



Job Contracts, Parenthood and Work Satisfaction: Perspectives from Decent Work

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Abstract:

The future of work is undoubtedly linked to the sustainability of job contracts and of work-family relationship. The article aims at reflecting the practical application of the decent work definition as a set of dimensions that facilitates the understanding of worker's perceptions of different job contracts. The study, with a correlational design and cluster analysis, investigates the differences between workers with dissimilar job contracts, for what concern work-family conflict issues, job satisfaction, and other variables. By using a person-centred approach, an index of decent work was constructed and then used as an independent variable in a factorial ANOVA. Study 1 involved a sample of 3122 workers coming from different regions of Italy; Study 2 involved 901 workers from different Italian regions. Results revealed that women with children were more satisfied with their job rather than childless women, even if their job was not secure and guaranteed. This result collides with the decrease of nativities, probably due to the backward laws on work-life balance. The legal system needs to update laws in terms of reconciliation, to encourage parenthood. Decent work can facilitate the understanding of recent development in exchanges between workers and organizations, and provide a useful framework for understanding key processes in personnel management, job contract management, and work-family policies.

Keywords: decent work, parenthood, work-life balance, job satisfaction, labour contract

JEL classification: J16, J28, M55

Introduction

The leitmotiv of this paper is the concept of decent work as conceived by the International Labour Office [ILO, 1999]. Decent work is based on the understanding that "work is a

source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in the community, democracies that deliver for people, and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and enterprise development” [ILO, 2009] and expresses its meaning in: employment, social protection, workers’ rights, social dialogue, the fundamental rights of workers (e.g., freedom of association or non-discrimination at work). These dimensions are related to objective and subjective aspects experienced by workers which are not shared in the same way by typical and atypical workers. For what concerns the Italian context, looking at decent work in an objective way [De Witte & Naswall, 2003], we assume the contract jobs may be the principal and closest expression of “decent work”, while job satisfaction could be seen as a synthesis of both objective and subjective aspects.

Regarding to contract types, since the last two decades, non-standard forms of employment provided by the Italian law have been on the increase, leading to a large segmentation of the employment regulation. A study on workers’ conditions and expectations by the ISFOL¹ refers to the prevailing contract type’s consistency, obtaining 42 different “atypical” contract types from the RCFL (National investigation on the workforce) of the ISTAT².

1. Job Satisfaction

Since decent work refers to both subjective and objective dimensions of working, it seems to us important to recall what literature on job satisfaction states. According to Locke [1976] job satisfaction is a positive emotional state, resulting from the perception of one’s own work as an activity to obtain or facilitate personal values achievement. For Cranny et al. [1992], it is subsequent to the comparison of ideal and real work results [Schroder, 2008], implying dimensions like use of skills, success, level of activity, career opportunities, responsibilities, organizational policies, salaries, creativity, moral values, recognition, security, supervision, human relations, working conditions. Today a new representative side of the relationship between contract types and satisfaction has been opened. An extensive literature, focused on threatened traditional work, gradually deconstructed and made insecure [Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke & Hellegren, 2002; De Witte & Näswall 2003; Lozza et al., 2012a]. Studies analysing the relationship between organizational satisfaction and satisfaction in social life, welfare systems and labour policies, assumed increasing centrality. Thus, job satisfaction boundaries are wide and related more to a vast and multidimensional topic than to a specific focus.

2. Parenthood and Work-family Reconciliation Laws

Parenthood is one of the most important dimensions of individuals’ lives [Umberson, Pudrovska & Reczek, 2010]. This dimension is functional for the construction of the individual’s identity, but its role is not all-encompassing. In self-identity construction converge several factors, including the socio-economic status and the working sphere.

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² Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (National Institute of Statistics). www.istat.it

Work-family binomial is often associated to females that are stereotypically identified as caregivers. Nowadays, women are not only mothers or wives, but also workers. Often, the need for success and for career is placed before or after to parenting satisfaction. Thus, it is important to understand how women could manage both roles of mothers and employed, and how these roles interact and influence each other [Matthews & Rodin, 1989; Haas, 1999; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Masuda et al., 2012]. Scholars widely discussed the work-life conflict or the work-life balance, while few studies explore the relationship between parenthood and job satisfaction. As referred by Greenhaus and Powell [2006], the relationship between work stress and reduced well-being is attenuated for individuals with a more satisfying and high-quality family life [Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992]. So, life satisfaction may produce positive effects on the working side.

