They consider the woman's income as an auxiliary income, not the main income. Because the view is that the man is a breadwinner and responsible for the economic situation even if his income is less than his wife's income. Some respondents believed that a woman's decision to accept such a challenging job depends on whether her husband is ok with it or not. This means that the acceptance of this decision by the woman depends on the husband's permission. which expresses the same official statements in the law that the woman's work permit and her presence in the workplace depends on her husband's permission and approval.

In addition, there is an old view about women which says that being a housewife or doing care work are more important than pursuing professional jobs. This view was expressed by about forty per cent of respondents. This issue can be seen as a manifestation of stereotyped beliefs that women are suitable for chores and maternal duties, and men are suitable for working

outside the house and are in charge of breadwinning. This has caused some women to sacrifice their careers and progress to their families. As a number of respondents stated that performing caring roles at home (housekeeping and childcare) is the most important priority for women.

In another part of the research, opinions about discrimination created by families between the son and the daughter regarding education were asked. Those who agreed that the family should send the boy abroad to continue his education, but keep the girl near them to take care of the parents, claimed that the growth of the boy in the future will help the growth of the family and the boy in the future can support parents financially. But when the girl gets married, she can no longer share her income with the family and her income will be spent on her new family, so the family must invest on the boy. Others said that the families do not send girls abroad to continue education because they do not trust girls. Families think that girls will face mental and emotional problems while studying abroad. And they might meet strangers and make relationships with foreign boys. This issue seems unpleasant for the family, that's why they worried more about their daughters than their sons. Families also believe that a girl should always be controlled by another person such as the father, the brother or the husband. This idea states that boys are stronger than girls and can better cope with the problems and hardships of living abroad. It can be understood from these statements that the families do not believe girls. And they do not believe in their abilities. They also do not want girls to become independent. Families expect girls to take care of the parents. They believed that girls are more emotional and are more suitable for supporting and caring roles. These are in line with those stereotypes that believe women are more emotional and sensitive and men are stronger and more independent.

These thoughts can also be seen in the participant's answers to another question about a person who was very interested in spending time with his family but had to stay away from his city and family for a while to get promoted. And finally, he did not accept this promotion. They stated that if this person is a man, he must endure these hardships because he is responsible for the family breadwinner. But if this person is a woman, she should forget this promotion and stay with her family because for a woman caring and supporting are more important than the promotion. Some people said that if the family's living conditions change significantly by moving to the new workplace, then the woman should accept the promotion.

This view states that the success and continuation of the career path for women are less important than the success of men. And accepting a promotion and a challenging job is suitable for a woman when she can contribute to the family's economy. But the respondents stated that this is an opportunity for the man to progress and develop his career, and this means improving the family's future. On the other hand, because women do not consider themselves decision-makers, they cannot freely choose whether to accept this promotion or not.

The last question was asked to the people that can a boy and a girl get married while only one of them has a job and has income? About half of the respondents were afraid that the working person is the girl. They considered the girl's income as a complementary income to the boy's income and as an auxiliary income. And they consider the responsibility of being a breadwinner to be a man's. And the man's income is considered the main income of the family. And they believe that a woman can work when the family is facing severe economic problems. The interesting thing to note was that despite these traditional views about the role of the breadwinner and being the head of the family, 25 of these people believed that a man without income, who only relies on his wife's income, will become a lazy person in the future. And he gets used to the existing situation and becomes irresponsible with his family and financial issues. This problem makes them constantly discuss financial issues and face problems.

Some said that women who have money tend to be proud of their income or to become the head of the house and dominate all the affairs of the house. Some say that women earners expect to be appreciated for their work, while men do not want to do that.

In summary, it can be said that There are many expectations from women in Iran. Both from the family and the society. These expectations have made certain roles and duties for women to be appropriate and worthy in society. These beliefs, which are already included in the country's constitution, have been internalized by men and women. These beliefs are supported by religion, which is the main source of customs and constitution in Iran.

