

University of Groningen

Jonge vrouwen werken aan hun toekomst. De invloed van de kwaliteit van de arbeid op de loopbaanontwikkeling van laaggeschoolde jonge vrouwen

Jorna, Anna Elisabeth; Offers, Ellen Harriët

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1994

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jorna, A. E., & Offers, E. H. (1994). *Jonge vrouwen werken aan hun toekomst. De invloed van de kwaliteit van de arbeid op de loopbaanontwikkeling van laaggeschoolde jonge vrouwen*. Uitgeverij Sua 1994.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Summary

YOUNG WOMEN WORKING ON THEIR FUTURE

The influence of the quality of work on career development
of lower educated young women

Since the 1960s, the traditional division of labour between the sexes has started to change. The male role of breadwinner and the female role of mother and housewife were no longer taken for granted and both women and men became more options to shape their own lives. In the same period the rise of the feminist movement contributed to changes in the power relations between the sexes and gave women the opportunity to play a more active role in public life. The past decades have seen an increase in the number of women participating in the labour force which clearly reflects the changing patterns between the sexes.

In spite of this, the gender specific character of labour participation has hardly changed. One of the most striking things is the (temporary) withdrawal of women from the labour market for reasons of child care whereas the careers of men remain unaffected by domestic duties. Especially after the age of 25, labour participation of men increases sharply in contrast to labour participation of women, which decreases slightly on account of domestic duties. This pattern comes even stronger forward when the level of education is lower.

In the introductory **chapter 1** we explain how these patterns have influenced our choice to study the career development of lower educated young women. With lower educated young women we refer to women of 16-25 years old who followed four years of lower general secondary education maximum before entering the labour market. The dominant view is that these women *choose* to leave the labour market after their first child is born. However, individual choices are made within the contexts of the labour organization and the work situation. Central theme of this study therefore is the question to what extent these structural characteristics influence the outline of life, especially the relation between paid work and parenthood. Our assumption is that both labour organization and work situation influence the experiences of these young women in the labour process, which in turn shape their choices about career in relation to future parenthood. We hereby pay special attention to power processes based on gender, age and social-cultural background and raise the question of how the position of lower educated women in the labour process can be improved in order to reduce their withdrawal from the labour market.

In **chapter 2** we take a further look at the position of lower educated

young women on the labour market, and explore to what degree participation in paid work contributes to their emancipation.

Analysis of statistical material shows a strong gender segregation within so-called 'youth jobs', the segment of the labour market that (most) lower educated young people rely on. Generally, young women have different jobs than young men. Only a few occupations can be considered as mixed. Furthermore, in the examination of the labour categories that include these youth jobs it becomes clear that age segregation is stronger among women than among men. It follows that selection processes on the labour market are gender and age specific.

In treating the extent of the emancipating effect of paid work on lower educated young women we make use of the concept of gender paradigm of Weeda (1993). Gender relations are in a phase of transition. Both in social practices and on an ideological level the dominance of the traditional gender paradigm decreases in favour of the modern gender paradigm. The traditional gender paradigm assumes a division of tasks between women and men that has its origins in biological differences. This view is given up in the modern gender paradigm, which rejects the self-evident character of the traditional division of tasks.

The organization of labour processes is still strongly based on assumptions of the traditional gender paradigm. Therefore, women have more difficulty than men in meeting the demands of paid work. In this respect, participation in paid work cannot be seen as the sole means to emancipation. It is necessary to look at the quality of work and to define conditions that give women and men equal opportunities in the field of paid work bearing in mind the fact that both women and men can have obligations in private life.

In **chapter 3**, the concept of the quality of work is elaborated with insights from the labour process approach. We examine to what extent this approach offers an interpretative framework for the position of lower educated young women in labour organizations. Starting point of the approach is the view that the formation of labour processes is based on power differences within labour organizations. We make use of the concept of 'hegemonical regulation' of Doorewaard (1989) to illustrate the reproduction of power relations even in situations without manifest power processes. The process of hegemonical regulation concerns a power relation which is non-conscious and is embedded in the rules of the structure of an organization. Inherent as it were to these rules is an unequal chance of realization of interests. The subordinate group, however, agrees with the rules as they seem to suggest that realization of one's individual interests is feasible. Hegemonical regulation therefore derives its effect from images which are strongly related to the thoughts, experiences and actions of individuals.

