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Gender Inequality and Occupational Stress: An Analysis of Administrative Staff in the Slovak Republic

Nierówność płci i stres w pracy: analiza pracowników administracyjnych w Republice Słowackiej

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Abstract: The position of women in the labour market remains a significant societal issue, as gender disparities persist despite legislative guarantees of equality. The aim of this paper is to analyse differences in the treatment of women in the labour market and to examine the level of work-related stress among employees in the context of gender. The theoretical part highlights ongoing inequalities in pay, employment opportunities, and social support, which are confirmed by both domestic and international studies. The empirical part is based on quantitative research conducted using the standardized Stress Profile battery on a sample of 80 administrative employees, with an equal representation of men and women.

Streszczenie: Pozycja kobiet na rynku pracy pozostaje również obecnie istotnym tematem społecznym, gdyż różnice płciowe – mimo legislacyjnych gwarancji równości – są wciąż

obecne. Celem przedkładanej pracy jest analiza różnic w traktowaniu kobiet na rynku pracy oraz jednoczesne zbadanie poziomu stresu zawodowego pracowników w kontekście płci. Część teoretyczna wskazuje na utrzymujące się nierówności w wynagradzaniu, możliwościach realizacji zawodowej oraz wsparciu społecznym, co potwierdzają badania krajowe i zagraniczne. Część empiryczna pracy opiera się na badaniu ilościowym zrealizowanym za pomocą standaryzowanej baterii Stress Profile na próbie 80 pracowników administracyjnych, przy zachowaniu proporcji mężczyzn i kobiet w stosunku 1:1.

Keywords: gender inequality, occupational stress, social support, labor market, administrative staff, gender differences

Słowa kluczowe: nierówność płci, stres zawodowy, wsparcie społeczne, rynek pracy, pracownicy administracyjni, różnice płciowe

Introduction

The position of women in the labor market remains an ongoing and widely discussed topic in modern society. Looking back at historical milestones, one could say that the status of women was primarily perceived through a traditional lens-defined by stereotypes accepted by society at large. These traditional patterns predestined women mainly to care for the household, children, and the family as a whole, leaving them with insufficient opportunities for professional self-realization. Today, women enjoy much greater freedom in terms of decision-making and acting according to their own preferences. Planning plays a crucial role here, as it concerns not only a woman's career but also her family life; managing both work and household responsibilities requires organizing specific blocks of time, which can fundamentally impact a woman's professional standing. Based on the above, the following questions arise: Do women have complete freedom regarding their position in the labor market? And when women do enter the workforce, are there gender-based differences regarding the issue of occupational stress?

Contemporary Context of the Issue in the Slovak Republic

The fundamental principle of equal opportunity, specifically regarding the demographic indicator of gender, can be found in Article 12, Paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. This principle is further elaborated in labor legislation (the Labor Code) and is also incorporated into the laws governing civil service and public service.

Statistical data on gender equality in the labor market are provided by the *Summary Report on the State of Gender Equality in Slovakia for 2018* (based on the EU Gender Equality Index for 2017), in which the Slovak Republic achieved a score of 52.4 out of 100 points. This result is virtually identical to the score from 2005 and is statistically 14 points lower than the EU-28 average. The report highlights the fact that no significant progress in gender equality was recorded in Slovakia within the 2005–2015 timeframe (MPSVR SR, 2019).

From a global perspective, exploratory studies indicate that women earn approximately 20% less than men. Beyond direct discrimination, it is necessary to consider other factors that contribute to these findings, such as shorter working hours, domestic responsibilities, and similar variables. Based on these assertions, a study was conducted in Slovakia in 2020 to monitor treatment in the labor market between men and women, specifically during the hiring and firing processes. The study involved 155 professionals with experience in recruitment and termination. The task was to evaluate the CVs of three candidates applying for a regional sales manager position. To test for potential discrimination, half of the experts evaluated CVs with female names, while the other half evaluated identical CVs with male names. The results concluded that recruiters would offer women, on average, a salary 200 EUR lower than that offered to identical male candidates. A high percentage of disadvantage was observed in the case of the "best" candidate; compared to an identical male counterpart, she was offered a 15% lower starting salary and a 13% lower salary following the probationary period. Since the characteristics between the genders were identical in this research, it can be argued that the study demonstrated a specific form of gender discrimination by recruiters during the entry into the workforce. An alarming finding of this study is that this discrimination was committed primarily by women – female HR professionals. The results show that female recruiters offered men 210 EUR more as a starting salary and 240 EUR more after the probationary period (SAV, 2020).

