

# Differences between Men and Women in Quality of Life

D7.3 – April 2009

Éva Fodor and Dorottya Rédei - Central European  
University



Universiteit Utrecht



**Quality** is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international-comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

Quality is a Specific Targeted Research or Innovations Project funded within the Sixth Framework Programme, Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society of the European Commission.

Fodor, E. & Redai, D. (2009). Differences between Men and Women in Quality of Life. Deliverable of EU-project Quality, Utrecht: Utrecht University



**Universiteit Utrecht**



The knowledge and data provided in this publication has been collected as part of the FP6 EU-financed-project QUALITY. It reflects only the authors' views. The EU is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein. The user uses the information at his/her sole risk and liability.

# Content

- 1. Background .....4
- 2. Data and analytic strategy .....4
- 3. Univariate analysis .....5
  - 3.1 Length of leisure time .....6
  - 3.2 Quality of leisure .....7
  - 3.3. Division of domestic labor .....7
  - 3.4. Childcare concerns .....8
  - 3.5. Subjective indicators of well-being .....10
- 4. Multivariate analysis .....12
- Summary .....15

# 1. Background

This report is Deliverable 7.3 for the project QUALITY of Life in a Changing Europe, funded by the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission. The task of this report is to review gender differences in how quality of work affects quality of life - based primarily on quantitative and secondarily on qualitative data collected in the eight countries participating in this project. In our previous report, Deliverable 7. 2: “Differences Between Men and Women in Work Quality” we identified small, yet remarkable gender differences in quality of work and people’s perceptions of their quality of work. Specifically, we found that women worked shorter hours than men at their workplaces. This was especially true for the more developed economies as women’s relative workload seemed significantly higher in Bulgaria, Hungary and Portugal. In addition, women had less authority, contributed less to the household budget, tended to commute a bit longer, had less access to flexible work arrangements and in general were less likely to receive training than men. Nevertheless, women felt just as, or even more, loyal than men and derived a somewhat higher degree of pleasure from their jobs. Men, on the other hand, experienced more pressure and more demanding careers. The differences between men and women were small, however, and could be due to sample bias. We also explored determinants of job satisfaction and found that they were by and large similar for men and women. Having supervisory authority and autonomy are more important for men’s enjoyment of their work, while having access to flexible work time options contributes more to women’s job satisfaction. This makes sense as women are more likely to be responsible for domestic duties while masculinity is closely tied to power and authority. In general, these findings lead us to conclude that work/life balance policies at the workplace contribute more to women’s happiness with their jobs than men’s, while lengthy and unpredictable work hours make both genders dissatisfied.

Having examined people’s actual and perceived work quality as well as its predictors, we now move on to explore how work quality as well as other life areas, such as domestic work, quality and quantity of leisure time and support from relatives and friends contribute to people’s overall well-being. The goal of this report is to identify gender differences in these areas.

# 2. Data and analytic strategy

Data for this report comes from several sources. We primarily rely on survey data collected within the framework of our project Quality of Life in a Changing Europe. The data collection mechanism and details have been described elsewhere, so we will review this only briefly here, along with our main variables.

Survey data was collected in eight European countries participating in our project: Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the UK. Each country team picked 4 companies, which operated in the sectors of finance, health, retail and telecommunications. We selected these sectors because of the diversity of its workforce as well as the fact that they are growing and of increasing importance in the European economy. In each company we conducted a web-based survey: with permission and support from the managers we posted a survey on a website and allowed access to all

or a selected group of employees in each company. In each country and each company we received between 150-600 answers, and the compilation of these serve as our data. (The exact procedure is described elsewhere in the documents for this project.)

Obviously, these data are not representative of the country, the sector or even the company as people self-selected into the survey. As in all such surveys, people who are especially loyal and satisfied as well as those who are particularly unhappy are more likely to respond. In addition, while we assured everyone that the survey is anonymous, in many cases they were administered or at least accompanied with a supporting letter/email from the company management. Thus employers may have had doubts as to the real anonymity of the survey and might have been hesitant to tell us about their true feelings.

