

## Professional success and satisfaction in the career development: Gender patterns

### Éxito profesional y satisfacción en el desarrollo de la carrera: Patrones de género

María Fe Sánchez-García\* y Magdalena Suárez-Ortega\*\*

\*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, España

\*\*Universidad de Sevilla, España

#### Resumen

*En este artículo se estudia una serie de variables vinculadas al desarrollo profesional de trabajadores jóvenes y adultos desde un enfoque de género. Se analizan las percepciones de mujeres y hombres trabajadores respecto al éxito profesional subjetivo de sus carreras, dentro del contexto español, atendiendo a la satisfacción e identificación de patrones de género. Se combina una metodología cuantitativa y cualitativa (enfoque mixto), aplicando un cuestionario a una muestra de 205 trabajadores, así como entrevistas a una submuestra de 32 personas. Los resultados permiten describir una marcada dualidad en la percepción de la progresión de la carrera, la satisfacción laboral y las expectativas de logro, en relación con el género, pero también con la edad. Las barreras percibidas en el desarrollo profesional presentan igualmente patrones diferenciados. Se derivan implicaciones prácticas, a fin de mejorar las estrategias de orientación de las carreras de trabajadoras y trabajadores tomando en cuenta esta realidad.*

*Palabras clave:* orientación para la carrera; género; satisfacción laboral; expectativas profesionales.

## Abstract

*This paper examines a series of variables related to the professional development of young and adult workers from a gender perspective. It analyses, within the Spanish context, how working women and men subjectively perceive their professional success, paying attention to the identification and following of gender patterns. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are combined in a mixed approach that uses a questionnaire (given to a sample of 205 workers) and interviews (with a subsample of 32 individuals). Their results enable us to describe a marked duality in the perception of career progression, job satisfaction and achievement expectations in relation to gender but also age. The barriers perceived in professional development also present differentiated patterns. Practical implications are derived with a view to improve career guidance strategies for working women and men, taking this reality into account.*

*Keywords:* career guidance; gender; job satisfaction; professional expectations.

## Introduction

For decades, scientific literature has been pointing to the existence of gender differences in the configuration of identity. This research (e.g. Betz, 2005; Fitzgerald, & Crites, 1980) has led gender to be considered a barrier in the professional ambitions of women and in the progression of their careers.

Although there have been improvements since the end of the last century (Susak, Filipovic, & Podrug (2019), attitudes regarding equality are still not very promising. The distribution of types of employment for women in Spain and in the European Union as a whole is still very much focused on certain activities. Some examples are the caring professions (education, health, care of the sick and elderly), trade and services. The difficulties increase in times of crisis (Organisation for Economy Co-operation and Development, 2013), and Spain today has one of the highest unemployment rates in the EU (Eurostat, 2019).

In the field of career guidance, the gender perspective has been slowly but progressively incorporated since the 1950s in studies on career development patterns (Patton, & McMahon, 2006; Saavedra, Araújo, Taveira, & Vieira, 2013). In the context of the industrial era, the studies by authors such as Super (1992) and Super & Knasel (1981) showed that the stages of career development were established by age groups, delimiting few stages of career development based on different sections of expected age groups. Although subsequent studies (Helwing, 2009) continue to reflect this important relationship between age and career stages, changes occurred in the post-industrial and globalized society leading individuals to develop more complex patterns and variations in the progression of their careers (Lent, 2012; Savickas, 2013). At the same time, women incorporate new barriers and strategies when designing their life plans (Evers, & Sieverding, 2014; Haile, Emmanuel, Dzathor, 2016; Pheko, 2014).

Gender is therefore considered to be a powerful determinant of career decision-making that interacts with other contextual variables (Tyler, 2011). For the most part, studies have focused on populations with access to educational resources and opportunities for vocational structure, and largely on high and medium-high qualification

levels (Saavedra, 2013). As such, studies on managerial careers are common (e.g. Grodent, & Peere, 2013; Haile, Emmanuel &, Dzathor, 2016; Moreno Calvo, 2016), or on qualified professionals (e.g. Reimer, 2016; Tugend, 2017). However, it is evident that the segments of occupations with medium or low qualification levels, despite their demographic weight, have been studied to a lesser extent (e.g. Agostinho, & Ralph, 2011).

Current approaches to career development emphasize more holistic, systemic and ecological perspectives, focusing on the relational, emotional meaning-centered character that individuals attach to their professional development (McMahon, 2011). Overall, other studies (Kenny, & Donnelly, 2019; Saavedra et al., 2013) show that: (a) women's careers have different characteristics compared to men's, they are more complex, slower and irregular, taking fewer risks in decisions; (b) their identity is not necessarily determined by occupation; and (c) their decisions are mediated by various social and contextual barriers of a complex nature. The analysis of the literature on managerial careers conducted by Grodent & Peere (2013) highlights (a) that career perception varies according to age and life cycles, and (b) that what men and women think with respect to social gender roles changes over time, despite some recurring intergenerational patterns.