In addition to this theory we show that the process of hegemonical regulation is not isolated from the distribution of power over specific groups. Images of gender and age play an important role in the formation of the labour process and the allocation of jobs to specific categories of employees. Gender specific images of skills and career profiles are particularly of great influence. Definitions of skills refer to

supposed qualities of women and men and are related to the areas traditionally regarded as female or male. As a result, women and men are seen as fit for different sorts of jobs. Images of career profiles are closely related to the division of tasks between women and men within a traditional family. Men should follow the masculine career profile: maximal availability for paid work, which is possible for lack of domestic duties, and a non-stop career at a company. Women should at best follow the model of the 'working mother': their duties in the domestic sphere impede full-time availability for paid work and raise the chances of an interrupted career.

Age plays an important role in images of skills as well as in images of career profiles. Images of skills are age specific especially in the case of physical features. Age is strongly embedded in the images of career profiles as a woman's stand on motherhood depends on her stage of life.

Finally, criteria are formulated to assess the quality of work. The quality of work reflects the power relations of an organization. The interests of the various groups within the organization can be conflicting. The management will be interested in controlling the labour process in order to gain maximum utilization of the available manpower. The interests of the employees form the criteria for assessing the quality of work and can be summarized in terms of reward, security of employment, mental and physical work load and qualification. Reward and security of employment can be determined quantitatively. Qualification refers to the opportunities to use and develop skills both in job content and the available training and career possibilities. Mental and physical work load are mainly related to the possibility of prevention of balance problems both in the work situation and in the organization of paid work and private life. Furthermore, working conditions can result in too high safety and health risks. In these four criteria, which are used for the assessment of the quality of work, the gender and age specific characteristics as dealt with earlier are included.

Most lower educated young women will be faced with the question whether they want children and, if so, whether or not they wish to combine motherhood and a working career. In **chapter 4** we further analyse this individual choice process. We emphasize the relation between individual choice processes and the structure of the labour organization and the work situation as elaborated in chapter 3. The linking concept here is identity, which is defined as follows. Identity is related to ideas about what is correct and suitable or what should be changed. It is expressed in the action patterns of individuals. Shaping the outline of one's life and, as part of it, plans for parenthood and a career, are important expressions of one's identity. At the same time, identity is further shaped by the outline of life.

In describing the process of hegemonical regulation it appears that organization structures are effective because the individual members of the organization consent to the images that underlie the rules applied in the organization. In this case, the members integrate the images in their identities in the course of a two-sided process involving identification

and someone identifying her/himself. Identification concerns the indication of one's own action patterns or those of other people. In the process of identification, identity types are created other than concrete individuals. Important characteristics which are used when creating identity types are level of education, age, gender, race and social-cultural background. Identifying oneself forms the other side of the process. If the individual accepts the images underlying the identification process, (s)he will identify her/himself with the expected action patterns.

The process of identifying has a collective and an individual aspect. The individual can be 'seduced' by the dominant images existing in the labour organization, but can also be attracted to alternative images circulating e.g. in the labour organization, in private life, the media or in political and social movements. The more people opt for alternative images, the more the process of hegemonical regulation loses its effects. As a result, the existing structures in the labour organization will no longer be taken for granted.

After elaboration of the concept of identity we examine the development of identity during youth. As a result of the transition from traditional to modern gender paradigm, both girls and boys have more opportunities to shape the outline of their lives as compared to some decades ago. Attention is paid to the changes occurring in the fields of education, family and leisure. Identity development continues throughout one's life and concerns the total life situation. Within the various life domains, however, several identities can be distinguished. In view of the scope of this study we are interested in the occupational identity and the parenthood identity. We hereby take into account that both are strongly determined by gender identity, because of gender being a dominant ordering principle in our society.

To study occupational identity and parenthood identity we introduce the concepts of orientation, career intention and career. We distinguish two orientations. The orientation to work refers to the meaning assigned to different aspects of paid work. The orientation to paid work in relation to parenthood refers to the meaning of paid work within the outline of life. These orientations serve as the basis of the career plans of the women: the career intention. Career intention concerns the actual plans and wishes about paid work within the outline of life. The moment a career is continued or abandoned forms the point of realization of the career intention as included in the outline of life.