All these problems notwithstanding, we have a dataset of close to 6,000 (see tables for exact N's for each procedure), collected in 8 countries in 4 sectors in 16 companies. We asked questions about people's conditions of paid and unpaid work as well as how they felt about it, their perception of their workplace characteristics, enjoyment of work, level of stress, health, etc. While it may be difficult to make generalizations on the basis of these data, the information we gain is still diverse enough to potentially lead to the development of novel ideas and to explorations of emerging trends in the European labor markets.

We have recoded the dataset to make it more easily usable for our analysis. Primarily we relied on scales constructed by the QUALITY team to measure a variety of aspects of work and life quality. The construction of these scales and their basic characteristics are described in detail elsewhere.

In this report, we start by reviewing five areas of life where we expect gender and cross-country differences to emerge. After an evaluation of the univariate distributions, we turn to a set of linear regression equations designed to identify the most important predictors of satisfaction with life. Finally we conclude by examining the force of each predictor in separate equations for men and women.

## 3. Univariate analysis

We explore five groups of variables, each describing a different angle of quality of life. While there are many such indicators, we picked the ones where gender differences are expected to be significant.

The five sets of indicators are the following:

Length of leisure time;

Quality of leisure time;

Division of domestic labor;

Concerns about childcare;

Subjective indicators of financial, social and overall well-being.

### 3.1 Length of leisure time

Table 1 describes mean non-leisure hours for women and men in each country. We include in this category hours spent doing paid work, domestic work, and commuting back and forth between one's workplace. (We did not weight the samples for these tables, thus the N's are somewhat different in each country. We decided against weighting to retain the full information available in the sample and because representativeness is not guaranteed anyway.)

Table 1 shows significant cross-country differences in work hours. Men and women in less developed economies work longer hours and the gender difference is much smaller here than in most of the other countries. While women only work about 2 hours per week less than men in Bulgaria, Hungary and Portugal, the gap is between 5-14 in the other countries. This is due to the unavailability of part time work options for women at least in Hungary and Bulgaria. Women in these countries also commute longer to get to work, but so do men. The cross-country difference is larger here than the one between men and women. In terms of housework, women do significantly more work everywhere than men. In fact, women in the countries where paid work hours are longer tend to do more, rather than less, domestic work, adding up to a significantly longer time spent at work than in countries with shorter paid work hours. For example, women in Bulgaria spend on average 59.2 hours per week doing paid and unpaid work (men 52.4), while women in the Netherlands spend 41.4 (while men work 46.4). *This means that women tend to work longer than men in less developed countries (Hungary, Bulgaria and Portugal), while they work less or similar hours – all combined – in more developed economies (Finland, Sweden, UK, Netherland and Germany).*

Table 1. Hours worked in a variety of areas (means)

		Work hours	Housework hours	Commute time (minutes)
Finland	Women	-	8.1	27.3
	Men	-	5.7	24.3
Sweden	Women	36.5	11.9	32.6
	Men	41.7	8.4	28.6
UK	Women	34.7	15.3	31.8
	Men	40.8	8.6	34.8
Netherlands	Women	29.0	12.4	33.3
	Men	39.5	6.9	41.8
Germany	Women	35.1	13.6	28.9
	Men	41.6	7.5	38.7
Portugal	Women	43.7	13.4	37.8
	Men	45.9	6.8	35.7
Hungary	Women	44.6	14.2	47.2
	Men	45.4	7.4	41.4
Bulgaria	Women	44.1	15.1	34.1
	Men	45.1	7.3	31.2

### 3.2 Quality of leisure

Most people in our sample had relatively little leisure time and this was especially true of women in less developed economies. They had the least time available for recreation. Aside from quantity, quality of leisure is also important. This is why we wanted to find out how people spend their leisure time and how they feel about it. Table 2 summarizes some of the indicators we reviewed.