Regarding objective career success, numerous studies confirm clear gender differences associated with factors such as promotion, salary, remuneration or work-life balance (e.g. Llorente Heras, Maroto Sánchez, Martín-Román, & Moral de Blas, 2018; OECD, 2018). Analysis of the positions of men and women in the labour market shows a gender-based dichotomy manifested in the horizontal distribution (in the structure of occupations and sectors) and vertical distribution (hierarchical levels). These studies have shown the barriers and the negative effects of working conditions in women's careers (Chinyamurindi, 2016), and in their quality of life affecting satisfaction (Nirosha, & Sri Ranga, 2019), particularly the feminization of the lowest positions (Guillaume, & Pochic, 2009; Cebrián, & Moreno, 2018; Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC, 2017; OECD, 2018). In this sense, Pons, Calvet, Tura, & Muñoz (2013) warn of the large amount of knowledge, skills and talents that women possess and that are underutilized by institutions, companies and society in general.

The effect of parenthood and role conflict in professional careers has also been a core concern in relation to women's careers. It has been found that the dual-role lacks the same impact for women compared to men, and does not affect the development of their careers in the same way (Emslie, & Hunt, 2009; Gregory, & Milner, 2009). The longitudinal study by Abele & Spurk (2011) shows that, for women, motherhood has a negative influence on career success, while in the case of men, professional success is independent of fatherhood. In short, the studies confirm that a very traditional view of masculinity is present regarding the concept of work, and of femininity regarding the importance of family and care (Salinas, & Bagni, 2017).

Among the indicators of subjective career success, we found relevant dimensions such as the perception that individuals have about the progression of their careers and job satisfaction (Mauno, Cheng & Lim, 2017). Personal valuations seem to be conditioned by gender, together with variables such as age, the dual-career dilemma or their own professional expectations, goals and ambitions. In that sense, we see that

career preferences are marked by gender stereotypes and affect the job satisfaction experienced by working men and women (Benschop, Halsema, & Schreurs, 2008).

In general, women perceive their professional careers more negatively than men regarding their own success and work values. Women's careers are generally less developed than those of men because they are affected not only by external (social/labour) factors but also by their own self-imposed limitations and psychological factors. While women express lower expectations and less confidence in reaching their goals, men focus more on achieving promotion and progress at work, even if this involves risks. Women are keener to achieve work stability as a means of achieving work-life balance (Guillaume, & Pochic, 2009; Mauno et al., 2017).

Patterns of career progression also show a strong correlation with age and professional levels. Intensive work is required between the ages of 25 to 35, when women are likely to have children and family obligations. The work by Abele, Volmer, & Spurk (2012) discusses career stagnation for women as a phenomenon caused by multiple factors that have not yet been sufficiently studied. The results show this is linked to the dual-career dilemma. Along these lines, Eugeneli, Ilsev, & Karapinar (2010) conclude that satisfaction in the workplace seems to be determined largely by the opportunities to achieve work-life balance. The phenomenon of career stagnation also seems to be related to goals and expectations, in the sense that ambitious career advancement goals reduce the likelihood of stagnation, though they also limit career satisfaction (Abele, Volmer, & Spurk, 2012).

Some works show that people develop expectations and values connected to their careers differently according to gender (Damaske, 2011). It seems that the ambitions, expectations and preferences are built on various factors, including the perception of opportunities and obstacles (Patton, & McMahon, 2006). Thus, the study by Guillaume & Pochic (2009) finds that women report lower expectations of achievement, lower confidence in achieving their goals, and aspire to achieve job security as a means to reconcile work and family life; while men opt for further promotion and career advancement, despite the associated risks. They perceive their careers as being less developed than those of men because they are affected not only by external factors (both social and work-related) but also by their self-imposed limitations and psychological factors (Guillaume, & Pochic, 2009). The work by Dolan, Bejarano, & Tzafrir (2011) on engineering workers revealed that in the case of men there is a link between ambitions and career success, but not among women, to the extent that the latter seek greater job security in their careers, and professional success is more related to achieving work-family balance.

In this framework, we have pondered on the impact of gender on the subjective success of women's and men's careers within the Spanish context. In particular, regarding job satisfaction in the workplace, the way they perceive the progression of their careers, and how much self-confidence they show to make their professional ambitions come true in the future.

## **Method**

### **Goals**

This study explores the characteristics and aspects that differentiate the careers of working men and women, as well as satisfaction in the workplace. We start from the hypothesis that there are gender differences among Spanish workers regarding their career development, the stage of their careers, their long-term expectations and satisfaction with their careers.

The aim of the study is to describe and contrast the distinguishing aspects of women and men in their subjective career success. Specifically, with respect to (a) job satisfaction, (b) the perception of the progression of their careers and perceived barriers, and also (c) expectations for future achievement.

### **Sample**

The sample comprised 205 persons aged between 16 and 65 (58.5% women and 41.5% men). Selection was guided by incidental sampling, depending on the opportunities to access the different workplaces, though ensuring the following criteria: geographical representation within Spain, and several levels of professional qualification. 85.4% work in the tertiary sector (services) and 14.6% in the secondary and primary sectors (industry, agriculture, and livestock farming).