Characteristics of the Research Focused on Occupational Stress Analysis

The primary objective of our research was to analyze the incidence of stress through a comparative method, focusing on the demographic indicator of gender among administrative workers in the Slovak Republic. This quantitative research was conducted via a questionnaire survey using the standardized *Stress Profile* test battery, which consists of 123 questions. A total of 80 respondents participated in the study. The collected data were statistically processed using IBM SPSS software, which was subsequently used to interpret the results. As indicated, the data collection for our research sample took approximately one month on average, as it was quite challenging to balance the sample by gender to ensure the results were as objective as possible and allowed for appropriate comparison.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Count	Percentage
Male	40	50.0
Female	40	50.0
Total	80	100.0

Source: Author's own processing.

Hypotheses

The focus of the presented research was further specified through predefined hypotheses, which we established in advance to better verify our assumptions.

H1: There is a statistically significant gender difference regarding support from supervisors and colleagues.

H2: There is a statistically significant gender difference regarding the health status of employees.

H3: Women will exhibit higher levels of stress at work compared to men.

Research Results

Through the first hypothesis, we sought to examine the differences in supervisor support and peer support, both of which are integral components of occupational stress. To address this research question, we utilized independent samples t-tests.

The results of both t-tests are presented in Table 3. Regarding the variable of *supervisor support*, we found a statistically significant difference between genders in our data (t(78)=2.142, p=0.035). In this case, men received greater support than women. We observed the same relationship for the variable of *peer support*. Here too, men receive greater support than women (t(78)=1.990, p=0.05).

Table 2

Average values of supervisor and peer support at work

	Gender	Count	Mean	SD	S.E.M.
Supervisor support	Male	40	3.475	1.198	0.189
	Female	40	2.875	1.304	0.206
Peer support	Male	40	3.650	1.026	0.162
	Female	40	3.175	1.106	0.175

Source: Author's own processing.

Table 3

Supervisor and peer support at work

	t	df	p	Mean difference	S.E. difference
Supervisor support	2.142	78	0.035	0.600	0.280
Peer support	1.990	78	0.050	0.475	0.238

Source: Author's own processing.

Hypothesis No. 2 was tested using a parametric independent samples t-test. The mean health status scores for men and women are shown in Table 4. The t-test results (Table 5) present the findings of the analysis. They indicated a significant gender dif-

ference in health status within our data ($t(78) = 3.870$, $p < 0.001$). In our sample, men reported a better health status than women, with an average difference of 9.57 points.

Table 4

Mean health status scores of men and women in the workforce

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	S.E.M.
Health status	Male	40	85,1000	10,70	1,699
	Female	40	75,5250	11,41	1,804

Source: Author's own processing.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of health status in men and women

	t	df	p	Mean difference	S.E. difference
Health status	3.870	78	< 0.001	9.575	2.474

Source: Author's own processing.

Through Hypothesis No. 3, we investigated whether women in the workforce exhibit a higher degree of occupational stress than men. This hypothesis was tested using a parametric test for differences between groups–an independent samples t-test. This test revealed a significant difference in occupational stress between men and women in our data ($t(78) = – 7.75$, $p < 0.001$). Descriptive statistics indicate that women experience a higher level of occupational stress than men (Table 6).

Table 6

Descriptive statistics of occupational stress in men and women

	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Occupational stresss	Men	40	1,98	1,19	1	5
	Women	40	3,98	1,12	1	5

Source: Author's own processing.

Table 7

Independent samples t-test

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	P	T	Df	P	Mean difference
Occupational stress	Equal variances assumed	0,98	0,326	-7,75	78,00	<0.001	-2,00
	Equal variances not assumed			-7,75	77,74	< 0.001	-2,00

Source: Author's own processing.

Comparison of research results with other domestic and international studies

Our first hypothesis investigated whether a statistically significant difference exists between the gender of employees and the level of support received from supervisors and colleagues. We selected this type of hypothesis because many employees report that low support from supervisors and poorer relationships with colleagues directly contribute to a higher perception of occupational stress. To address this research question, we utilized independent samples t-tests. Regarding the variable of *supervisor support*, we found a statistically significant difference between genders in our data (t=2.142, p=0.035). This result was also consistent in the case of *peer support*, where men again received greater support than women (t=1.990, p=0.05).

This issue was addressed by Siegrist (2008), whose study placed great emphasis on monitoring interpersonal relationships in the workplace and support from supervisors and colleagues. The study states that the primary interpersonal source of stress at work is precisely a lack of social support in the workplace. A notable finding from this study is the relationship between low social support at work and depressive symptoms. Based on these assertions, we can conclude that low support can result in a decline in employee health and create "health-related" stress. The study also indicates that low social support in the workplace is linked to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and low job satisfaction, which ultimately causes overall stress in the work process.