Table 2. Percent of men and women who pursue the following leisure activities at least with some regularity

		Eat meal with household	Go out with partner	Go out with friends
Finland	Women	78	21	9
	Men	74	32	20
Sweden	Women	83	31	12
	Men	85	35	12
UK	Women	65	27	14
	Men	65	29	15
Netherlands	Women	83	34	26
	Men	80	29	17
Germany	Women	71	30	16
	Men	74	33	14
Portugal	Women	68	21	9
	Men	75	24	9
Hungary	Women	75	32	13
	Men	76	31	11
Bulgaria	Women	79	42	23
	Men	79	54	41

It is interesting to note that the majority of people eat meals with members of their household on a regular basis, although relatively few go out with friends or a partner to do the same. We find no significant gender difference in this regard across the countries, in fact, not even significant cross-country differences overall. About three fourth of the people in the survey eat meals with family members, about a third go out with their partner and about 10-15% with friends. Men seem to go out with friends somewhat more, while women prefer meals with partners and family. It seems that men and women use their leisure time similarly. When we examine the indicator we constructed that shows how people feel about their leisure activities we find no significant gender difference in this composite index either.

### 3.3. Division of domestic labor

In table 1 we already saw that women do significantly more domestic work than men. In fact women spend a median of 13 hours, while men only about 7 hours doing household chores. Table 3 describes how people feel about this division of labor, since we assume that not only the actual time but people's

perceptions about its fairness influence one’s quality of life. There are no surprising gender differences along these two indicators in any of the countries so we only present data for men and women together.

Table 3. Percent of men and women who claim they divide housework equally and/or argue over the division of domestic labor. (%)

	Housework is divided equally	We often argue over division of housework
Finland	47	34
Sweden	45	32
UK	37	38
Netherlands	30	26
Germany	36	33
Portugal	50	33
Hungary	49	27
Bulgaria	26	42

There is surprising variation in the proportion of people who claim that domestic work is divided equally in the household. Fewer women than men tend to agree with this statement but the gender differences are small. Close to 50% of those surveyed claim that domestic work is divided equally in Hungary, Portugal, and Finland, even though the “behavioral” indicators suggest that women tend to put in many more hours in each of these countries than men. Bulgarians are the least likely to say that there is equality in the household, followed by the Dutch and Germans.

The second variable measures the opposite of what we see in the first column: disagreement over the division of labor. There is practically no gender difference in our sample in this regard: percentages range from a low of 26% in the Netherlands to a high of 42% in Bulgaria. In other words, while only a quarter of Dutch couples claim to argue over the domestic division of labor, over a third of Bulgarians do. Overall about a third of the people in the sample admitted arguing over housework at least “often.” We will show that both actual hours worked as well as the perceived fairness of the division are good indicators of life quality, albeit the former for women, the latter for men.

### 3.4. Childcare concerns

Usually the most pressing aspect of the domestic division of labor is the time spent looking after and caring for children. This is why we concentrated specifically on this aspect of domestic work. Childcare duties are usually primarily done by women and are seen as one of the key reasons why women cannot participate fully and equally in the labor market. Yet, in our survey we found little to no gender difference in how much difficulty people experienced in obtaining good quality childcare. Table 4a describes the distribution of the variables available.

Table 4a. Means difficulty of arranging childcare (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating most problems with childcare.) Only people with children in household.

	Overall	Regular care	Unanticipated
Finland	1.7	2.5	2.9
Sweden	1.8	2.3	3.2
UK	2.1	3.2	3.7
Netherlands	1.6	2.5	2.8
Germany	1.7	2.7	3.1
Portugal	1.9	3.3	3.0
Hungary	1.8	2.6	3.3
Bulgaria	1.7	2.8	3.0

