

HAJNALKA FÉNYES

*Gender Differences in Work Attitudes and Work  
Experience in a Student Sample*

Status inconsistency can be found between women's education level and labor market position. Concerning participation rates in formal education the advantage of women can be observed as early as the 1980s<sup>1</sup> (Forray 1986), whereas even recently women in the labor market seem to be in a disadvantages position compared to men. However women's advantage cannot be said to be complete even in the education system. Boys' and girls' schools go in different directions; horizontal segregation is taking place according to gender. A “neosegregation” of boys' and girls' schools is gaining ground as coeducation is driven back, which may put the girls in a disadvantaged position. “In the vertical structure of the education system girls have gained advantage over the boys, but in the horizontal structure the traditional choices have proved to be overwhelming.” (Forray, Hegedűs 1987: 234). In the grammar schools of minor settlements and in the outskirts of cities girls are in majority, whereas in schools of higher prestige in cities the gender rates seem to be balanced. Also in vocational secondary schools segregation by traditional male and female professions is prevalent (Forray 1986). Besides, segregation by gender can also be found in higher education (see Fényes 2009b).

Among the underlying reasons for the status inconsistency in women's position in this paper we are dealing with the differences between the work attitude and work experience of boys and girls gained during their studies in higher education, as these differences may predict their achievements or failures in the labor market. Investigating the differences in work attitudes is also important because one of their consequences is the separation of workplaces by gender that “feminized” and “male dominant” workplaces are diverted and the number of women is scarce in CEO positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Forray(1989) has pointed out that roma women still lag behind in the participation of formal education compared to roma men, thus emancipation in education has not reached the level of the total population.

The term work attitude covers in an “absolute sense” what work means in the individual life, and in a “relative sense” it refers to the characteristics of “good life” and in which ways they are related to work (Kóródi 2006). A similar term to work attitude is labor value, which covers the opinions related to the material and subjective rewards of work (Megyesi, Róbert 2000).

The study of the work attitude of young people seems to be justified by the fact that “in Ericson's definition work attitudes are actually deep-rooted ideas which are established in early childhood due to the impacts from society, and these “only” are being shaped under the influence of new experience”(quote by Kóródi 2006:290). Young people's work attitude can be influenced by their work experience during their studies, but the effect of parents and other adults can also be considerable. For the examination of work attitude an internationally accepted question consisting of several items was used<sup>2</sup>, a similar one was also applied by Megyesi and Róbert in their research (Megyesi, Róbert 1998, 2000, 2008).

According to Altorjai and Róbert difference can be made between instrumental (salary-oriented) and committed (value-oriented) work attitudes, whose importance by gender can be expected to be different. For people with instrumental attitude high salary is important, they consider work as a way to make money and nothing else. Those with committed work attitude would work even if they had not needed money, and they find it important that their work should be beneficial to society and could assist others. However it is an interesting result that instrumental attitude does not imply advantage in salaries, on the contrary, committed employees got higher wages (Altorjai, Róbert 2006).

Over the past few years employees in Hungary consider the security of job, the size of the salary and promotion options highly important, whereas the social benefit of work, assisting others and flexi time are not that important as they used to be. (Megyesi, Róbert 1998, 2000, 2008). According to the results of the database ISCED54 of the “Regional University” research (Kóródi 2006, 2007) for higher education students the security of the job, the high salary and the challenge of the prospective job are the most essential features.

The further results by Kóródi also show that in the region called Partium only as much as 12.4 per cent of the students in higher education worked regularly in 2005, and 62 per cent of their job did not relate to their studies. The reasons why they took these jobs were mainly financial necessity, getting more independent from the parents,

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<sup>2</sup> On a four degree scale how important are the following: work in a good atmosphere, sense of achievement, friendly colleagues, meeting people, helping others, work useful for society, team work, time for the family, it should not be too exhausting, work focusing on achievement, high salary, promotion prospects, and finally the option of independent decision-making.

and gaining experience. It is also a noteworthy result that the work attitude of the students with work experience did not really differ from that of the students with no work experience.

### **Hypotheses and database**

Our first hypothesis is concerned with the work attitude of young people. Due to the diverse career orientation, for women well-balanced emotional ties and interpersonal relations at work are a lot more important, whereas for men it is power and money that really matter (Koncz 2005). Thus it can be envisaged that women will highly appreciate socially beneficial work, helping others (altruistic, value-oriented, committed work attitude, see Altorjai, Robert 2006). Besides, the security, diversity and the challenge of the job is also important for them and due to flexi time and less exhaustive job they could also have enough time for the family. For girls the high morale of the workplace, meeting people and working with friendly colleagues are also important, including team work and the sense of achievement can be more relevant for the girls due to their lesser sense of self confidence.

In case of men high salary, working independently, achievement- oriented job and responsibility and promotion prospects will be more important.