The participants live in seven Spanish regions: Andalusia, Canaries, Castile-León, Castile-La Mancha, Madrid, Murcia and the Basque Country. Regarding their professional categories, 9.5% are managers and middle managers, 25.7% are technical staff and professionals, 23% are skilled workers and assistants, and 41.9% work in non-skilled jobs.

During the second stage of the study, 32 semi-structured interviews were carried out on a subsample (15.6% of main sample) of workers in order to determine in further depth, from a qualitative point of view, the characteristics and conditioning factors for professional development and satisfaction in the workplace. The following dimensions were studied: (a) job satisfaction, (b) perception of the progression of their careers and perceived barriers, and also (c) expectations for future achievement.

This subsample was selected randomly from among the respondents who stated their willingness in the questionnaire: 17 women and 15 men, aged between 24 and 55 years, 65.6% with family responsibilities. By occupational category, 2 are middle managers; 3 technical or professional staff; 4 skilled or specialists workers; 5 aides or assistants; and 18 unskilled workers.

### **Instrument**

An ad hoc questionnaire was used to collect the data. It comprised 19 items structured in five areas - stage of development, career progression, linearity-discontinuity, expected achievements and job satisfaction, together with 7 identification items - gender, age, area of residence and professional category. The content validity was studied

by 17 experts in professional guidance with diverse profiles, including counsellors, teachers and researchers in the area. The results showed (on a scale from 1 to 5) high averages (4.3) in: pertinence of the items regarding the goals, sufficiency, and clarity and presentation format (See Table 1).

Table 1

*Content validity. Ratings by experts*

Aspects	Num. items	Pertinence*		Sufficiency*		Clarity*		Presentation format*	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Sex	1	4.83	.389	4.45	1.036	4.83	.389	4.92	.289
Age	1	4.92	.289	4.42	.996	4.83	.389	4.92	.289
Area of residence	1	4.58	.669	4.08	1.084	4.42	.669	4.45	.688
Professional category	1	4.50	.522	4.33	.651	3.67	1.115	3.83	1.267
Stage of development	1	4.67	.492	4.42	.669	4.00	.853	4.42	.669
Job satisfaction	15	4.92	.227	4.15	.899	3.23	1.235	3.15	1.463
Progression and linearit of career	2	4.75	.662	4.25	.754	4.00	.739	4.33	.651
Expected achievements	1	4.58	.669	4.36	.924	4.00	.853	3.92	.996

\* Scale: 0-5

For the reliability study, the internal consistency was analysed using Cronbach's alpha, giving a result of 0.973 for the 19 elements. Analysis using the split-half method gave coefficients of 0.984 (Spearman-Brown test) and .951 (Guttman test).

The semi-structured interviews followed an ad hoc protocol, based on the following dimensions and categories: stages in career development, career evaluation and planning, decision-making, determinants, job satisfaction, expected achievements, work values, gender influence in career, and work-life balance. This technique was applied in order to explore the subject matter of social context-dependent manner and work (Tanggaard, 2009; Denzin, 2014). The methodological approach considered scientific criteria such as triangulation of topics (career development, gender and mixed methods) (Denzin, 2010), and testing the information with the informants themselves (Polkinghorne, 2007).

## Data collection and analysis procedure

The data collection through the questionnaire was done online, while the interviews were conducted by telephone. Attending to ethical criteria, the anonymity of the participants was guaranteed at all times.

The data analysis adopted mixed methods (Flick, 2011). For the quantitative analysis, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used as well as correlational techniques (questionnaire reliability) based on the SPSS 22 program. For qualitative data, a critical analysis of the discourse content was carried out using the NVivo 11 program as methodological support for data categorization and reduction.

Regarding the general process of data analysis, the first step was to record the data using a recorder, and then transcribe the information. Subsequently we proceeded to the analysis, coding and categorizing the data, doing an exploratory analysis. Then, the data was analyzed in greater depth, through an analysis of the content and taking into account the importance of the system's categories. This allowed us to create and revise a system of categories, - the main analytical technique used-, and elaborate text matrices. An example of the coding and elaboration process of the category system is provided (see Table 2).

Table 2

System of categories for content analysis

Core categories for analysis	Codes	Examples of discourse
Job satisfaction	JOBSATI	The path has been very good and I have gained much experience and dedication (Male informant 6); My work has been steady, has gone well, the company has valued it... (Male informant 18)
Homogeneity and progression in professional career	PROGRE	I feel my professional development was positive until I had to take care of my parents (Female informant 2);
Facilitators	FACILIT	My career has progressed since its inception (Male informant 10) My persistence in pursuing my goals, my perseverance has been essential
Career conditioning factors	Barriers/obstacles LIMITAT	(Male informant 21) Motherhood was wonderful, but it had a negative effect on my career, on my professional progression... (Female informant 17)

Core categories for analysis	Codes	Examples of discourse
Expectations of achievement	EXPECT	One never stops learning (Male informant 29).
		I have studied to become a clinical assistant (Female informant 3). Overall, I am satisfied with my career (Female informant 8)
Professional success	SUCCES	I am satisfied with my career, but I aspire to more (Male informant 12)

## Results

### Job satisfaction in the workplace

The surveys show that, overall, participants did not feel very satisfied with their jobs, since almost no aspect valued as satisfactory reached 50% of frequency (except proximity to home). The elements of greater satisfaction are, in descending order, closeness to home (51.1%), salary (40.8%), the stability of the contract (34.8%), the number of working hours (34.2%), and the interest of the job (33.2 %).

