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Article

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Gender and job satisfaction in OECD countries

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Abstract

Gender differences in labour market outcomes are frequently reported. Earlier findings on the associations of job satisfaction and gender revealed mixed results. The majority of empirical results indicate that women report higher levels of job satisfaction than men, whereas others find no gender differences in job satisfaction. This study replicates the empirical findings of Pita and Torregrosa (2021) and explores gender differences in job satisfaction by utilizing the Survey of Adult Skills for OECD countries. Employing the Balanced Worth Vector (BWV) procedure for data analysis, this study contributes to the literature by presenting additional cross-national evidence from various regions of the world. Our findings reveal that there are heterogeneities in the gender-gap paradox of job satisfaction across OECD countries.

Keywords: gender, job satisfaction, balanced worth vector, OECD
JEL Classification Codes: I31, J16, J28

1. Introduction

Labour market outcomes are significantly related to the characteristics of individuals. As a measure of subjective well-being, job satisfaction is associated with characteristics of both the job and the worker (Hauret and Williams 2017; Hodson 1989; Gazioglu and Tansel 2006). Moreover, researchers suggest that job satisfaction has associations with labor market decisions such as job quits, absenteeism, and productivity measures (Clark 1997; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000a). The current study replicates and extends recent research undertaken by Pita and Torregrosa (2021) on gender differences in job satisfaction.

Economists, sociologists, and psychologists investigate gender differences in job satisfaction. A branch of literature reveals a significant gender gap in job satisfaction and suggests that females are more satisfied with their jobs compared to males (Clark 1997; Gazioglu and Tansel 2006; Hauret and Williams 2017; Hodson 1989; Perugini and Vladisavljevic 2019; Pichler and Wallace 2009; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000b). This finding is referred to as the "gender-job satisfaction paradox" by researchers since females mostly face lower wages, worse job conditions, and fewer promotion opportunities on average (Green et al. 2018; Kaiser 2007; Perugini

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and Vladisavljevic 2019; Pita and Torregrosa, 2021; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000b; Westover 2012) Hodson (1989) explains this observation by referring to the homemaker roles and job characteristics of women. Clark (1997) states that females have low expectations of their jobs because they experience worse working conditions and discrimination in promotion, hiring, and quitting processes. Furthermore, due to the characteristics of women's jobs, as a result of occupational segregation, having a job may give females a sufficient level of satisfaction to compensate for their losses from lower earnings (Bender et al. 2005). On the other hand, some studies find mixed results for gender differences in job satisfaction (Bokemeier and William 1987; Green et al. 2018; Kaiser 2007; Mobley et al. 1994; Pita and Torregrosa 2021; Redmond and McGuinness 2020; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000a; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2003; Westover 2012).

Since earlier studies employed various data sets from single or multiple countries and utilized different methodological frameworks, there is no consensus on associations between gender and job satisfaction. This study adds to the body of knowledge by examining gender differences in job satisfaction in OECD countries. Utilizing individual-level data from the Survey of Adult Skills (SAS) (PIAAC, 2018), this study applies the Balanced Worth Vector (BWV) framework of Herrero and Villar (2018) for empirical analysis. We extend the study of Pita and Torregrosa (2021) by conducting a robustness check for their findings for a sample of European countries and providing additional evidence from non-European regions of the world.

2. Data and methodology

This study uses three waves of the Survey of Adult Skills (SAS) (PIAAC, 2018) conducted by the OECD. The survey is conducted with nationally representative adult populations (aged between 15 and 65) in OECD member countries. SAS were conducted over a variety of time periods in a sample of OECD countries. Country selection for the current study is based on the availability of data for gender and job satisfaction. A total of 35 different countries are included in the current study: 22 countries from Round 1 (2011–2012); 8 countries from Round 2 (2014–2015); and 6 countries from Round 3 (2017). The United Kingdom covers Northern Ireland and England. The United States is included both in Round 1 and Round 3. Table 1 displays information on survey rounds and countries.