Women believe that the role of care and support in the family and supporting their spouse and children is their main duty and it has priority over all aspects of their work and professional life and their future career. By entering the educational and university system, women have been able to remove the restrictions and restrictions that traditional education had on them and have formed a new image of an Iranian woman who is not only a housewife but also has a high level of education and Look for to earn money. However, women are disrespected to enter the labor

market and are welcomed in jobs with low income or jobs with a caring or feminine identity, or they mainly enter the labour market in the private sector, where accurate information about the amount of income is not available or there are no exact working hours. However, there are still more challenging obstacles on their way so that they can get their true position in domestic and foreign societies. For example, women are deprived of the necessary political support to form a party and have a political representative or work representative. They also have less access to financial resources and do not have a significant place in the country's economy. Many other men and women believe that women do not have enough time to form these partnerships or investments. Furthermore, they believe that women involve themselves in less marginal and safer issues so that they can take care of their children and maintain the balance between work and home and the intimacy between themselves and their husbands. keep as a valid example, they state that having a job like a university professor has difficulties for a woman and that women have to work hard to get it and reduce their pleasures. But by delving into the research and this research, it becomes clear to some extent that it is the expectations of society, men and families from women that make women stay away from sensitive and time-consuming jobs that require a lot of concentration and effort.

On the other hand, many women say that apart from these expectations and stereotypes in society, it is the existence of discrimination that prevents women from attaining high positions in important jobs or attaining economic and political opportunities. Discrimination in the basic and religious laws of society, discrimination in the laws and customs of organizations during recruitment and promotion, and the differences in culture and religion between men and women that have led to discrimination.

In addition, families and especially the men of the family have little faith in the abilities and endurance of women. These cases, in addition to the statements, have been more visible in the amount of support girls and women have received from their families or husbands during their careers or starting entrepreneurship or even studying in other cities or outside of Iran. Because it is believed that success and more income for the son in the future means prosperity and material well-being and high social status of the father's family, but these things are not true for the daughter, because the daughter cannot provide financial assistance and social support to the father's family after marriage. These issues are stated while many believe that a girl can better take care of her parents during illness.

Finally, all these views and expectations have caused women to be seen as a threat to traditional society. It also makes challenges in the balance of family structure or the roles and duties that men and women do.

### **Practical Recommendation for Policymakers, organizations, management, and women.**

#### **Recommendation for future research:**

Since the results of the surveys showed that economic and work opportunities for Iranian women are much less than for Iranian men. It is suggested that for future research, this issue should be specially investigated as to why Iranian women's access to wealth and other economic opportunities is limited. It is also suggested to conduct in-depth interviews on the experiences of successful women in the field of economics and entrepreneurship to determine how they were able to overcome the challenges on their way.

It is suggested that more research be done on people's tendency to choose or not choose women for representative seats in the parliament, in order to determine more aspects of the reasons for the lack of women in this important political structure.

Since the qualitative research results showed that Iranian women tend to become independent, even after marriage, it is suggested to conduct research on why women tend to become independent after they get a very good job position.

The results also praised that in the path of higher education, Iranian girls face problems that prevent them from reaching positions such as becoming university professors, so it is suggested that future research should also focus on the lived experience of female university professors in this field.

In addition, many Iranian women stated that accepting jobs with high mobility and a lot of displacement depends on the permission of their husbands, and because their husbands do not like them to accept these jobs, they also reject these jobs. It is suggested that future research should address the issue of whether this choice of women is due to the fear of breaking up the family or sacrifice!

Some men said that in order to reach high job positions, women have to put in a lot of effort, but women don't want to be hard to see! While men work and study day and night to succeed.

It is suggested to compare their experiences in the path of success in a comparative study between male and female professors.

### **Practical Recommendations**

This study is useful for politicians to know in which parts of society there is inequality so that they can help remove the barriers to equality.

Economists can also pay attention to the positions of women in the shadow economy and the private sector and address the obstacles that this sector can have in the lack of economic transparency.

Sociologists also benefit from the results of such research. Since the study showed that people's opinions and attitudes are more effective in elections than laws, they can help to change opinions and attitudes about stereotypes and discrimination against women in the field of inequalities.

### **Practical Implication**

But the application of this research for women themselves is to know what the most obvious obstacles to equality are and how can they deal with them. The benefit of this study for managers and organizations is that they become aware of the opinions and attitudes of women and men towards women's work and income and realize the importance of having a job for women, especially educated women.