By contrast, the informants expressed clear dissatisfaction about the workload (only 4.9% satisfied), conditions of job security (9.3%), promotion opportunities (9.3%), and the physical environment (14.7%). By comparing the averages, significant differences were obtained in all the dimensions analysed, and the importance assigned to each category allows us to identify different profiles of satisfaction by gender in 9 of the 15 issues considered (Table 3).

Table 3

*Job satisfaction aspects. Descriptive statistics and gender differences*

	Response options	N=205		Gender differences		
		Freq	SD	Freq Women	Freq Men	Chi square
Remuneration	Yes	75	.493	38	37	NS
	Not	109		67	42	
Closeness to home	Yes	94	.501	51	43	NS
	Not	90		54	36	
Working hours	Yes	63	.476	33	30	NS
	Not	121		72	49	
Flexible working hours	Yes	39	.410	19	20	NS
	Not	145		86	59	



	Response options	N=205		Gender differences		Chi square
		Freq	SD	Freq Women	Freq Men	
Contract stability	Yes	64	.478	22	42	20.621***
	Not	120		83	37	
Degree of responsibility	Yes	42	.421	14	28	12.510***
	Not	142		91	51	
Job security conditions	Yes	21	.319	6	15	7.865**
	Not	163		99	64	
Workload	Yes	9	.216	0	9	12.577***
	Not	175		105	70	
Interesting work	Yes	61	.472	25	36	9.632**
	Not	123		80	43	
Social security and health care	Yes	43	.424	23	20	NS
	Not	141		82	59	
Physical environment	Yes	27	.356	13	14	NS
	Not	156		91	65	
Recognition by superiors and colleagues	Yes	34	.389	11	23	10.396**
	Not	150		94	56	
Link to their training	Yes	65	.479	30	35	4.884*
	Not	119		75	44	
Working atmosphere with colleagues	Yes	63	.476	27	36	7.893*
	Not	121		78	43	
Promotion opportunities	Yes	21	.319	5	16	10.700**
	Not	163		100	63	

Statically significant differences (Chi square): \*\*\*  $p \leq .000$ , \*\*  $p \leq .005$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , NS=Not significant

The women show levels of demand that focus on more instrumental or basic needs, particularly on job stability and security; while the men have achieved more developed levels of demand, of a more social and personal nature.

The qualitative analysis shows that the majority of male discourses on job satisfaction reflect a positive balance (80%). This idea about self-confidence and job satisfaction is added to the perception on expectations of progress: "The path has been very good and I have gained much experience and dedication" (Male informant); "My work has been steady, has gone well, the company has valued it ..." (Male informant). The discourses expressing overall dissatisfaction are not dominant, and refer mostly to job insecurity (lack of job security, lack of professional stability). In contrast, 60.0% of female discourses express an unsatisfactory view of their professional development, coupled with the lack of job security (like the men). To this reason they add emphatically the need to care for

their families, especially when they have young children; and external factors linked to their environments. In the discourses that highlight a satisfactory assessment of their careers (40.0%), the latter are connected to the realization of progressive global advancement or to achieving to stay in the labour market as a means to survive: "I've been really looking for stability now, but I couldn't find it and now I don't have it. Even so, I still work for the subcontractor" (Female informant); in some discourses, the women value work as subsidiary or secondary, or to support the salary of their partners: "I work to share expenses with my husband and help the family economy" (Female informant).

### **Homogeneity and progression in professional careers**

We found highly significant differences between men and women with respect to both career progression and career continuity/discontinuity. The women considered their careers were negative or stagnant more often than the men, who in turn mostly valued them as positive (See Table 4). In the group of women, considering their professional categories, there were also significant differences (Chi square= 16.058,  $p=0.001$ ): careers were mostly considered positive in the higher categories (management, middle management and technical staff and professionals), and the lower the category, the more careers were frequently described as stagnant or negative. For the men, there were no significant differences in career progression in relation to professional categories.

While the women considered their careers more frequently to be "broken up" or "discontinuous", the men mostly considered theirs to be "homogeneous" or "linear" (Table 4). The women in higher professional categories (management, middle management, technical staff and professionals, and even auxiliary staff and assistants) showed a greater tendency towards considering their careers as linear and homogeneous. Women without specific qualification described their careers more frequently as broken up or discontinuous (Chi square=16.058,  $p=.001$ ). There were no significant differences in the case of the men, who mostly considered their careers to be homogeneous or linear in all categories, especially in the highest ones (management, middle management and technical staff and professionals).

These findings are clearer when the genders are compared by age group, with significant differences found in three of them (using the Chi-square test): in the 25-31 year-old age group ( $p=0.018$ ), in the 32-45 ( $p=.017$ ) and in the 46-65 year-old age group ( $p=0.023$ ). The women aged 26-31 considered themselves to be in an initial or intermediate stage, while there were men of that same age group who considered themselves to be at a consolidated stage. It is surprising to note that in the group aged 46-65, while the men considered themselves to be only either at the stage of consolidation or close to retirement, the women placed themselves in all four stages of development.