We consider the survey question DQ_14 of SAS*: "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your current job? Would you say you are ... 1) Extremely satisfied; 2) Satisfied; 3) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4) Dissatisfied; 5) Extremely dissatisfied".* The framing and measurement categories of this question differ from that Pita and Torregrosa (2021), who employ a four-level scale (where 1=Very satisfied; 2=Satisfied; 3=Not very satisfied; 4=Not at all satisfied). Participants who did not have a job during the survey period were not eligible for this specific question. We exclude individuals who did not answer this survey question from our operating sample. The gender of respondents is identified by survey question GENDER_R in SAS. Table 1 reports the total sample size, operating sample size, and percentage of females in the operating sample for each country.

We employ the Balanced Worth Vector (BWV) characterization to investigate gender differences in job satisfaction (Herrero and Villar, 2018; Pita and Torregrosa, 2021). We conduct our analysis for female and male groups with five categories for job satisfaction level. Since groups of countries are not the same across different rounds of SAS, we cannot provide an analysis of gender differences across time for OECD countries. We utilize the algorithm provided by the web site of the Instituto Valenciano de Investigaciones Económicas (https://web2011.ivie.es/balanced-worth/index.php) to compute the BWV output.

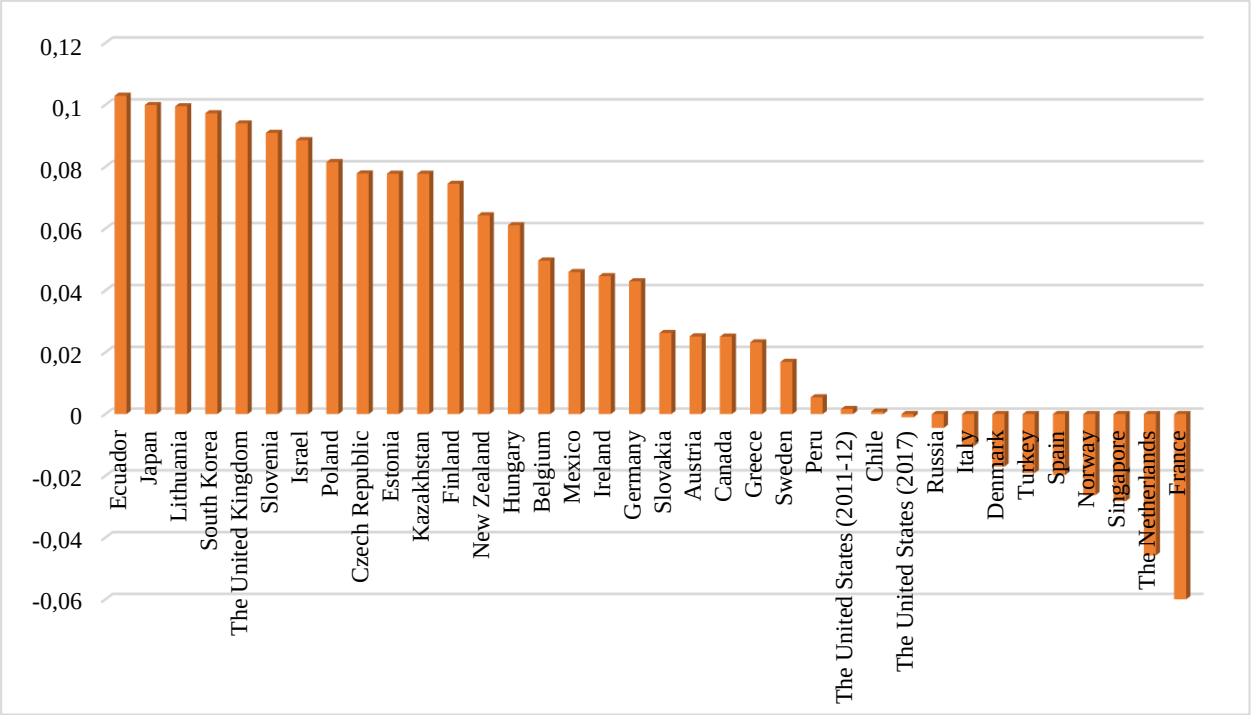
Table 1. Survey information and sample sizes with respect to countries

