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**TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO LABOUR:
PARENTAL CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND
CHILDREN'S REPRODUCTION OF GENDER
INEQUALITIES**

Andra-Bertha SĂNDULEASA

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Transition from Education to Labour: Parental Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Gender Inequalities

Andra-Bertha SĂNDULEASA¹

Abstract

Research in the field shows that, in industrialized countries, men and women tend to work in different types of occupations or sectors of economic activity, for which reason the scientific community developed the term of occupational gender segregation. This phenomenon persisted over the years despite the changes in legislation promoting gender equality. Literature suggests that parents, by the way they raise their children, transmit their cultural values regarding educational achievement and professional career. This transmission of knowledge, skills, preferences and interests from parents to children has been conceptualized by Bourdieu (1977) as cultural capital. In more general terms, this is called parental cultural transmission, a process by which information is passed from individual to individual via social learning mechanisms, which means that the way parents educate their children has a large effect on their children's preferences and beliefs, on how their children will choose to behave as adults in society. But not all cultural traits are equally likely to be preserved and passed from parents to children, for which reason intergenerational cultural transmission is considered a fundamental component of cultural evolution (Mesoudi & Whiten, 2008). In addition to the literature review regarding the effects of gendered intergenerational cultural transmission on educational preferences and career choices, this article also presents an analysis regarding the intergenerational transmission of educational values and occupational preferences among the Romanian population, based on several survey data sources. This paper is supported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed

¹ Postdoctoral Researcher at the Romanian Academy & Scientific Researcher III at the National Scientific Research Institute for Labour and Social Protection, Bucharest, Romania, sanduleasa@incsmpls.ro, 0040726371576.

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Keywords:

Cultural intergenerational transmission; Gendered choices; Occupational gender segregation; Educational preferences; Work-life balance.

Introduction

It is a fact that women still work in typical *women's occupations* and men in typical *men's occupations* (Charles & Bradley, 2009). It is also a fact that occupational gender segregation (i.e. the unequal distribution of women and men across occupations and/or sectors of economic activity) is a topic that attracts many debates among scholars and governors because this segregation is a source of inequality between women and men, as many jobs occupied by women are inferior to those occupied by men in terms of earnings, career opportunities, employment conditions and even job security (European Commission, 2014).

There is an *intergenerational transmission of gender roles* in general and *occupational preferences* in particular (Anker, 1998; Fortin, 2008). Specific work-related preferences lead to different educational and occupational choices between men and women and these preferences are the *result of the socialization process in the pre-occupational life*. But, when women invest in their education and are committed to invest in their professional careers, the occupational gender segregations disappears at least in terms of earnings (Tomaskovic-Devey & Skaggs, 2002; Polavieja, 2005).

Anker (1998) considers that occupational gender segregation is a nearly immutable and universal characteristic of contemporary socio-economic systems since actions taken by the policy makers are not efficient enough to counteract the effects of this phenomenon. In Anker's opinion, occupational gender segregation should be of critical interest for both researchers and policy makers as this phenomenon "*has an important negative effect on how men see women as well as how women see themselves by reinforcing and perpetuating gender stereotypes*" (Anker, 1998). Anker also highlights the fact that occupational gender segregation is a measure of labour market rigidity, because it reduces the labour market's ability to respond to change. In this context, the occupational gender segregation must be understood not only as women's exclusion from

“men’s jobs”, but also as men’s exclusion from “women’s jobs” or men’s refusal to accept a job that is typical a “women’s job”. Another effect of occupational gender segregation is that it affects negatively the opportunities of education and training for future generations, as parents decide on their children’s education (how much education, what field of study), based on their experience with regards to labour market opportunities. Yet, governmental measures related to the promotion of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment will hardly receive support from the people unless they are designed to meet individual expectations, needs and rationales (Stoilova et al., 2012).

This paper combines methods of documentary source analysis regarding gendered intergenerational cultural transmission on educational preferences and career choices, and descriptive data analysis using statistics on women’s and men’s participation in the labour market in Romania, with reference to the situation in the communist period, from a sociological perspective.

1. Theories on Gender Specific Occupational Preferences

There are two main theoretical approaches discussing the phenomenon of occupational gender segregation and the relationship to family life: the *structural perspective* and the *neoclassical perspective*. The structural perspective takes the *demand-side* of the labour market and attributes the occupational gender segregation to the discrimination practices promoted by employers. Women, particularly those with family responsibilities, are assumed to have less stable employment patterns and less productivity due to family obligations, so, employers consider that it is economically rational to reserve jobs with high turnover costs for men. This leads to the segregation of the workforce, men being the more valued in terms of skills and wages (Trappe & Rosenfeld, 2004). This phenomenon of existing barriers that prevent the ascension of women is known in literature as *sticky floor*. There is also the theory known as the *glass ceiling* or *glass wall* according to which women hit an invisible barrier that blocks their vertical mobility (access to managerial positions).