Our second hypothesis is that boys do more regular job during their studies than girls and the work they do is more closely related to their studies, which fact also may predict men's labor market success. In case of the reasons for having job during the studies such as financial necessity, material independence, gaining experience, self-fulfillment, work done at request, professional ambitions, work done at compulsory practice no significant difference can be expected by gender. The underlying reason for this might be that most of the students have not started a family, so the conflict between work and family does not appear and in this way the motives of doing a job are mostly similar both in case of the boys and the girls.

Our results are shown relying on the database ISCED54 of the Regional University Research (NKFP 26-0060). We examined students before graduation because they presumably have more realistic ideas about their future job and in this particular questionnaire several items are related to the attitude to work (N=940).

## **Gender differences in work attitudes and work experience**

Results related to the work attitude of young people showed as early as in the 1980s that boys appreciate high salary and minor intellectual effort, whereas girls consider good working conditions, the social aspect and aesthetic value of the job more important. Taking social background also into consideration the difference between the work attitude of socially disadvantaged boys and girls was bigger than that of the socially advantaged boys and girls (Forray 1986). We do not examine this relationship at this point, but we intend to do it.

Kóródi (2006, 2007) made use of the same ISCED54 database of the Regional University research project, but the students from across the border were not included, and she examined only the difference in the average scores of the questions related to work attitude. According to her results for women in higher education it is more important to do socially beneficial job, to help others besides they also appreciate the secure and interesting jobs. Regarding independent job performance and promotion there were significant differences by gender, moreover it was rather peculiar that girls considered high salary more important than boys. What may lie in the background of this fact is that the financial situation of the girls was worse than that of the boys.

Our results, based on the total four-year course students database of Regional University research (ISCED54, N=940) are as follows. Work attitudes were compared by means of three methods by gender. Similarly to Kóródi the averages of the work attitude variables (1: absolutely not important, 2: not important, 3: important, 4: very important) were compared by gender and here the ANOVA value significance was considered. Then we examined simple cross-tabs and chi-square statistics. Finally the question related to work attitude was transformed into a two-value one, with important or not important values, and we used here also cross-tabs the chi-square statistics.

Absolute advantage of the boys measured by all three methods cannot be detected in none of the work attitude variables. Girls' advantage was however significant measured by all three methods in the following work attitudes (shown by the data of the third method).

*Table 1. Gender differences in seven work attitudes, percentages of important and very important replies put together*

<b>Important...</b>	<b>Boys (N)</b>	<b>Girls (N)</b>	<b>Chi-square</b>
work in good atmosphere	93.7% (303)	<b>98.4%</b> (622)	***
sense of achievement	95% (301)	<b>98.1%</b> (622)	*
friendly colleagues	91% (300)	<b>95.5%</b> (620)	**
meeting people	81% (300)	<b>88.7%</b> (621)	**
helping others	63% (303)	<b>84.8%</b> (620)	***
socially beneficial work	70.7% (300)	<b>82.3%</b> (620)	***
team work	65.3% (303)	<b>72.2%</b> (622)	*

In line with our hypotheses helping others and socially beneficial work are much more important for women than men due to the diverse career orientation and the traditional gender role behavior. Women tend to be altruistic, value-oriented and more committed to work than men. Team work, friendly colleagues and meeting people are also important aspects of work for women, which is also in accordance with the social skills of women and the fact that they appreciate being in community, thus with colleagues as well. Sense of achievement, especially external acknowledgment is more important for women than for men, which can be explained by different gender socialization. (According to Michelson (1989) for women external acknowledgment is more important, whereas men have higher self-confidence.) Work in good atmosphere is also more important for girls.

In the table below work attitudes are shown in which minor advantage of girls/boys was found. Among the three methods one or two were not significant by gender, but in the third one girls'/boys' advantage is shown.

*Table 2. Gender differences in further eight work attitudes*

<b>Minor advantage for girls</b>	<b>Minor advantage for boys</b>	<b>No difference by gender</b>
time allotted for the family	flexi time	promotion
variety in work	not too exhausting job	independent decision-making
challenging job	achievement-oriented job	
secure job	high salary	
responsible job		

As it was expected, also in accordance with gender roles minor advantage for girls was found in the work attitude that time should be allotted for the family, when

comparing the averages of the replies, but the difference is not significant according to cross tables.

As shown by cross tables varied and interesting job is a bit more important for girls than boys, but the average score of the replies to the question did not differ significantly. In a study of the motives of further education (see Fényes 2009a) in girls' career prospects it is not necessarily the high salary that matters, but rather professional interest, and the enhancement of cultural capital, which may come also useful in their family. Varied and interesting job is a value in itself for them.

As it was supposed, secure job is a bit more important for the girls, but the difference is not significant by all the three methods. (This aspect was important for the boys and very important for the girls.) However, contrary to our hypothesis responsible work is also more important for girls according to the four-value cross tables, but the difference is not significant according to the other two assessment methods.