Cross-country variations are perhaps more important in this section as they at least partially reflect the childcare opportunities made available by the welfare state in each country. These opportunities may greatly contribute to women's and children's well-being, as well as to an elimination of the feminization of poverty and reducing women's dependence on men. The data presented here are not representative and obtained from a small section of each population. Nevertheless, there are some interesting points. First, people who live in Scandinavian countries, well-known for the generosity of welfare state provisions, especially in the realm of childcare, experience the least childcare concerns. They are the least likely to have problems with regular childcare and overall have childcare concerns. They are most likely to find last minute solutions for unanticipated care for children, such as illness. Post-state socialist countries are second in line. Workers in Hungary and Bulgaria are moderately likely to have problems finding regular or occasional care for children. At the same time, people in the UK report the most problems in all childcare areas. Liberal welfare states, like the UK, are the least likely to provide measures to alleviate working parents' childcare concerns. It is not surprising but also important to note that regular childcare is usually easiest to obtain and occasional care the hardest. Yet the patterns across the countries are the same in each area.

We were surprised to note that both men and women report childcare problems. This may have to do with the way the question was phrased, or with the fact that men also, at least on some level, feel responsibility for placing their children in care. We do not have the means to decide what explains the surprising lack of gender difference here.

In addition to formal care arrangements, families in all of the eight countries use their own extended resources to care for children. Table 4b. describes the frequency with which workers ask for help from family members and friends as well as paid domestic workers to alleviate their workload. Again we observed no notable gender difference here.

Table 4b. Percent who has hired domestic workers, received help from relatives or friends.

	Paid domestic help	Help from relatives	Help from friends
Finland	3	10	3
Sweden	5	8	3
UK	10	13	7
Netherlands	19	16	3
Germany	7	9	3
Portugal	45	26	3
Hungary	9	23	5
Bulgaria	8	28	10

Except for Portugal, where this seems very common, a very small percentage of people hire paid domestic workers. The high percentage in Portugal could be an artifact of our sample or could indicate the availability of cheap laborers or a culture where hiring paid domestic workers is seen as a symbol of success and high status.

Another interesting point to note is the reliance on family members – usually grandmothers – in the less developed economies: Hungary, Bulgaria and Portugal. In these countries 23-28% of people claimed to have used help from family members, while the relevant percentage ranged from 8-16 only in the other countries. This indicates a difference both in cultural practices but also possibly in the availability of care and work options for older women. When the latter are scarce and public childcare is unavailable, grandparents and other – usually female – relatives step in and take over some of the burden of childcare. This seems to be particularly characteristic in the Eastern and Southern part of the continent. Except in Bulgaria, friends and neighbors rarely provide help to families.

### 3.5. Subjective indicators of well-being

Finally let us review how people themselves feel about their lives: a variety of areas of their lives, as well as the balance they managed to strike between work and home. Subjective indicators reflect many issues in addition to how people actually feel. They may indicate support and loyalty for the company, and overall reluctance to say negative things or simply unwillingness to complain in a faceless survey environment. With these caveats in mind, we explore table 5 below.

Table 5. Means on a scale – satisfaction with different areas or aspects of life

		Financial Scale 1-5, with 1 very satisfied	Social Scale 1-5, with 1 very satisfied	Balance Scale 1-5, with 5 very satisfied	Life Scale 1-7, with 7 very satisfied
Finland	Women	3.5	3.7	3.4	4.8
	Men	3.4	3.6	3.4	4.7
Sweden	Women	3.8	4.0	3.5	5.0
	Men	3.9	3.7	3.5	5.0
UK	Women	3.4	3.3	3.2	4.2
	Men	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.9
Netherlands	Women	3.7	3.9	3.6	5.0
	Men	3.7	3.8	3.6	4.8
Germany	Women	3.4	3.7	3.4	4.8
	Men	3.4	3.6	3.3	4.6
Portugal	Women	3.1	3.4	3.1	4.4
	Men	3.2	3.4	3.2	4.4
Hungary	Women	3.1	3.3	3.2	4.1
	Men	3.2	3.1	3.3	4.3
Bulgaria	Women	3.1	3.1	3.3	4.2
	Men	3.2	3.2	3.4	4.3

The first column shows people’s satisfaction with their financial situation. The people we surveyed are usually in quite advantageous positions compared to the rest of the populations. Most have high levels of education, they all had jobs and an income. In addition, it is possible that those in the least happy positions would be less likely to fill in a voluntary survey. So it is not surprising that we see general happiness and an expression of overall well-being.