The neoclassical perspective offers a *supply-side* explanation and argues gender occupational segregation by focusing on individual characteristics and preferences for certain jobs. The *human capital theory* provides only economic and resource oriented explanations and assumes that all occupational decisions are the result of rational cost-utility

calculations. According to this theory, women are more focused on family concerns than men so they are less interested in investing in education and professional life. Another theory argues that intergenerational cultural transmission with regards to work preferences is determined in relation to *work values*: intrinsic work-values focused on the importance of the work itself; extrinsic work values focused on the importance of instrumental resources, such as income, prestige, security; social work values that contain preferences for jobs with social work content; work values related to the work-life balance such as high leisure time. Men and women differ in these work values which affect gender typical occupational decisions, as women adopt less risky and less competitive behaviours than men in relation to professional career. Polachek (1981) also argues that women *self-segregate* as they rationally chose an occupation that requires less human capital investment (both in terms of formal education and in terms of professional development in the workplace), as these types of occupations are usually more compatible with women's family obligations. In contrast, men get to specialize in better jobs with higher earnings, prestige and security. These preferences and orientations are learned during childhood, in the socialisation process, when societal structures, values and norms are internalized together with the gender specific roles and preferences. Girls internalise *feminine work capacities* and in the adult life will have higher social work values and will prefer occupations categorised as women's occupations; conversely, boys develop higher intrinsic work values compared to women, so they will prefer jobs that require higher specialisation and better paid. Social beliefs on gender have impact on children's education. Girls who reject traditional gender roles tend to do better at school and achieve higher grades, compared to girls who hold traditional views on gender. Mothers with less traditional gender views are more likely to have working daughters and more likely to have working daughters-in-law. A growing literature suggests that *female employment continues to be influenced by the intergenerational transfer of cultural beliefs and expectations about family and work* (Scott, 2004; Vella & Farre, 2007; Fernandez, 2013). Benabou & Tirole (2006) introduced the theory of *competing identities* and argue that investing time and other resources in one identity may damage the other identity. When women decide to invest in their identity linked to the professional life, they might damage the other identity (when they postpone starting a family or giving birth to

children). Conversely, when women decide to invest in a family, they might damage their chances to have a successful career. When trying to combine professional career and family life, women may experience or expect negative feelings such as guilt or distress.

Another group of theories claims that the complex relationship between occupational gender segregation and family preferences is mediated by the *institutional context* (social and economic structures, consistency of public policies targeting women's participation on labour market and work-life balance, etc.). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that, as in the case of race or class, gender is an *institutionalized system of social practices* which constitutes men and women as two significantly different categories and organizes social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference. Gender beliefs are institutionalized not only in the private setting of the family, but also in the norms and structures of public settings (such as work and educational settings) that have important consequences for gender inequality. More important, this system of social practices is enforced and intergenerational transmitted by *socially advantaged actors*. So, policies targeting gender equality on labour market, both in terms of employment rates and in terms of job quality, have to take into consideration that *women have to pay higher costs than men if they want to be equal with men*. If forced to face higher costs, women will rationally choose jobs that require lower efforts, even if that means that they will produce lower returns both during their active life (lower professional prestige, lower earnings, etc.) and in their later life (lower pensions, lower quality of life). Polavieja (2008) argues that women might make certain choices with regards to their educational and professional paths regardless of their own gender preferences and even in the absence of discriminating practices on labour market, but *influenced by the social structures* in which they live (such as educational offer, the lack of jobs, the law support from the state with regards to child rearing and work-life balance). So, individuals make choices also based on the opportunities and support that society gives them. According to the concept of *bounded rationality*, individuals analyse their resources, chances and obstacles in positioning on the labour market and make decisions based on their analyse, including with regards to their educational paths (Arum & Müller 2004; Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2006). This link between macro-level structures and micro-level behaviour is a crucial channel for the social reproduction of gender inequality. Sociologists speak about *the*

presence of pill-over effects from the macro-level characteristics of societies to the individuals' choices and preferences (Coleman, 1990; Hedström, 2005).