This point of view is also confirmed by several studies [Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Masuda et al., 2012a; Cujec et al., 2000; Kopelman et al., 1983; Lundberg & Frankenhaeuser, 1999; Roberts & Friend, 1998]. Cujec et al. [2000], starting from Carr et al. [1998] point of view – that showed how women with children feel less satisfied than childless women – reached interesting results, although in contrast with their original hypotheses. The authors describe a spill over effect between parenting satisfaction and job satisfaction. The main results revealed that women starting their medical careers seemed to be aware of the potential for role overload in combining family and career and were less likely than men to recommend parenting to their peers [Cujec et al. 2000].

For what concerns the Italian context, recently, the relationship between parenthood, job insecurity and atypical work has been investigated [Lozza, Graffigna & Bosio, 2009; Lozza, Libreri & Bosio, 2013]. The employees' consumption and life projects, seen as potential extra-organizational outcomes of subjective perception and objective condition of job insecurity have been studied [Lozza, Libreri & Bosio 2013]. Authors found that especially subjective perception of job insecurity may be associated with sacrifices of daily consumption (like groceries, apparel, or entertainment) and life projects (e.g. buying a home, marrying, or having children). Thus, having children seems to be inhibited by the presence of unstable and not guaranteed working conditions [Lozza, Libreri, & Bosio, 2013]. According to models that assert work and family are “allies” [Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Masuda et al., 2012a; 2012b], our aim was to investigate differences between work and family spheres, at all the levels of job conditions (e.g., precarious or permanent). So, despite the lack of job security, it has been hypothesised that women with children will be more satisfied rather than those ones who do not have children.

3. The research

3.1 Aim and Scope

The focus of the present study was to investigate job satisfaction in typical and atypical workers, in relation, primarily, to parenthood. The subjective dimension of job satisfaction in different occupational contract types has been investigated in female workers (typical and atypical) with and without children.

3.2. Methodology

A sample of 3122 Italian workers, coming from different parts of the country, filled in an ad hoc questionnaire, created by a network of industrial and organizational psychologists belonging to 9 different Italian universities in the occasion of the National research program “Life, Identity, Gender in precarious balance”. Each university contributed to the construction of a full-bodied questionnaire. Our research group focused on job satisfaction in relation to the level of education and parenthood in women with different atypical contract types and social context.

3.3. Sample

Study 1

A sample of 3122 participants filled in an ad hoc questionnaire. The sample was collected by focusing on the contract job type (atypical) and it was balanced for geographical position. After deleting male participants and outlier cases that exceeded more than ± 3 SD for our dependent variables, the final sample was made up of 1967 female participants, mean age 33.00 (SD = 9.1). The 35.8% have 1 or more children, the 74% an atypical contract job type and the 53.6% comes from the South of Italy and the 3.3% (N = 64) comes from [location masked for blind review] region.

3.4. Measures and Analyses

The questionnaire includes socio-demographic questions and investigates diverse aspects of working conditions, from the mere objective ones – like working hours per week and occupational contract type – to more subjective ones – like the perceived job insecurity and job satisfaction, along with different measures of life satisfaction, like the quality of social relationships.

To measure job satisfaction, a single item was used to fully catch the overall perception of participants’ job satisfaction (“Please rate your current job satisfaction”, ranged to 1 = “severe dissatisfaction” to 10 = “greatest satisfaction”). Some variables were used as indicators of decent work: working hours per week, autonomy, perception of job security, perception of economic status, earnings, quality of relationships with colleagues and with supervisor. Autonomy was measured by the item “To what extent, in your current job, you can decide how to carry out your professional activities?” (1 = “I have no autonomy”, 10 = “I am completely autonomous”); Perception of job security was measured with the single-item “Please rate your current condition of job security” (1 = “severe insecurity, I am and I will always be unemployed”, 10 = “greatest wealth, I have and I will have plenty of work”); Perception of economic status was measured by “Please rate your current economic condition” (1 = “Severe poverty. Lacks the essential”, 10 = “Great richness. I can live without working”); quality of relationship with colleagues and with supervisor were measured by the items “How do you rate the quality of your relationships? With your colleagues” and “How do you rate the quality of your relationships? With your supervisor” ranged to 1 = “very bad” to 10 = “very good”.