In terms of financial assets, people in less developed economies are slightly more satisfied than those in the rest. This could be due to the fact that relative to those around them – many without jobs perhaps –, they consider their financial position advantageous. There is no mentionable gender difference in any of the countries.

With respect to social relations, people in the three least developed countries seem to be doing better – perhaps for the same reason as above. Gender differences are negligible everywhere.

The most important variables for our purposes are found in the last two columns in this table: overall satisfaction with life and a satisfaction with the balance of work and family life. Contrary to our expectations, there is very little, if any, gender difference to note here. Women are just as likely as men to find that they have struck the right balance between work and family obligations. The percentages do not much differ across countries, either. Similarly, women seem to be slightly but not much happier about their lives altogether than men in each country with little variation across countries. We find the largest gap in the UK, where men average 3.9 and women 4.2 on a scale that runs from a low (unhappy) of 1 to a high of 7 (very happy).

In sum, there is little gender difference we can observe in the variables describing people’s quality of life outside the workplace, at least in the areas we observed. We see that women do more housework than men and work longer hours in at least the less developed countries. Otherwise, little gender difference is apparent.

## 4. Multivariate analysis

Next we move on to examine the factors which contribute to men’s and women’s satisfaction with their lives. We examine three sets of factors: first the social context, such as age, status of health, gender, education and family status. Then we discuss variables associated with work: length of hours, as well as a variety of other work characteristics, such as work/life balance measures available, experience of pressure, insecurity, support, etc. Finally, we add the impact of the domestic division of labor and satisfaction with social life. The three models are found in table 6 below.

Table 6. Regression coefficients from a linear regression equation predicting determinants of satisfaction with life (sat\_life). Unstandardized coefficients and SE.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	-.21* (.03)	-.14* (.03)	-.20* (.04)
Age	.001 (.001)	.001* (.001)	.001 (.001)
Ill health	-.63* (.02)	-.46* (.02)	-.41* (.02)
Post sec degree	-.03* (.01)	-.008 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Has kids in house	-.09* (.03)	-.06 (.03)	.08* (.03)
Married	.57* (.04)	.50* (.03)	.70* (.27)
Hours worked	--	-.01* (.001)	-.01* (.001)
Often does shift work	--	-.06 (.03)	-.04 (.04)
Used flex time	--	.03 (.03)	.07 (.04)
Pressure	--	-.12* (.03)	-.09* (.03)
Autonomy	--	.41* (.04)	.39* (.04)
Insecurity	--	-.16* (.01)	-.14* (.02)

Talks to supervisor	--	-.10 (.01)	-.03 (.02)
Support 1	--	.22* (.02)	.21* (.03)
Career demands high	--	-.07* (-.02)	-.05* (.02)
Support 2	--	.12* (.02)	.17* (.03)
Domestic work hrs	--	--	-.004 (.002)
Disagree on div lab	--	--	-.28* (.04)
Quality time	--	--	.27* (.03)
Constant	7.6* (1.1)	6.7* (1.0)	5.1* (1.1)
N	5864	5458	3728
R square	.18	.30	.31

Gender: women (1); men (2).

Indicates significance at p smaller than 0.05 level.

Model 1 shows that women are slightly happier than men, or at least they are more likely than men to say that they are satisfied with their lives. Age makes no difference in life satisfaction, but health does: those who feel sickly are less happy about their lives. Surprisingly, marriage positively but children in the household negatively influence satisfaction with life. This may have to do with the fact that children possibly create financial problems and increase the workload and stress on members of the family. Highly educated people seem to be unhappier – again suggesting that workplace stress may be linked to quality of life.