In **chapter 5** we present the methodological issues of the study, which is based on the empirical data of a policy research carried out earlier. With the help of a structured questionnaire, young women of five companies were interviewed about their work situation, their orientations and career intentions. Later on, a small number of women of each company participated in follow-up group interviews where they extensively discussed some central topics. The same questionnaire was used to interview a contrast group of men to prevent unjust attribution of the results to gender specific processes. Furthermore, we interviewed personnel officers and the heads of department to gain insight in the

company's policy.

The present study forms a theoretical reflection on the previous research. The research plan can be characterized as a comparative case study which involved four companies divided over two cases: a factory case and an office case. The factory case was represented by two industrial companies, the office case by a bank and a local government. In addition to the existing empirical data we executed a so-called second measurement. About three years after the first interview all young women and men were contacted a second time to gain insight in the course of their careers.

In the chapters 6 to 8 the empirical data are presented. The factory case is discussed in **chapter 6**, the office case in **chapter 7**. In **chapter 8** we compare the two cases. Furthermore, we make a comparison between the young women and the young men.

As for the factory case: the young women taking part in our study were employed as production workers. Of the two companies involved, one manufactured small electronic appliances for domestic purpose, the other one manufactured pharmaceutical products. In both companies there was a strong gender segregation. Women were responsible for production work, for which no physical strength was required. Men did the mechanical work and were appointed to more technical jobs and management tasks. The women were employed in work that can be characterized as subdivided detail labour. Their work consisted of one or a few simple tasks of a short-cyclic character.

The administrative employees worked at a local government and a bank. Their work ranged from jobs involving one or a few simple standardized tasks to jobs that contained a variety of tasks which were only partly standardized and of diverse complexity. In between was a great diversity of jobs. Gender segregation in jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy in the administrative companies was less strong than in the industrial companies. However, vertical gender segregation in the administrative companies was just as strong as in the industrial ones.

Systematic differences between the two cases appeared at the levels of qualification and mental and physical work load. The administrative employees had more scope to use and develop skills than the production workers, because their work was less standardized compared to the industrial jobs. They also had more training and career possibilities. Compared to the administrative companies, the risk of mental 'underload' was greater in the industrial companies due to limited autonomy and the undemanding character of the work.

There were strong differences between the cases with regard to (future) balance problems with the organization of paid work and private life. The administrative workers had more opportunities to combine paid work and domestic duties than the production workers. The administrative companies had creche facilities and provided their administrative employees with the opportunity to change full-time into part-time employment. These facilities were lacking in the industrial companies.

There were no systematic differences between the cases with regard to safety and health risks. In general it appeared that chances of physical

complaints decreased when autonomy of the employees was raised.

The two cases showed a significant difference concerning the aspect of reward. The wages of the administrative workers were higher than those of the production workers. Furthermore, there were differences between the industrial companies. The wages of the women at the electronic company were significantly higher than those of the women at the pharmaceutical company. Within the cases there were differences concerning the aspect of security of employment. Both the pharmaceutical company and the local government employed more women on a temporary contract. For these young women it is more difficult to view work in a long-term perspective.

Differences in the quality of work between the cases were related to the companies' production principles and the dominant gender paradigms. In the industrial companies Taylorist production principles were combined with images and practices from the traditional gender paradigm. In these companies control was reached through maximal standardization of jobs. Due to the dominance of the traditional gender paradigm in which gender specific images of skills and career profiles dominate, women were appointed to other jobs than men. As a result, they worked in jobs of poor quality which offered hardly any career possibilities.

In the administrative companies the Taylorist production principles were to some degree combined with insights from the Human Resource Management. In the rules and structures of these companies, moreover, images from the modern gender paradigm were noticeable. Gender neutral images of skills from the modern gender paradigm were adopted as far as the lower positions concerned. Vertical gender segregation, however, remained very strong. Vertical gender segregation is still based on traditional images of career profiles of women and men, which expect women to follow at best the working-mother model. The fact that they do not work in higher positions is presented as the result of their own choice. Despite the gender neutral image the management tried to give to the company's policy, both companies pursued an emancipation policy which aimed, among other things, at the recruitment of women in jobs where they were underrepresented. They hereby acknowledged that gender segregation was not a matter of coincidence. At the same time personnel officers and heads of departments were led by images from the traditional gender paradigm and did not recognize ambitions and potentials of the young women. The influence of these images appeared from the gender specific effects of the blocked internal labour market. Young women hardly ever moved on to other jobs whereas men of the same age did. The success of the emancipation policy is therefore questionable.