2. Women's educational and career paths in Romania

During communism, women had to participate equally with men on labour market, but, on the other hand, a law interdicting abortions was introduced in 1966 with the aims to increase fertility. Under the promotion of the traditional family model according to which women's first priority is to raise children and take care of their family, women remained the only ones responsible for housework and childcare (Deacon, 2000; Baluta, 2014). Under this *double burden*, women had to leave their education and professional career on the second place, so occupational segregation was high despite the promotion of family model of double bread-winner.

After the fall of the communist regime, the transition to the market economy brought undesired phenomena such as increased unemployment rates, early retirements (as an alternative to job loss), rising poverty rates. All these put pressure on the state budget, so the public spending was reduced, sacrificing the investments in childcare and educational services. The retirement age was increased, so the help received from the grandmothers with childcare reduced (in 1990, the retirement age in Romania was 50 years for women). In this context, although the abortion was liberalised, the *double burden* of women's work remained present and the occupational segregation also persisted. Despite the promotion of laws regarding the protection of maternity and the equality between men and women on labour market, private entrepreneurs still continue to hire personnel based on gender, age and family status, considering that young women would take maternity leave for their soon to be born children, and after that, they would start requesting time off from work in order to deal with their family obligations. The concept of flexible working arrangements is still underdeveloped in Romania and women still face grater difficulties in negotiating their working contracts when dealing with private employers highly centred on short term profit maximization (which involves, among others, longer working time and higher professional specialisation). Employers' reticence in hiring women is also powered by the still insufficient access to childcare and education services (especially in the case of children under 3 years) as the result of various factors such

as the cost of childcare, the quality, accessibility and availability of childcare, and the tax-benefit system (Matei, 2014). By comparison with the communist period, the social support enabling women to balance work and family life was drastically reduced. Women have restricted choices with regards to education, labour market participation, maternity and lifestyle in general. The culturally transmitted domestic and care responsibilities affect them not only as these activities represent unpaid work, but also as they are time consuming and diminish women's mobility and freedom to design educational and professional strategies.

Gender segregation on the labour market is primarily rooted in the *educational segregation*. In the communist era, because wage differentials were low and everybody had to work obliged by the communist law, people were not motivated to get involved in educational programs, other than the compulsory ones. But even so, women took advantage of the educational opportunities available to them and Romania registered one of the world's highest levels of women's education. In the post-communist era, women continued to be interested in education, but the interest towards education and the access to education was significantly influenced by the changes brought by the market economy and the lack of effecting work/family reconciliation public policies. Educational segregation became a phenomenon typically for the contemporaneous Romanian society. One of the causes is the reduced access to education of children coming from families with low earnings and from rural areas. Romania remains one of the countries with high rates of school dropout and early school leavers (Eurydice & Cedefop Report, 2014). On the other hand, tertiary education became almost a strategy of life, especially in the case of females who, given their difficulties in entering on labour market, perceive education as an alternative to unemployment and postpone their entrance on labour market by enrolling to higher levels of education. In this context, staying on education as an alternative to unemployment means not only postponing the entrance on labour market, but also delaying starting a family which translates in reduced fertility rates and population ageing.

3. Participation on education and labour market in Romania

Chances for attaining managerial positions are lower for women than for men (only 39% from the persons working in managerial

positions were women in 2010 in Romania). The share of employed females is highest in the case of occupational groups *Professionals* (62.4%), *Clerical support workers* (67.6%) and *Service and sales workers* (59.9%)². All the three occupational groups are associated with earning gaps, men being the ones with higher earnings. Women in Romania are disadvantaged also with regards to economic activity. The share of employed women is highest in sectors like *Accommodation and food service activities* (58.7%), *Financial and insurance activities* (70.3%), *Public administration* (60.2%), *Education* (69.1%) and *Human health and social work activities* (78.4%)³.

Gender employment gap increases in direct dependence with the number of children in the family. Children's age is also an important determinant of employment gap, in the sense that the smaller the children, the higher gender employment gap (*Table 1*). What really increases the gender employment gap is the age of the youngest child. This means that Romanian women continue to be the ones who take parental leave when a child is born. The most distinctive gender gap is registered in case of parents with *lower educational levels*, regardless the number of children and regardless children's age. A possible explanation might be the fact that people with higher educational levels hold more egalitarian gender attitudes which means that educated female receive more support from their husbands in balancing work with family responsibilities. Also, people with higher education are most likely engaged in better paid jobs which means that they afford to pay for childcare services, women thus being able to return to work soon after their child is born.

Table 1. Employment rates and gender employment gap by sex, educational attainment level and age of youngest child, 2010 (%)

Age of children	Educational	Males	Females	GG
Less than 6 years	ISCED 0-2	73,3	43,1	30,2
	ISCED 3-4	80,3	58	22,3
	ISCED 5-8	93,1	86,5	6,6

² Eurostat online database, online data code [earn_ses10_54], data presented for year 2010.