### **Do women and men perceive the same barriers and/or facilities to their professional development?**

Gender differences were also noted in the barriers that men and women perceived for their career development. Among the men, the barriers perceived were linked to imbalances between supply and demand at the labour market: "... there's not much

demand for what I do" (male informant). Among the women, family responsibilities were perceived as a serious obstacle: "Everything has an influence, especially when you have family responsibilities" (female informant). Other serious obstacles were culturally assumed gender-based subordination: "... my husband doesn't interfere with my work, providing it's during the daytime. He doesn't like me to work at night" (female informant); and organisational culture: "In a private company you might be promoted but you aren't, maybe because the boss is married and it wouldn't be considered proper for you to travel with him; in the case of a man, there would be no problem, it would just be a business trip" (female informant).

Among the obstacles perceived, some women explicitly mentioned gender discrimination: "all over the world you see that in the labour market men get on better than women. It's very difficult to get promoted. You have to be very cautious, and you always earn less" (female informant). In other cases, they expressed beliefs and stereotypes about the performance of men and women: "women are more tenacious, we organise our time differently. Men know they can go back home and find everything ready" (female informant); "Women are more demanding of themselves and of others" (female informant).

However, in the discourses, some aspects were perceived as facilitating career development. For example, the men mentioned the support of the social environment: "The social environment had a great influence in the working environment, because of recommendations" (male informant). Also, the influence of people who had been significant in their lives, providing them with role models: "My father always instilled in me the value of hard work" (male informant). And they stressed the role of the family as an element that encourages them to develop: "The family..., always backing me up" (male informant). But the most outstanding were confidence in their own capabilities, positive self-esteem and intrinsic motivation as determinants for career development: "My persistence in pursuing my goals, my perseverance has been essential" (male informant); "All the decisions I've made about my education, such as continuing to study, studying for another degree, then doing a postgraduate course" (male informant); "The manager has seen my work and said this man would be good at managing the department" (male informant).

Although the women's comments did not reflect as many career facilitators, the most outstanding differences in their discourses related to professional performance. Self-confidence was not reflected so much in female discourses. Unlike the women's perceptions, for the men, family responsibilities act as a stimulus to develop their careers: "when you have a family you have to make different decisions and focus more on your career" (male informant).

### **Self-confidence and expectations of achievement**

With regard to self-confidence and expectations to achieve their goals, most of the sample believed they would achieve at least some of their goals (40.6%), but there was also a considerable proportion that believed they would almost definitely achieve them (36.0%). There were also some who were pessimistic about the future or thought they would not achieve their goals (18.8%) (See Table 4).

Table 4

*Perception of career development. Descriptive statistics and gender differences*

	Response options	N=205		Gender differences		Contrast test
		Freq	SD	Freq Women	Freq Men	
Stage	Initial	46		34	12	U Mann-Whitney= 2867.000*** Chi Square= 19.731***
	Intermediate	81	.827	50	31	
	Consolidated	51		16	35	
	Near retirement	8		4	4	
Career progression	Positive	104		42	62	U Mann-Whitney= 3034.500*** Chi <sup>2</sup> = 25.797***
	Stagnant	69	.709	51	18	
	Negative	26		21	5	
Career homogeneity	Broken up or discontinuous	77	.529	61	16	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 29.956***
	Homogeneous or linear	98		38	60	
Self-confidence & expectations of achievement	I shall almost definitely achieve them	71		34	37	U Mann-Whitney= 3094.500** Chi <sup>2</sup> = 13.237*
	I shall partly achieve them	80		50	30	
	If I'm lucky, I might achieve something	6	1.208	5	1	
	I'm almost sure I won't achieve them	31		25	6	
	I don't know	8		4	4	
	I don't think about it	1		0	1	

Statically significant differences: \*\*\*  $p \leq .000$ ,  $p \leq .005$ \*\*,  $p \leq .05$ \*

The differences detected by gender are significant ( $p = .001$ ), and the women showed less confidence about their possibilities of achieving their goals.

Analysis of the interviews showed that the most frequent ambition in both women and men is to achieve greater balance between the kind of job and their training: "What I know how to do, machine operation" (male informant); "What I studied, which is nursing assistant" (female informant). Among the men, it was more apparent that the goal was to continue developing with a view to promotion and progress in their careers: "Training, you never stop learning" (male informant). Searching for a better-quality job was also an ambition for both genders. However, for the women, quality work seemed in many cases to go together with the search for stability, while for the men the ambitions were higher: "to be in a public institution, in an interesting project, in which I can progress" (male informant); "... to be a public worker, a teacher" (female informant).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

According to the hypothesis, the results confirm the existence of a duality of gender patterns of subjective career success, based on indicators of job satisfaction, perception of career progression and barriers perceived in their careers. Both genders show moderate satisfaction with different aspects of their working lives, but while men are more satisfied with workload, promotion opportunities and the degree of responsibility, women prioritize social security and closeness to home. The social dimension also introduces different profiles, because while women value the relationship with peers more positively (although the work environment is very masculine and these relationships are complex), men value more the recognition by superiors and colleagues.