Through Hypothesis No. 2, we examined whether there is a statistically significant difference between employee gender and their health status. This finding is of great importance to us, as overall health status is related to the overall level of health-related stress among employees. The question was tested using a parametric independent samples t-test. The results showed a significant gender difference in health status within our data (t=3.870, $p < 0.001$). In our sample, men had a better health status than women, with an average difference of 9.57 points, which is a very surprising result.

This significant issue was also investigated by Mayor, who conducted research to identify gender differences in health status related to stress. The author states that women have an advantage over men in life expectancy but a significant disadvantage regarding morbidity. Individual differences in physical and mental health are primarily explained by the degree of stress these individuals endure, with women being more affected by stress than men. The author notes that women are impacted by more chronic stressors than men. Ultimately, the research study emphasizes that stress worsens a person's overall health. The results showed that the total number of reported chronic conditions is 40% higher in women than in men, a finding that is highly alarming in the field of stress and health (Mayor, 2015).

A research study by Rivera-Torres et al. (2013) points to the fact that occupational stress is largely associated with various health problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders (lower back pain, cervical spine pain, arthritis), cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, depression, burnout syndrome, or insomnia. Stress also has a significant impact on performance, particularly on creativity, productivity, innovation, engagement, and leadership.

Middleton [Middletonová] described the link between stress in the work process and human health. She asserts that many employees suffer from mental health disorders due to work, and stress has a major impact on the development of depression and anxiety (Middleton, 2012).

Similar research was conducted by a government agency (Health and Safety Executive, 2018) in Great Britain, which monitored the relationship between occupational stress, anxiety, and depression, while also comparing the gender of employees. Over a three-year period between 2015 and 2018 in Great Britain, it was found that the average prevalence for occupational stress, depression, and anxiety was 1,370 men and 1,950 women per 100,000 workers. During this period, the results clearly show that women had a statistically significantly higher prevalence rate of health-related stress, anxiety, and depression than men.

With Hypothesis No. 3, we focused on the assumption that women would exhibit a higher level of occupational stress than men. Hypothesis 3 was tested using a parametric test for differences between groups–an independent samples t-test. This test showed that we found a significant difference in occupational stress between men and women in our data ($t=-7.75$, $p<0.001$). The results of our research show that women experience a higher level of occupational stress than men.

This exact issue was addressed in a study by Rivera-Torres et al. (2013). The aim of that research was to monitor employees in Andalusia by gender. The study involved 5,496 men and 2,779 women. This research proved that a significant difference exists between the gender of workers and occupational stress. The results show that men in the work process experience stressors in terms of quantitative demands–specifically regarding control and support. In addition to these quantitative demands, women also experience a high degree of stressors in terms of qualitative demands, which include emotional and intellectual aspects. It is these qualitative demands (emotional and intellectual) that significantly influence occupational stress in women. The research states that men are often in higher positions than women, and in most cases, women are affected by far more stressors than men. Women also perform monotonous work tasks to a greater extent than men, which is also reflected in their occupational stress. The research results also highlight family life. After work, women experience greater family stress, as they must care for the household and family, which, according to the research, ultimately has a major impact on occupational stress. The results indicate that overall occupational stress is also significantly influenced by interpersonal stress, i.e., general employee support. It is this support that women seek to a greater extent, as mentioned in our Hypothesis No. 1.

Limitations of the Study

Every research project has its practical constraints, and ours is no exception. The most apparent issue is the sample size; while 80 participants allowed us to identify clear trends, it is not a large enough group to speak for every administrative worker in Slovakia. It is more realistic to treat these results as an exploratory snapshot or a pilot study rather than a definitive national representative.

Another point to consider is the human factor inherent in the data. By using a self-report tool like the *Stress Profile*, we are essentially relying on how participants perceive their own reality. This is naturally subjective–responses can be swayed by anything from a person's mood that morning to an unconscious desire to provide "socially acceptable" answers. Lastly, because this was a cross-sectional study, we've captured a single moment in time. This prevents us from seeing how stress levels and gender dynamics evolve over a longer career path. To build a more complete picture, future research should aim for a broader reach across different sectors and ideally follow these workers over a longer period.

Conclusion

The integration of women into the labor market remains a persistent problem in terms of gender equality in the Slovak Republic as well as abroad, as indicated by the *Summary Reports on the State of Gender Equality* and current research studies conducted by experts. An alarming finding is that after entering the labor market, women experience certain negative psychological states to a greater degree, including stress in the work process. It should be noted, however, that the article reports the observed differences between women and men (in terms of stress, health, and support) in a descriptive manner and does not attribute them to gender inequality as a causal factor, since gender inequality was not directly measured in the study.

Modern society should possess effective preventive measures, such as the development of a comprehensive and high-quality anti-stress program. Such a program would include components for the effective organization of working time, relaxation techniques, and steps that could help reduce the issue of stress in the workplace.

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