Boys considered flexi time a bit more important, and according to cross tables, girls did not find it so much important as boys, which fact is in contradiction with the division of labor by traditional gender roles, since family and childcare is still the responsibility of women and flexi time would be more conducive to this role. Mickelson (1989) says this phenomenon perhaps can be explained by the fact that women in higher education may have unrealistic expectations, i.e they underestimate their labor market disadvantage and they expect men's equal participation in household chores. Besides preference of flexi time by boys may be related to their greater demand for independence and freedom.

Contrary to our hypothesis the need that the work should not be "exhausting" is also more important for the boys.<sup>3</sup> As it can be seen in the gender differences in further education motivations (Fényes 2009a) boys can be characterized by a sort of "laziness". They enter higher education because that they did not need to work even during this time, and apply for a particular major because they did not have to take an entrance examination. As shown by cross tables not very exhausting job was important for girls, but a lot more important for boys.

Achievement oriented work and high salary are a bit more important for boys than for girls, which fact corresponds to our hypothesis.

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<sup>3</sup> This fact is also harmony with Forray's (1986) results from the 1980s, namely that young boys favoured minor intellectual effort when doing work.

Furthermore, there is no significant difference between boys and girls regarding promotion prospects and independent decision making by none of the assessment methods, although boys' advantage could have been expected.

In the tables below gender differences in doing work during the studies can be seen. These differences can also be related to work attitudes and future job performance.

*Table 3. Work done during studies by gender*

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Yes, regularly	<b>16.5%</b>	11.2%
Yes, occasionally	33.3%	31.2%
Yes, but not paid work	3.3%	2.3%
Did not work	46.9%	<b>55.3%</b>
N	303 (100%)	618 (100%)

*Chi-square is significant \*.*

*Table 4. To what extent the work done was related to their studies by gender*

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Always	<b>16.7%</b>	10.6%
Most of the time	<b>27.2%</b>	23.0%
No	56.2%	<b>66.4%</b>
N	162 (100%)	274 (100%)

*Chi-square is almost significant ( $p=0,069$ ), and the reason for this fact can be that the item numbers are smaller, since only the gender distribution of the students doing work is taken into consideration.*

As it can be seen a larger number of boys work regularly during their studies than girls, and the work they do is more related to their studies than in the case of girls. This fact may have something to do with the future labor market success of the boys. Unpaid charity work was not that common among students at the time of the query (in 2005), and there is no difference between boys and girls in this respect. The motivations for doing work during their studies, such as financial necessity, material independence, gaining experience, self-fulfillment, work done at request, professional ambition and work during compulsory practice in line with our hypothesis did not differ by gender. Due to the lack of significance our data are not shown here. Our results showed no significant difference in employment abroad<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The motivations for this can be slightly different by gender (unfortunately no data are available). The main reasons like learning languages and financial considerations are equally important for boys and

## Summary

In this paper we intended to find out why women are still in disadvantage in the labor market despite their advantage in the education system. One of the possible reasons can be the difference between the work attitude and work experience of boys and girls in higher education.

As shown by earlier research results women prefer well-balanced emotional and interpersonal relations at work, whereas men rather appreciate power and money. These differences can also be found in the work attitudes of higher education students. What may lie in the background of diverse career options and work attitudes are identification with traditional gender roles and socialization to gender roles.

In line with our hypothesis socially beneficial work, helping others, the security, variety and challenge of the job are important aspects for the girls and also the fact that more time should be allotted to the family. Moreover high morale of the workplace and also meeting people there, friendly colleagues and team work were highly appreciated by girls. The sense of achievement is also more important for them, which partly can be explained by their minor self-confidence.

In accordance with diverse career orientations high salary and achievement-centered job are important for men, but contrary to our hypothesis, responsible work was more important for the girls. Beside also contrary to our expectations working independently and good promotion options were equally important for both for the girls and the boys. It is also in contradiction with our hypothesis that flexi time and not too exhausting jobs are a bit more important for boys. It can be explained by the unrealistic expectations of girls (Mickelson. 1989), namely girls may underestimate their labour market disadvantage, and they expect equal participation by men in family and childcare and also by boys' greater demand for freedom and independence.

In accordance with our hypothesis a larger number of boys work regularly during their studies than girls and their work is more closely related to their field of studies. The motivations for doing work during their studies are not different by gender, since most of them have not started a family, and the conflict between the tasks of employment and family do not appear yet. Thus their motivations for employment seem to be similar.

Thus differences can be observed in the work attitudes and work experience of boys and girls. All in all the fact that boys do work more regularly during their studies and

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girls, but in case of girls preparing for gender roles can also be motivating when they work as baby-sitters e.g.



also the fact that their work was more closely related to their studies and high salary and achievement-centered job are more important for them may contribute to their later labor market success.

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