The differences in labour organization and the quality of work were noticeable in the outlines of life of the young women in the two cases.

The young women were asked to rank different aspects of paid work in order of importance. Apart from good salaries and nice colleagues, they considered job content and scope to use and develop skills to be important aspects of paid work. The qualification orientation as we call

it showed significant differences between the two cases. The administrative workers turned out to be more oriented to further qualification than the production workers. Their jobs generally offered quite a few opportunities to develop skills. Likewise, the low qualification orientation of the production workers reflected the poorer opportunities to develop skills in their working situation.

Most of the young women who took part in our study wanted children. The second dimension of the work orientation concerns the meaning of paid work in relation to future parenthood: the work:care orientation. The differences between the women of both cases regarding the work:care orientation showed much similarity with the differences that appeared on the level of the qualification orientation. The administrative employees were stronger oriented to combine both paid work and motherhood. The production workers on the other hand were more oriented to motherhood instead of paid work. Besides opportunities to use and develop skills, the images of career profiles of the women in the organization were important for the constitution of the work:care orientation. Within the companies, the dominance of a traditional and a more modern gender paradigm respectively is noticeable in the work:care orientations of the production and administrative workers.

The career intention of the women represents the degree to which they want to continue working after the birth of their first child. Remarkably, 56% of the total group of young women planned to stay on in a job after the birth of their first child and only 16% intended to completely give up working. Again, the administrative workers more often intended to combine paid work and care for children, whereas the production workers more often intended to leave the labour market (temporarily). Finally, the same pattern appeared in the careers of the young women who had children at the moment of the second measurement. Compared to production workers, more administrative workers had continued working.

In conclusion we can say that, looking at their orientations, many young women used images from the modern gender paradigm. Especially in the factory case these did not correspond to the dominant images circulating in the company. In the final shaping of the outline of life, however, many production workers identified themselves with the dominant images within the company. They (intended to) stop(ped) working after their first child is born. In more theoretical terms we can say that the process of hegemonical regulation was effective. A small group of production workers did not identify themselves with the dominant images, but alternatives were hardly available. As for the office case, the images used by the young women were more similar to the images circulating within the organization. This was reflected by the way the outline of life was modelled. They were oriented to a future in which both paid work and motherhood are combined and (intended to) continue(d) working after the birth of their first child. Some of the administrative workers were oriented to working their way up the ladder, but this will prove more difficult to succeed. On this point the

images in the organizations were still rather traditional.

Comparisons between the young women and the young men show that on average the men were employed in jobs of better quality than the women. Moreover, it became clear that the relation between the quality of work and shaping the outline of life as present in the case of the women, was absent in the case of men who shaped the outlines of their lives independent of the quality of work and of plans for future parenthood. Nearly all young men intended to be working full-time in the future and to be responsible for the family income.

On the basis of the results of the study we try to formulate some intervention options in **chapter 9** that can contribute to a reduction in the withdrawal of lower educated young women from the labour market. The relations found between the quality of work and shaping the outline of one's life point at two fields of policy that call for changes: job improvement and career policy. Job improvement should lead to more opportunities to use and develop skills and a lower risk of mental and physical work load. Career policy should increase the opportunities to develop skills through training and facilitate moving on to other jobs. At the same time it should decrease the risk of balance problems on account of a discrepancy between the organization of paid work and private life by creating facilities for a better combination of paid work and parenthood.

Improvements in these two fields should be accompanied by changing processes in the (explicit and implicit) images of skills and career profiles, which are often used in combination with images of most efficient management. This ensures that the improvements will also affect lower educated young women. Finally, it will be necessary to check whether advancement of the quality of work of young women corresponds to the interests of other groups in the organization. As improvements are in the interest of more groups in the organization, the chances of success will increase.