Country	*Survey Year*	*Total Sample*	*Operating Sample*	*% of Females in Operating Sample*
Austria	2011-12	5,130	3,734	48.286
Belgium	2011-12	5,463	3,381	47.560
Canada	2011-12	26,683	19,367	50.901
Czech Republic	2011-12	6,102	3,666	50.000
Denmark	2011-12	7,328	5,332	48.612
Estonia	2011-12	7,632	5,372	54.095
Finland	2011-12	5,464	3,885	49.421
France	2011-12	6,993	4,517	48.085
Germany	2011-12	5,465	4,038	48.192
Ireland	2011-12	5,983	3,676	50.979
Italy	2011-12	4,621	2,867	43.844
Japan	2011-12	5,278	3,865	46.391
Kazakhstan	2011-12	6,050	3,660	54.317
The Netherlands	2011-12	5,170	3,933	48.182
Norway	2011-12	5,128	3,950	47.646
Poland	2011-12	9,366	5,122	42.659
Russia	2011-12	3,892	2,235	62.416
Slovakia	2011-12	5,723	3,311	46.995
Spain	2011-12	6,667	3,374	44.821
Sweden	2011-12	4,469	3,351	47.747
The United Kingdom	2011-12	8,892	5,905	55.478
The United States	2011-12	5,010	3,557	50.745
TOTAL	**Round 1**	**151,897**	**102,098**	**49.666**
Chile	2014-15	5,212	3,606	51.581
Greece	2014-15	4,925	2,461	45.063
Israel	2014-15	5,538	3,642	46.101
Lithuania	2014-15	5,093	3,217	58.595
New Zealand	2014-15	6,177	4,526	54.065
Singapore	2014-15	5,468	3,988	46.113
Slovenia	2014-15	5,331	3,013	47.693
Turkey	2014-15	5,277	2,312	25.865
TOTAL	**Round 2**	**43,021**	**26,765**	**45.791**
Ecuador	2017	5,702	3,465	45.541
Hungary	2017	6,149	4,278	48.410
Mexico	2017	6,306	3,929	41.334
Peru	2017	7,289	5,358	45.689
South Korea	2017	6,055	4,422	46.354
The United States	2017	3,660	2,507	50.738
TOTAL	**Round 3**	**35,773**	**23,959**	**45.807**

3. Findings

We report frequency distributions and calculated BWV components for females and males for each country in Table 2. Figure 1 displays gender differences in BWV components for each country. In both Table 2 and Figure 1, the countries are ranked with respect to the difference between BWV components of females and males. A positive difference implies that females are more likely to report a higher level of job satisfaction than males. In countries with a negative difference, males have a higher likelihood of reporting higher job satisfaction than females.

Figure 1. Differences in BMW components of females and males in OECD countries



Our findings reveal that there is heterogeneity across countries with respect to gender differences in job satisfaction. There are gender differences in some countries, whereas we observe no such differences in a group of countries. These findings are parallel with related literature (Green et al., 2018; Perugini and Vladisavljevic, 2019; Pita and Torregrosa, 2021; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000a, 2000b). According to the findings, Ecuador, Japan, and Lithuania have the greatest positive differences between female and male job satisfaction. On the other hand, the lowest negative differences between BWV components of females and males are observed in France, the Netherlands, and Singapore. The United States, Chile, Peru, and Russia display the lowest differences in job satisfaction between females and males.