When assessing their careers, women tend to perceive them as more disperse, stagnant or negative. Important elements are identified in their careers, such as perseverance and adaptability. But women show a lack of appreciation for their own -professional or educational- experience. These trends are intensified in the lower occupational categories and generally in the 30-40 year-old age group, whereas for men, careers tend to appear with more positive progression and greater linearity. These findings are consistent with other studies such as those of Damaske (2011), Guillaume & Pochic (2009), Eugeneli et al. (2010) or Mauno et al. (2017). Helwing (2009) also notes the existence of significant relationships between age, stage, and career conditions. Meanwhile, Emslie & Hunt (2009) provide similar results regarding job satisfaction differences between men and women, showing gender differences in the perception and evaluation of working conditions.

The analysis of career barriers and facilitators enables identification of certain elements on which both women and men ground their concerns. Although they both find it difficult to keep their jobs and stabilize their professions, we see that the same factors have a different value. Family, in the case of women, clearly appears as a barrier: the problem of the dual-role and work-family balance lies at the heart of their concerns; whereas in the case of men, family is seen more as a facilitator. For the latter, work-life balance is not an issue, and family is perceived primarily as a twofold driver for their careers: providing emotional support to achieve their goals, and as an incentive to overcome obstacles in their working life. Only in some cases is family seen as a cause of limitations, although not to the opportunity to practice a profession, but rather to progressing towards more ambitious goals. Which brings us directly to the problem of work-life balance. These results agree with those of Gregory & Milner (2009), who find that work-life balance is not conceived and valued equally by both genders. It is women who face greater difficulties in balancing family and work, as in their careers there is a greater diversity of roles (Evers, & Sieverding, 2014; Hari, 2017).

But the facilitating factor most commonly identified by male workers, in contrast to female workers, is self-confidence in their own abilities to advance professionally. This links to the gender duality found in the professional expectations in the sample: lower for women and focused on staying employed; and higher among men, who are more willing to take risks for promotion. Pereira Belo, Ramalho de Souza, & Camino (2010) also identified different gender discourses in expectations and work values. The study by Dolan et al. (2011) on engineering workers identified a link between ambition

and career success for men but not for women, to the extent that women seek greater job stability in their careers, and professional success is more related with achieving work-family balance. Also, the study by Carlson & Crawford (2011) showed that the basis of female expectations and imaginations is the male-dominated environment of labor organizations, which offers few opportunities to establish positive relationships between employees. All of this places women between the will and the way in the labour field, as it continues to be more complex for them than for men to coordinate diverse life and professional roles, especially at a time when professional development should be strengthened.

The processes leading to vocational decision-making and professional success are related to the way in which workers manage their careers (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquina, Butterfield, & Koert, 2010; Lent, 2012). However, according to Pheko (2014), the definition of professional success ought to be revisited from a more holistic approach, consistent with women's careers. Such a revision may consider work-life balance not only as a barrier, but also as an opportunity (rather than a barrier) in order for the organization to implement new lines of development and foster greater satisfaction among the workers, with a view to designing professional and life careers that are better adapted to one's own needs (Hartung, 2011). This shows the importance of the ability to adjust to work, flexibility to demands and resilience, as key elements for satisfaction and professional success (Sylva, Mol, Den Hartog, & Dorenbosch, 2019).

Based on a preventive approach, these results may be relevant when proposing vocational guidance actions in educational contexts. In this sense, also organizations must provide the right conditions for proper professional development and a suitable working environment (Carlson, & Crawford, 2011), which translates into increased job satisfaction among the workers.

As final considerations, we found that the trends are comparable to the findings of similar studies in different contexts. This confirms the importance of gender in careers as a transverse variable, affecting all cultures and professional levels, although more marked in the lower levels, and so guidance processes should take this very much into account. It will be interesting in future studies to make use of a broader sample to enable us to confirm more consistently the differences found in diversity of contexts and countries, as well as to fine-tune the traits that would need to be defined in the age groups.

It would be desirable to study further the complexity of relationships associated with gender roles, discontinuity and stagnation of professional careers, as well as how the barriers involved emerge. The need to adopt a proactive and dynamic approach (Sylva, Mol, Den Hartog & Dorenbosch, 2019; Suárez-Ortega, Gálvez-García, & Sánchez-García, 2019) becomes obvious in educational and professional guidance, as does the need to help individuals, from an early stage, to reflect upon their own values, especially such as relating to gender and work, in order to be able to question potential stereotypes, whose effects (evident in this study) lead to diminished opportunities for professional development (Eurostat, 2019; Braches, & Elliott, 2017). Current educational programmes are excessively focused on informative elements and on the moment of transition to employment, neglecting the fact that professional development takes place throughout life, and that one's own values and expectations have an impact on job satisfaction and career development.