As regards contract job types, it was asked to participants what kind of contract job they have, by choosing from a list of 19 different contracts. On the basis of ISFOL (2006) classification, this last variable was then clustered into five main categories: fixed term

employment, precarious employment, collaboration employment, permanent contract and professionals. Then, the first three categories were categorized as “*atypical contracts*” while the last two were labelled “*typical contracts*”.

4. Results

4.1. Decent Work Clusters

Study 1

Cluster 1 labelled “Secure and guaranteed workers” refers to those females who have reached a job stability. They are older ($M = 44.1$, $SD = 8.4$) than the women in the other two clusters, the 50.4% is married, the 66.3% has children, the 54.9% has a stable contract job and a mean wage of 1282.7 euro. Females in Cluster 2 and 3, although look like similar in mean age, marital status, parenthood and kind of contract job (Cluster 2 = 86.1% atypical, Cluster 3 = 73.6% atypical), they differ from the specific job-related aspects. In fact, female workers in Cluster 2 seems to report levels of overall job satisfaction ($M = 7.0$, $SD = 1.5$), perception of job security ($M = 5.8$, $SD = 2.0$), perception of economic situation ($M = 6.3$, $SD = 1.3$) and autonomy ($M = 6.9$, $SD = 1.8$) much lower than female workers in Cluster 3 (respectively, $M = 4.3$, $SD = 2.3$; $M = 3.3$, $SD = 2.2$; $M = 5.0$, $SD = 1.7$; $M = 3.5$, $SD = 2.8$). In addition, the 46.8% of women in Cluster 3 is not searching for a new job because it is already employed. Thus, despite both clusters are characterized by a strong presence of women with atypical contract jobs, women in Cluster 3 perceive their job as a stable one. For these reasons, Cluster 2 was labelled “Precarious women” while Cluster 3 well symbolize those women who are involved in a job at an entry-level position (the so called “*gavetta*”³, that is achieving a good professional positioning after a period of hard training). As it was stated above, the Italian contract jobs condition is complex, and using contracts as a variable synthesis of the working condition could be not exhaustive. In these terms, decent work concept may be useful to catch the complexity of the Italian working situation. In addition, cluster analysis may help to investigate in a deeper way the data, having as main reference the concept of decent work.

4.2. Anova

Study 1

In general, job satisfaction’s means are better if participants have children (with children = 6.32, $SD = 2.2$; childless = 5.7, $SD = 2.3$; $t(1962) = -5.8$, $p < .001$). The mere parenthood seems to express an influence on work satisfaction, so that workers with sons (in both genders) are more satisfied, and such a trend is in line with a recent literature domain [e.g., Zajczyk, 2007; White & Rogers, 2000] that shows the importance to embrace family plans besides occupational plans and goals, being possible the reconciliation (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Piazza, 2007; Guglielmi & Sarchielli, 2008).

In order to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction (dependent variable) and contract type and parenthood (independent variables) a factorial ANOVA has been performed (Table 2). All effects were statistically significant ($p < .001$), also the interaction between parenthood and contract jobs type ($F(1, 1963) = 5.52$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$).

³ The figurative meaning of “*gavetta*” refers to begin a career starting with the humblest tasks; starting from scratch. (Treccani on-line vocabulary, <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/gavetta1/>).

Results stress the important aspect of contract type in shaping work satisfaction per se and in interaction with the parenthood. Naturally, typical workers seem to be more satisfied ($M = 6.51$, $SD = 2.1$) if compared to atypical workers ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 2.3$) and this mean change score was statistically significant ($F(1, 1963) = 32.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .016$). This finding may be seen along with the sense of job insecurity that steals satisfaction from work in the atypical ones.

There is also a statistically significant difference in job satisfaction in relation to parenthood ($F(1, 1963) = 11.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .006$): both typical and atypical female workers reported job satisfaction means greater if they have children. In addition, this difference becomes most notable for atypical workers in favour of who have sons. This can be understood making reference to the model on spill over from family to work context. These findings are confirmed also in the specific sub-sample of the atypical females (fixed-term, collaboration and precarious), $F(2, 1447) = 9.4$, $p < .001$, even if there is no interaction effect ($F(2, 1447) = 0.3$, $p = .974$).