The current study's findings show both similarities and differences with the findings of Pita and Torregrosa (2021). For instance, Lithuania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Austria, and Greece display positive differences, whereas Denmark, France, Norway, Turkey, and Italy have negative differences in both studies. Slovenia, Finland, Belgium, Germany, Slovakia, and Sweden have negative differences in Pita and Torregrosa (2021), whereas we find positive differences in these countries. The Netherlands have positive differences in Pita and Torregrosa (2021), whereas we find high levels of negative differences in this country. Poland and the United Kingdom have small positive difference levels in Pita and Torregrosa (2021), whereas they display large positive differences in our analysis. Spain has small negative difference levels in Pita and Torregrosa (2021), whereas it displays large negative differences in this study. These differences across the findings of these studies may be attributed to various factors, such as survey periods, framing, and scale of the job satisfaction question. This study considers a job satisfaction measure with five levels, whereas Pita and Torregrosa (2021) utilizes as four level Likert-scale for job satisfaction. The framing of scales is also different across the two studies. For instance, the highest level of job satisfaction is framed as “Extremely satisfied” in the current study, whereas it is labelled as “Very satisfied” in Pita and Torregrosa (2021). Similarly, the lowest level of job satisfaction is labelled “Extremely dissatisfied” in the current study, whereas Pita and Torregrosa (2021) label it “Not at all satisfied”. Further research may focus on the investigation of framing effects for gender differences in job satisfaction and the use of the BWV framework with different Likert-scale levels for job satisfaction.

Findings from this study suggest that gender differences in job satisfaction are also observed in non-European regions of the world. Moreover, countries from similar geographical locations display different patterns. For instance, females in Japan and South Korea report higher job satisfaction than males, whereas females in Singapore report lower job satisfaction than males. We observe low levels of gender differences in job satisfaction Peru and Chile, whereas high levels of positive differences are present in Ecuador and Mexico. Females report higher job satisfaction in Kazakhstan, whereas males report higher job satisfaction in Russia.

Researchers provide multiple mechanisms to explain cross-country differences in the gender gap for job satisfaction. A branch of literature suggests that gender-related social norms and cultural differences between countries are associated with the job satisfaction of women (Fernandez-Puente and Sanchez-Sanchez, 2021; Kristensen and Johansson, 2008; Perugini and Vladisavljevic, 2019). Fernandez-Puente and Sanchez-Sanchez (2021) find that women who live in countries with higher gender gap indices are more likely to report lower job satisfaction. According to Perugini and Vladisavljevic's (2019) research, early life exposure to more gender equal social conditions is associated with lower levels of the gender gap in job satisfaction in European countries. Some studies indicate that job characteristics and labour market policies such as employee benefits are related to the job satisfaction of individuals, and these may offer additional explanations for cross-country variation in job satisfaction differentials across gender (Clark et al., 2021; Gaye, 2022; Hauret and Williams, 2017; Westover, 2012).

Table 2. Distribution of job satisfaction and BWV components.