## Referencias

- Abele, A.E., Volmer, J., & Spurk, D. (2012). Career Stagnation: Underlying Dilemmas and Solutions in Contemporary Work Environments. In P. Reilly, M. J. Sirgy & C. A. Gorman (eds.), *Work and Quality of Life: Ethical Practices in Organizations* (pp. 107-132). Dordrecht: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-4059-4\_7
- Abele, A.E., & Spurk, D. (2011). The dual impact of gender and the influence of timing of parenthood on men's and women's career development: Longitudinal findings. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 35(3), 225-232.
- Agostinho, R., & Rafael, M. (2011). Preocupações de carreira e satisfação profissional: Alguns dados de uma investigação com uma amostra de trabalhadores da administração pública. In M.C. Taveira, *Estudios de Psicologia Vocacional. Readings* (pp. 79-89). Braga: Associação Portuguesa para o Desenvolvimento da Carreira.
- Amundson, N.E., Borgen, W.A., Iaquinta, M., Butterfield, L.D., & Koert, E. (2010). Career decisions from the decider's perspective. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 58, 336-351.
- Benschop, Y., Halsema, L., & Schreurs, P. (2008). The division of labour and inequalities between the sexes: An ideological dilemma. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 8(1), 1-18.
- Betz, N.E. (2005). Women's career development. In S.D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 253-280). New York: Wiley.
- Braches, B., & Elliott, C. (2017). Articulating the entrepreneurship career: A study of German women entrepreneurs. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship*, 35(5), 535-557. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242616651921>
- Carlson, J.H., & Crawford, M. (2011). Perceptions of relational practices in the workplace. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 18(4), 259-376.
- Cebrián, I., & Moreno, G. (2018). Desigualdades de género en el mercado laboral. *Panorama Social*, 27, 47-63.
- Chinyamurindi, W.T. (2016). A narrative investigation into the meaning and experience of career success : perspectives from women participants : original research. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), 1-11. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v14i1.659>
- Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC (2017). *Informe mujeres investigadoras*. Comisión Asesora de Presidencia "mujeres y ciencia" 2018.
- Damaske, S. (2011). A "major career woman"? How women develop early expectations about work. *Gender and Society*, 25(4), 409-430.
- Denzin, N.K. (2010). Moments, Mixed Methods, and Paradigm Dialogs. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6) 419-427.
- Denzin, N.K. (2014). *Interpretive Autoethnography*, V17, SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dolan, S.L., Bejarano, A., & Tzafir, S. (2011). Exploring the moderating effect of gender in the relationship between individuals' aspirations and career success among engineers in Peru. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(15), 3146-3167. doi: 10.1080/09585192.2011.560883
- Emslie, C., & Hunt, K. (2009). 'Live to work' or 'work to live'? A qualitative study of gender and work-life balance among men and women in mid-life. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16(1), 151-172.

- Eugeneli, A., Ilsev, A., & Karapinar, P.B. (2010). Work-family conflict and job satisfaction relationship: the roles of gender and interpretative habits. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 17(6), 679-695.
- Eurostat (2019). *Harmonised unemployment rate by sex*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&language=en&pcode=teilm020&tableSelection=1&plugin=1>
- Evers, A., & Sieverding, M. (2014). Why do highly qualified women (still) earn less? Gender differences in long-term predictors of career success. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(1), 93-106. doi: 10.1177/0361684313498071
- Fitzgerald, L.F., & Crites, J.O. (1980). Toward a career psychology of women: What do we know? What do we need to know? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 27, 44-62.
- Flick, U. (2011). Mixing methods, triangulation, and integrated research: Challenges for qualitative research in a World of crisis. In N.K. Denzin and M.D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crisis* (pp. 132-152). Walnut Creek, California.
- Gregory, A., & Milner, S. (2009). Work-life balance: A matter of choice? *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16(1), 1-13.
- Grodent, F., & Peere, I. (2013). *Examining Managers' Careers at the Crossing of Gender and Age*. Paper presented at Euram "European management Academy", Istanbul, Turkiye. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2268/152378>
- Guillaume, C., & Pochic, S. (2009). What would you sacrifice? Access to top management and the work-life balance. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16(1), 14-36.
- Haile, S., Emmanuel, T., Dzathor, A. (2016). Barriers and challenges confronting women for leadership and management positions: Review and analysis. *International Journal of Business and Public Administration*, 13(1), 36-51.
- Hari, A. (2017). Who gets to "work hard, play hard"? Gendering the work-life balance rhetoric in Canadian tech companies. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24(2), 99-114.
- Hartung, P.J. (2011). Barrier or benefit? Emotion in life-career design. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 19(3), 296-305.
- Helwing, A.A. (2009). From Childhood to Adulthood: A 15-year Longitudinal Career Development Study. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 57, 38-50.
- Lent, R.W. (2012). Career-Life Preparedness: Revisiting Career Planning and Adjustment in the New Workplace. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 61(1), 2-14. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.2013.00031.x
- Llorente Heras, R., Maroto Sánchez, A., Martín-Román, A., & Moral de Blas, A. (2018). Éxito salarial: Indicadores de género en la distribución salarial. Documento de Trabajo, 4/2018. IAES-Instituto Universitario de Análisis Económico y Social, Universidad de Alcalá. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10017/33105>
- Kenny, E. J., & Donnelly, R. (2019). Navigating the gender structure in information technology: How does this affect the experiences and behaviours of women? *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719828449>
- Mauno, S., Cheng, T., & Lim, V. (2017). The far-reaching consequences of job insecurity: a review on family-related outcomes. *Marriage & Family Review*, 53(8), 717-743. doi: 10.1080/01494929.2017.1283382
- McMahon, M. (2011). The systems theory framework of career development. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 170-172. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1920.2011.tb01106.x