After exploring job satisfaction in relation to contract jobs and to parenthood, the same factorial ANOVA was conducted by using the 3-factors' cluster analysis previously performed (Table 3). Factorial ANOVA confirmed the results of the previous analysis ($F(2, 1838) = 278.6$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .234$): women in cluster 3 (working at an entry-level position) showed job satisfaction means much higher ($M = 7.01$, $SD = 1.46$) than women in Cluster 2 ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.26$) and in Cluster 1 ($M = 6.44$, $SD = 2.18$). Moreover, job satisfaction's means are better if participants have children ($F(1, 1838) = 7.8$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$) and this result is confirmed in all Clusters.

The entry-level position women are more satisfied with respect to the other two clusters, and there is no difference in job satisfaction levels between women with ($M = 7.03$, $SD = 1.6$) or without children ($M = 7.0$, $SD = 1.4$). Conversely, Precarious women are the more unsatisfied ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 2.3$), although there is a slight difference between women with ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 2.3$) or without children ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 2.2$), and the interaction between the cluster membership and the presence of children is statistically significant ($F(2, 1838) = 3.6$, $p = .028$).

Chi square

Study 1

In order to verify the distribution of the contract jobs in the three clusters cross-classification analyses were conducted (Figures 1a and 1b). Both analyses were statistically significant, so that the relationships observed in the cross-tabulations are not due to chance. In general, Cluster 1 is made up, for the 54.9%, of typical contracts, while Cluster 2 (86.1%) and 3 (73.6%) are made up principally of atypical contracts types ($\chi^2(2, N = 1842) = 166.7$, $p < .001$). Figure 1b shows the distribution by focusing on the specific contract job type ($\chi^2(8, N = 1842) = 195.0$, $p < .001$).

Conclusion and Discussion

Work-life reconciliation is a living matter: legislation seems to appear not updated, referring to the atypical labour market. A so segmented labour market – made up of a large amount of atypical contract types – do not ensure what ILO [1999] defined as Decent Work, and do not allow a working stability so that workers may not plan their future. The lack of guaranteed working conditions and the backward laws on work-life balance influence job satisfaction.

According to the socio-economic research company Censis [2014], in 2013 Italy registered a declining birth rate (62,000 births per year since the onset of financial crisis in 2008) among the lowest in the history of the Country.

This paper aimed at exploring job satisfaction in typical and atypical workers, in relation to parenthood. Firstly, contract job types were used as expression of working condition in order to verify changes in job satisfaction means across contracts and in relation to parenthood. After that, a person-centred approach was adopted in order to fully catch women's job satisfaction in relation to the "decent work" variable. Thus, a cluster analysis was performed and the three "decent work" clusters obtained were used as independent variable to assess changes in job satisfaction means in relation to parenthood.

Results confirmed the hypothesis that women with children experienced higher levels of job satisfaction than childless women, even if their contract job type is not "a secure one" (Ortiz, 2010).

Moreover, those women who perceived their commitment to childcare as not adequate were also more unsatisfied with their work than their counterpart.

The limits in legislation on the work-life reconciliation seem to interfere with the possibility to bear a child, in line with ISTAT [2013a] and Censis [2014] data. As Chinchilla and Grau [2013] stated, a lot of studies tried to find the principal reasons of the drastic reduction of the number of children, pointing out, for example, to the work uncertainty and to the difficulty of conciliating work and family lives.

Data seem to confirm this point: the entry-level position women are more satisfied with respect to the other two clusters, and there is no difference in job satisfaction levels between women with or without children. Conversely, precarious women are the more unsatisfied, although there is a slight difference between women with or without children, and the interaction between the cluster membership and the presence of children is statistically significant. Both "entry level" and "precarious" female workers are young, approximately the 40% is graduated and more than 50% comes from Southern Italy; nevertheless, precarious women are more unsatisfied. So, starting by an equal context, it seems that job satisfaction may depend by working conditions like earnings, economic situation, job security [Lozza, Libreri & Bosio, 2013] or autonomy, rather than the qualification or the geographical context.

The impossibility to offer and to guarantee an adequate level of care giving may be the factor that influences the job satisfaction. The presence of public services (i.e., kindergartens) with "flexible" timetables that fits with the "flexible" working needs, for example, may help women to act their double role of mothers and workers.

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