Country	Gender	Extremely satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied	BWV	Difference
Ecuador	Males	0.11446741	0.65712772	0.16004240	0.06200318	0.00635930	0.94854	
	Females	0.15652725	0.63434728	0.15462611	0.05069708	0.00380228	1.05146	0.10292
Japan	Males	0.08397683	0.48986486	0.31129344	0.10086873	0.01399614	0.95004	
	Females	0.09313999	0.52035694	0.30284439	0.07027329	0.01338539	1.04996	0.09992
Lithuania	Males	0.16441441	0.60885886	0.19069069	0.03153153	0.00450450	0.95024	
	Females	0.22546419	0.55278515	0.17984085	0.03395225	0.00795756	1.04976	0.09952
South Korea	Males	0.09795082	0.44590164	0.35901639	0.07991803	0.01721311	0.95136	
	Females	0.12058527	0.45761857	0.34308779	0.06760848	0.01109990	1.04864	0.09728
The United Kingdom	Males	0.27424876	0.51768733	0.12438189	0.06162039	0.02206162	0.95301	
	Females	0.31288156	0.50061050	0.11416361	0.05555556	0.01678877	1.04699	0.09398
Slovenia	Males	0.21065990	0.57931472	0.16814721	0.03236041	0.00951777	0.95454	
	Females	0.24773834	0.56228253	0.15379262	0.02783577	0.00835073	1.04546	0.09092
Israel	Males	0.37544575	0.45084055	0.10799796	0.03718798	0.02852776	0.95572	
	Females	0.40917213	0.43954735	0.10661108	0.02858845	0.01608100	1.04428	0.08856
Poland	Males	0.17466803	0.59482465	0.18352060	0.03575077	0.01123596	0.95926	
	Females	0.23340961	0.52997712	0.19130435	0.03249428	0.01281465	1.04074	0.08148
Czech Republic	Males	0.16148391	0.59028914	0.18712493	0.04800873	0.01309329	0.96109	
	Females	0.19094381	0.57828696	0.18166939	0.04200764	0.00709220	1.03891	0.07782
Estonia	Males	0.17234388	0.61881590	0.14841849	0.05231144	0.00811030	0.96113	
	Females	0.20681349	0.59704061	0.14556091	0.04060564	0.00997935	1.03887	0.07774
Kazakhstan	Males	0.25358852	0.48744019	0.21172249	0.03409091	0.01315789	0.96113	
	Females	0.27967807	0.48843058	0.18661972	0.03470825	0.01056338	1.03887	0.07774
Finland	Males	0.25801527	0.59847328	0.11145038	0.02646310	0.00559796	0.96276	
	Females	0.30156250	0.55677083	0.09947917	0.03750000	0.00468750	1.03724	0.07448
New Zealand	Males	0.29100529	0.50120250	0.14526215	0.04954305	0.01298701	0.96785	
	Females	0.31385370	0.49938700	0.12668574	0.04658766	0.01348590	1.03215	0.06430

Table 2. Distribution of job satisfaction and BWV components (cont'd).