In model 2 we add workplace characteristics and find that, as expected, having autonomy and social support positively, while working long hours and feeling job pressure negatively influence one's perception of their quality of life. Interestingly, the availability of flexible work time or even the need to do shift work does not seem to have an impact on people's happiness.

Finally, in model 3 we add three variables measuring non-work factors. We find that the length of time people invest in domestic work does not, but arguments over the division of labor does impact on life quality. Also, those who feel they have a rich social life are happier overall.

This is not altogether surprising, but it is possible that some of these factors influence men's and women's lives differently. To explore this possibility we ran the same regression equation separately for men and women and present the results in table 7 below.

Table 7. Predictors of satisfaction with life (unstandardized coefficients and \* indicating statistical significance at the .05 level in linear regression models for women and men separately with sat\_life as dependent variable.)

	Women	Men
Age	.004	.001
Poor health	-.39*	-.44*
Post-secondary education	-.01	-.01
Having kids in household	.04	.12*
Married	.63*	1.13*
Hours worked	-.01*	-.01*
Often do shift work	.002	-.08
Recently used flextime	.11*	-.01
Pressure	-.09*	-.10
Autonomy	.29*	.53*
Talk to supervisor	-.02	-.03
Insecure in job	-.14*	-.13*
Support 1	.21*	.19*
Career demands	-.04	-.07*
Support 2	.17*	.16*
Quality time	.26*	.26*
Disagree over housework	-.28*	-.23*
Hours in housework	-.01*	.002
Constant	10.4*	3.7*
N	2295	1433
R square	.29	.30

These two models reveal a few interesting issues. Most importantly for our purposes: women are more ambivalent than men about the impact of children on their lives. Men's lives are clearly enriched by the presence of children, women's lack of full enthusiasm probably reflects the work it entails to raise children, which is mostly on their shoulders. Similarly, marriage makes men happier with their lives than women. In addition, while men's quality of life is only impacted by domestic fights over the division of labor, women's also suffer from the sheer amount of time invested in doing domestic work. This shows that household pressures weigh more heavily on women's than on men's shoulders.

As a result, women's life quality is affected more than men's by the availability of flexible time work arrangements. These make women's satisfaction with life higher but do not seem to influence men, suggesting that these workplace measures have a strong gender dynamics. In terms of the rest of the workplace characteristics, men's life satisfaction is improved by more autonomy on the job, while this variable has less of an effect on women. This again conforms to our general understanding of expectations about masculinity and femininity in the countries we researched.

## Summary

In sum, the findings in this report support previous findings on the gender differences in the impact of childcare responsibilities and work/life balance company policies on men and women. Both men's and women's quality of life is affected by their perceived satisfaction with their jobs. Jobs which guarantee more autonomy, more support from colleagues and supervisors, less pressure and daily demands contribute to a happier life for both genders. Working long hours makes everyone unhappy but the availability of flexible work options, the length of domestic work and the presence of children are especially problematic for women, as they are, in each country, the primary bearers of domestic responsibilities.

A number of policy suggestions follow from this. First, since women do indeed benefit from flexible work arrangements, these, and other measures addressing the same problem should be encouraged.

Second, the most effective work/life balance measure is to cut down on work hours and overtime work. If both genders worked shorter hours, both would be more available for their dependents and friends, reducing overall stress levels and possibly contributing to the development and preservation of human capital in the long term.

Third, since it is obvious that women are more troubled by domestic responsibilities, it would make sense for companies to target men especially and encourage them to participate in work/life options and devote time to domestic responsibilities also. This would increase fairness, reduce gender inequality and contribute to women's better productivity in the workplace.

In sum, workplaces are important contributors to people's overall satisfaction with life, as most employed people spend a significant portion of their lives at work and gain a degree of their identity from this. As such, companies also have a responsibility in making working life as satisfactory and fulfilling as possible through policies which enable workers to establish a thoughtful balance between their work and home lives.