

Gender and job segregation

the SA labour market

Gender differentiation occurs in all societies. It is evident in the division of labour and the allocation of jobs in both paid and unpaid work.

In line with the traditional division of labour, boys and girls are assigned different tasks. Young girls are usually responsible for housework and the care of younger siblings when their mothers work. The allocation of financial resources may also discriminate against girls. They are less likely to be educated. This division of labour in the family invariably affects the occupational choices of women and their income potential.

In this article, I examine job segregation in the South African labour market from a statistical point of view.

Women and the world of work

Women are unable to sell the services of their labour freely because, unlike men, they are burdened by housework and childcare. Black women are in a worse position, as they also have to care for the elderly. Women have to take jobs that comply with these tasks.

Women rarely find employment in the regulated sectors. They tend to work in areas excluded from statistics, legislation and trade unions. Even when women work in regulated industries, their position as workers is prescribed by their gender.

Studies show that the incidence of

Pinky Lalthapersad examines job segregation in the South African labour market.

poverty is greater among female-headed households. This is because most women occupy low-paying, basic jobs characterised by weak unionisation. Also, poor female-headed households are more likely to transmit their deprivation to their children. Furthermore, women are more likely to suffer a change in their income status due to a change in their marital status resulting from divorce or widowhood.

Society sees part-time work as allowing women to combine income-earning activities with housework. So, does part-time work promote flexibility or simply serve the needs of employers by providing a cheap, easily dispensable source of labour?

Withdrawing from the labour market for childbearing purposes negatively affects women's job standing. They usually return to worse positions. This absence from the labour market also causes women's human capital to depreciate.

Women's jobs

The influence of gender on the labour market is evident in distinct job allocation

among the sexes. Statistical discrimination promotes the view of women workers as unreliable due to high turnover and absenteeism rates and costly to train since they are likely to leave work.

There are many misconceptions and stereotypes regarding women's financial needs. Society assumes they work for extra money. Women are rarely seen as primary breadwinners and heads of households.

Companies offer women jobs based on their physical strength, weak supervisory abilities, inability to work late and possible harassment by male co-workers. Certain jobs are reserved for men due to their perceived technical and physical abilities. Companies exclude women from technical jobs because they do not generate technology themselves. Generally, women perform mostly nurturing jobs. Reasons for hiring women in certain jobs rest on their 'natural ability' to undertake certain types of work, their submissiveness, caring nature, physical appearance and low wages.

Another explanation for male superiority is the distinction drawn between the private and public domain. The public domain is the area where men excel, giving them political and economic power. The private domain (that of the

household) where women stay denies them political, social and economic power. It pushes them to lower-level jobs.

The well-being of workers is linked to the nature of labour markets. Segmentation of the labour market separates workers in respect of income levels, standards of living, economic well-being, bargaining power and occupational mobility.

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The labour market

Women are more likely to be employed in the public sector due to the nature of jobs in this sector. In 1991, 62% of all employed women worked in this sector. In 1998, 51% of the 1,4-million public servants were women. However, they only comprised 25% of the highly-skilled supervisory workers, 14% of management and 12% of senior management.

Table 1 indicates that there are nine occupational categories in South Africa, of which five are male-dominated and one is female-dominated. In South Africa, the number of occupations refers to the categories stipulated by the Standard

Table 1: Occupational distribution of women (1996 Census)

Occupational group	% Women of total employed	% Black women of total employed	% Black women of total women employed
Managerial	27	7	26
Professional	55	29	53
Technical	48	16	33
Clerical	69	19	27
Service & sales	35	19	55
Skilled agriculture	20	16	81
Artisans	13	9	71
Plant operators	15	7	44
Unskilled work	57	48	84

Table 2: Female-dominated occupations

Variables	South Africa
Total number of occupations	9
Number of female-dominated occupations	1
% women employed	26
% employment share of female-dominated occupations	9
% female workers in female-dominated occupations	13
% male workers in female-dominated occupations	10

Classification of Occupations.

In analysing the occupational hierarchy in South Africa, table 1 shows that the five male-dominated occupations are managerial (73% male), sales and service (65%), skilled agriculture (80%), artisan (87%) and plant operators (85%). Only clerical work is essentially female with 69%.

According to table 1, black women comprise only 7% of the total managerial staff and 26% of all female managers. Yet, black women constitute 48% of the total number employed in unskilled work. This is 84% of the total number of women in this group. The second highest concentration of black women is in the professional category (29%). They comprise 53% of all women in this group. There are a negligible number of black female artisans, technical workers, clerks,

service and sales workers and skilled agricultural workers.

These statistics point to heterogeneity of labour markets with regard to race and gender. Such heterogeneity translates into income differences, differences in economic well-being, opportunities

for promotion and occupational mobility.

An illuminating exercise is to examine the structure of male-dominated and female-dominated occupations. This will allow one to determine the extent of segregation and the employment share of such occupations. Tables 2 and 3 attempt to do this and are based on work undertaken by Anker of the International Labour Organisation. The categories used comply closely with that of the author. In the case of South Africa, 60% was chosen as an indicator of domination as this was the percentage of male employment in 1996.

According to tables 2 and 3, the percentage of male employment (40%) and female employment (26%) in South Africa is predictably low.

If we examine the employment share, female-dominated occupations account for

less than 10% of total employment in South Africa. Male-dominated occupations account for 44% of total employment. Such an analysis highlights two things: firstly, that whilst the number of female workers has

Table 3: Male-dominated occupations

Variables	South Africa
Total number of occupational categories	9
Number of male-dominated occupations	5
% of men employed	40
% employment share of male-dominated occupations	44
% male workers in male-dominated occupations	50
% female workers in male-dominated occupations	20

increased, their employment is still far behind that of males; and secondly, job segregation is pervasive and will not be easily eliminated.

The percentage of female workers in female-dominated occupations is only 13%, which is almost half the total number of female workers. Furthermore, the number of male workers in female-dominated occupations in South Africa is 10%. These males in 'typically female' occupations are usually in supervisory positions. The number of females in male-dominated occupations in South Africa is only 20%. This indicates that factors such as statistical discrimination, limited access to jobs, segmentation of jobs and job structures are steadfast.

Conclusion

In South Africa, the five occupational categories that are male-dominated are typically primary sector jobs. This means male workers enjoy career paths, training opportunities, fringe benefits, competitive salaries and protection from negative economic influences. Furthermore, such workers have considerable bargaining power and well-organised unions to protect their interests.

Clerical work is a female-dominated occupation that is not typically 'secondary sector work' but contains many negative qualities. There are limited career paths, scarce training and promotion opportunities, low unionisation rates, few fringe benefits and low salaries. Such job segregation invariably affects women's financial status, their creditworthiness and the well-being of the children, especially where women are the primary breadwinners.

Gender influences the types of work people do, the sectors that offer them employment, their remuneration, promotion and training opportunities. Gender is reproduced at work through

reinforcing stereotyped attitudes regarding occupational roles and the worker's ability to perform certain tasks.

In South Africa, the segregation of jobs is very clear across occupations, industries and sectors.

In South Africa, the segregation of jobs is very clear across occupations, industries and sectors. The hierarchical division of jobs means that primary sector jobs tend to be male-dominated. Secondary sector jobs, which are part-time and casual in nature, tend to be the domain of women. 'Women's jobs' ultimately transforms into 'ghettos' when women are crowded into a limited range of jobs. If women are to make a contribution to the economy, they need to move into non-traditional, well-paying jobs. The Employment Equity Act, which aims to put race and gender quotas in jobs, is a pivotal step in remedying the past situation in South Africa where black women bore the brunt of a segmented labour market. ★

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