³ Eurostat online database, online data code [earn_ses10_01], data presented for year 2010.

From 6 to 11 years	ISCED 0-2	72	48,9	23,1
	ISCED 3-4	82,4	66,7	15,7
	ISCED 5-8	95,1	91,9	3,2
12 years or over	ISCED 0-2	68,1	52,4	15,7
	ISCED 3-4	79,2	68	11,2
	ISCED 5-8	84,4	87,8	-3,4

Data source: *Eurostat online database, data code [lfst_hberedch]*.

Table 2. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form by age, 2010 (%)⁴

Age	Gender pay gap in unadjusted form
Total	8,8
<25 years	1,7
25-34	2,6
35-44	10,5
45-54	11,1
55-64	8,5
>64 years	28,1

Data source: *Eurostat online database, data codes [tsdsc340] and [earn_gr_gpgr2ag]*

The gender pay gap increases with age in Romania (*Table 2*). One of the most distinctive gender pay gap is observed in mid-thirties and forties, which is the phase of family formation childbirth when women take parental care leaves. The value of the unadjusted gender pay gap is highest in the case of older women and this is explained, among others, by the fact that during communist regime the maternity leave could not exceed 112 days and women who stayed home to care for their children for longer periods of time had to take unpaid leave which translated in later life in smaller pensions.

According to a special Eurobarometer conducted in 2011⁵, Romanians believe that women have the necessary qualities and skills to fill positions of responsibility (66%) and are as willing as men to fight to

⁴ The gender pay gap (GPG) in unadjusted form represents the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees, in the sectors of industry, construction and services (except public administration, defense, compulsory social security).

⁵ Special Eurobarometer 376 - Women in decision-making positions.

make a career for themselves (70%), but have *less freedom because of their family responsibilities* (70%). According to another special Eurobarometer conducted in 2014⁶, Romanians are most likely to mention that *gender stereotyping are most widespread in the workplace* (47%), and on the second place they mention politics (33%); but on the other hand, only 56% agree that a father must put his career ahead of looking after his young child and say that *men are less competent than women at performing household tasks* (63%) and that *family life suffers when the mother has a full-time job* (65%). In this context, it seems that women and men take advantage of educational offer and position themselves in different segments of the labour market choosing jobs with different characteristics, not only in accordance with their human capital, but also with the possibilities to balance paid work and family life.

Parents taking care of children aged around 14 years who were included in the national field survey “Family Life” carried out by Soros Foundation Romania⁷ in 2008 have different expectations with regards to their children’s educational outcomes. Parents from the rural areas support tertiary education in a greater extent in the case of boys, while parents from urban in the case of girls. Also, parents’ expectations vary by their level of education: parents with tertiary education are the ones who expect in the greatest extend that their children would achieve tertiary education, both in girls’ case, and in boy’s case.

Conclusions

As individuals, women make choices with regards to education, family formation, fertility and labour market participation over their life-cycle. Women’s attitudes towards education and work are developed in youth, influenced by *parental education*. But, these views may also be shaped by *societal attitudes* and *institutional barriers*. The social and economic structures, the public policies targeting employment and work-life balance, the hegemonic cultural believes shaped or enforced by different institutions are all factors contributing to the gendered occupational segregation. If a woman’s aspirations include career goals as well as establishing caring and loving relationships with her children and spouse, she lowers her aspirations and she makes compromises, in the absence

⁶ Special Eurobarometer 428 - Gender Equality.

⁷ Only respondents who were parents of children aged around 14 years were selected when run the database (i.e. 377 respondents).

of societal and institutional support for balancing work and family life. From the perspective of resilience theory, women have the crucial role in *building resilience* (i.e. in adapting to the conditions), when society is resistant with facilitating and promoting work-life balance. Policy makers have to understand that promoting gender equality through public policies translates not only into *respecting women's right* to equal treatment, but also into *respecting children's rights* to equal treatment and equal opportunities in terms of education and career choices.

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Biodata:



Andra-Bertha Sănduleasa is a postdoctoral researcher at the Romanian Academy where she studies the influence of cultural factors on attitudes towards female participation on labour market in Romania. Sănduleasa is a sociologist, holds a MA degree in Communication and Public Opinion and a PhD degree in Sociology from the University of Bucharest. She also has over 11 years of experience in implementing national and international research projects in the field of social policies within the National Scientific Research Institute for Labour and Social Protection from Romania.