Country	Gender	Extremely satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied	BWV	Difference
Hungary	Males	0.28862710	0.48663344	0.17263253	0.03262347	0.01948346	0.96946	
	Females	0.31868662	0.46499276	0.17189763	0.02704008	0.01738291	1.03054	0.06108
Belgium	Males	0.37789058	0.51494642	0.07896221	0.01917654	0.00902425	0.97517	
	Females	0.41106965	0.47388060	0.08582090	0.01990050	0.00932836	1.02483	0.04966
Mexico	Males	0.28069414	0.56225597	0.12147505	0.02603037	0.00954447	0.97702	
	Females	0.32019704	0.50923645	0.12807882	0.03140394	0.01108374	1.02298	0.04596
Ireland	Males	0.24250832	0.56492786	0.11376249	0.05937847	0.01942286	0.97769	
	Females	0.27161153	0.53361793	0.11739594	0.05869797	0.01867663	1.02231	0.04462
Germany	Males	0.28680688	0.49282983	0.18021033	0.02772467	0.01242830	0.97852	
	Females	0.31757451	0.45580678	0.19475848	0.01901336	0.01284687	1.02148	0.04296
Slovakia	Males	0.17037037	0.57720798	0.19658120	0.04672365	0.00911681	0.98688	
	Females	0.19023136	0.55719794	0.19023136	0.05269923	0.00964010	1.01312	0.02624
Austria	Males	0.45520456	0.43138270	0.07664423	0.02589332	0.01087519	0.98743	
	Females	0.47587354	0.40155297	0.07598447	0.03327787	0.01331115	1.01257	0.02514
Canada	Males	0.28162793	0.54642970	0.11546956	0.04374803	0.01272479	0.98747	
	Females	0.29782917	0.52962061	0.11371475	0.04422804	0.01460743	1.01253	0.02506
Greece	Males	0.10281065	0.53032544	0.27071006	0.07914201	0.01701183	0.98840	
	Females	0.12623986	0.49323715	0.30568079	0.06041479	0.01442741	1.01160	0.02320
Sweden	Males	0.45802399	0.41119360	0.09251856	0.02969732	0.00856653	0.99155	
	Females	0.47125000	0.39250000	0.09625000	0.02937500	0.01062500	1.00845	0.01690
Peru	Males	0.05292096	0.68556701	0.18316151	0.07216495	0.00618557	0.99729	
	Females	0.05718954	0.67851307	0.19403595	0.06290850	0.00735294	1.00271	0.00542
Chile	Males	0.10481100	0.60080183	0.21363116	0.06643757	0.01431844	0.99960	
	Females	0.11182796	0.59032258	0.21344086	0.06129032	0.02311828	1.00040	0.00080
The United States (2011-12)	Males	0.27111872	0.52111872	0.12899543	0.05308219	0.02568493	0.99918	
	Females	0.28199446	0.49750693	0.14238227	0.05706371	0.02105263	1.00082	0.00164
The United States (2017)	Males	0.29068826	0.52793522	0.12631579	0.04210526	0.01295547	1.00052	
	Females	0.31210692	0.48191824	0.13993711	0.05110063	0.01493711	0.99948	-0.00104
Russia	Males	0.18116806	0.43623361	0.28843862	0.07151371	0.02264601	1.00223	
	Females	0.16917563	0.44874552	0.29964158	0.06594982	0.01648746	0.99777	-0.00446
Italy	Males	0.20496894	0.55900621	0.16521739	0.04968944	0.02111801	1.00516	
	Females	0.19888624	0.56245028	0.17342880	0.04693715	0.01829753	0.99484	-0.01032
Denmark	Males	0.50474453	0.40255474	0.06204380	0.02226277	0.00839416	1.00851	
	Females	0.49498457	0.41280864	0.06211420	0.02391975	0.00617284	0.99149	-0.01702
Turkey	Males	0.10851809	0.54375729	0.22753792	0.09159860	0.02858810	1.00956	
	Females	0.13043478	0.49331104	0.25083612	0.09531773	0.03010033	0.99044	-0.01912
Spain	Males	0.17237569	0.62486188	0.13149171	0.06022099	0.01104972	1.00989	
	Females	0.16496164	0.62659847	0.14066496	0.05179028	0.01598465	0.99011	-0.01978
Norway	Males	0.50483559	0.38781431	0.08123791	0.01644101	0.00967118	1.01314	
	Females	0.48671626	0.41339001	0.06854410	0.02337938	0.00797024	0.98686	-0.02628
Singapore	Males	0.13448115	0.63704048	0.18008376	0.04001861	0.00837599	1.01411	
	Females	0.10494834	0.67591082	0.17509516	0.03752039	0.00652529	0.98589	-0.02822
The Netherlands	Males	0.30142366	0.56995582	0.09032892	0.03190967	0.00638193	1.02290	
	Females	0.28073879	0.58205805	0.10501319	0.02691293	0.00527704	0.97710	-0.04580
France	Males	0.27675906	0.53816631	0.11471215	0.05202559	0.01833689	1.03000	
	Females	0.27209945	0.50644567	0.13720074	0.06399632	0.02025783	0.97000	-0.06000

4. Conclusion

This study investigates gender differences in job satisfaction in OECD countries. By utilizing the Balanced Worth Vector method, we find that the presence and direction of gender gaps in job satisfaction differ across countries. Findings on the gender gap in job satisfaction differ across OECD countries, even within the same geographical location. In some countries, females report higher job satisfaction than males, whereas in others, males report higher job satisfaction than females. In some countries, we do not observe gender differences in job satisfaction. Thus, the results of this study imply that the gender-job satisfaction paradox is not a global phenomenon.

Although we replicate some findings of previous research, we also report significantly different results from Pita and Torregrosa (2021). Differences across the findings of these studies may be attributed to differences across survey periods and the framing and scale of the job satisfaction question. Further research may focus on the investigation of framing effects for gender differences in job satisfaction and the use of the BWV framework with different Likert-scale levels for job satisfaction.

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