- Moreno Calvo, A. (2016). *Las mujeres en las organizaciones empresariales: Un escenario para el desarrollo de su proyecto profesional y de vida*. Tesis doctoral inédita. Universidad de Sevilla.
- Nirosha, P., & Sri Ranga Lakshmi, K. (2019). A study on quality of work life of employees. *International Journal of Research*, 8(4), 411-417.
- OECD (2013). *OECD Employment Outlook 2013*. For further information: [www.oecd.org/employment/outlook](http://www.oecd.org/employment/outlook). doi: 10.1787/empl\_outlook-2013-en
- OECD (2018). *Earnings and wages – Gender wage gap* – OCDE Data. Retrieved from <https://data.oecd.org/earnwage/gender-wage-gap.htm>
- Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). The systems theory framework of career development and counseling: connecting theory and practice. *International Journal for Advancement of Counseling*, 28(2), 153-66.
- Pereira Belo, R., Ramalho de Souza, T., & Camino, L. (2010). Analysis of discursive repertoires about professions and gender: an empirical study in Joao Pessoa. *Psicologia and Sociedade*, 22(1), 23-31.
- Pheko, M.M. (2014). Batswana female managers' career experiences and perspectives on corporate mobility and success. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(1), 1–11. doi: 10.4102/sajhrm.v12i1.445
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471-486.
- Pons Peregort, O., Calvet Puig, M.D., Tura Solvas, M., & Muñoz Illescas, C. (2013). Análisis de la igualdad de oportunidades de género en la ciencia y la tecnología: Las carreras profesionales de las mujeres científicas y tecnólogas. *Intangible Capital*, 9(1), 65-90. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3926/ic.375>
- Reimer, S. (2016). It's just a very male industry: gender and work in UK design agencies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(7), 1033-1046. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1073704>.
- Saavedra, L. (2013). Psicología vocacional e feminismo crítico: do pasado ao futuro. *Revista Brasileira de Orientação Profissional*, 14(1), 7-17.
- Saavedra, L., Araújo, A.M., Taveira, M.C., & Vieira, C.C. (2013). Dilemmas of girls and women in engineering: a study in Portugal. *Educational Review*. doi:10.1080/00131911.2013.780006.
- Salinas, P.C., & Bagni, C. (2017). *Gender Equality from a European Perspective: Myth and Reality*. Neuron. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2017.10.002>
- Savickas, M. L. (2013). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counselling: Putting theory and research to work* (2<sup>a</sup> Ed.) (pp. 147-183). Hoboken: Wiley.
- Sylva, H., Mol, S.T., Den Hartog, D.N., & Dorenbosch, L. (2019). Person-job fit and proactive career behaviour: a dynamic approach, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2019.1580309
- Suárez-Ortega, M., Gálvez-García, M.R., & Sánchez-García, M.F. (2019). Mapping the entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. En Matthias Dehmer, Frank Emmert-Streib & Herbert Jodlbauer, eds, *Entrepreneurial Complexity: Methods and Applications* (pp.141-170). Boca Raton, FL, London/New York: CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group.

- Susak, S., Filipovic, D., & Podrug, N. (2019). Women's challenges in managerial positions: Comparison of Croatia and USA, *38th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development* (pp.96-105) – Rabat, 21-22 March. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Amina\\_Benali/publication/332031589\\_The\\_role\\_of\\_market\\_knowledge\\_in\\_determining\\_marketing\\_strategies\\_A\\_case\\_study/links/5c9cb30845851506d7303ea9/The-role-of-market-knowledge-in-determining-marketing-strategies-A-case-study.pdf#page=104](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Amina_Benali/publication/332031589_The_role_of_market_knowledge_in_determining_marketing_strategies_A_case_study/links/5c9cb30845851506d7303ea9/The-role-of-market-knowledge-in-determining-marketing-strategies-A-case-study.pdf#page=104)
- Super, D.E. (1992). Toward a comprehensive theory of career development. En D.H. Montross and C.J. Shinkman (eds.), *Career development: theory and practice* (pp. 35-64). Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- Super, D.E., & Knasel, E.G. (1981). Career development in adulthood: some theoretical problems and a possible solution. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 9, 194-201.
- Tanggaard, L. (2009). The research interview as a dialogical context for the production of social life and personal narratives. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(9), 1498-1515.
- Tugend, A. (2017) *Careers for women in technology companies are a global challenge*. New York Times, 10/10/17. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/business/women-careers-technology-companies.html>
- Tyler, M. (2011). Postmodern Feminism and Organization Studies: A marriage of inconvenience? In E. Jeanes (Ed.), D. Knights & P. Yancey Martin (Co-Eds.), *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization* (pp. 9-24). Wiley-Blackwell: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Fecha de recepción: 1 de mayo de 2019.

Fecha de revisión: 14 de mayo de 2019.

Fecha de aceptación: 18 de junio de 2019.