

Gender Stratification in Cyprus as Seen Through Education and Employment

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ABSTRACT

This academic study utilizes secondary sources in order to investigate gender stratification in Cyprus, by examining education and employment. It reveals various forms of gender stratification and inequality, such as by study choice, the "gender wage gap", employment rates, and lower levels of women in positions of power. This is supported by official statistical sources and from recording peoples' views in a number of academic studies. Similar gender stratification in education and employment exists in other EU countries, thus demonstrating that it's not country specific. Systemic gender inequality is created by socially-constructed patriarchy, and because it's socially constructed rather than being "natural", there could be ways to possibly combat it, such as enacting education initiatives or equal opportunity legislation.

Keywords: Sociology of family; Immigration; Cyprus; Sociology; Family; Marriage; Sociology of marriage

INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine gender stratification in Cyprus, as seen through education and employment. Examining gender stratification will allow to focus on one the main forms of inequality in Cypriot society, which is gender inequality. Education and employment are appropriate sectors to study because there is widely available data which clearly demonstrates gender stratification and inequality in practice. Gender stratification is systemic and is deeply ingrained into the social system. Theories that can explain this systemic inequality includes patriarchy and social constructionism. Potential ways that can help overcome gender inequality include promoting equal opportunity schemes in education and the workplace, as well as equal opportunity legislation.

The research methods were secondary sources, mainly academic articles, including a number of academic studies, as well as encyclopedia entries, data from statistical sources such as the Cyprus Statistical Service and Eurostat, and general sociological manuscripts in order to gain atheoretical basis regarding social and gender stratification.

The primary focus research question is "In what ways is gender stratification evident in education and employment in Cyprus"? A secondary research question is "which sociological theories can explain gender stratification"? Finally, "what potential steps can we take to lessen gender inequality"?

Social stratification is the study of various intertwining groups in society. There are various theories regarding social stratification,

for example, functionalist theorists' view that social institutions exist in order to serve a function for society to work, and that social stratification can be justified because it is in place in order to fulfill social needs of hierarchy. Marxist theorists viewed social stratification as being caused by social economic antagonisms. Usually in response to Marxist theorists, Weberian theorists view that social stratification has various components of class, status and power, rather than simply socioeconomic division [1].

METHODS

Gender (stratification) is one of the main aspects of social division studied in the sociological field of social stratification [2]. According to Danaj, gender stratification is the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between the two genders. [3] It is therefore characterized by gender inequality, because of the systemic inequality between two genders. This inequality can be analyzed by examining aspects such as employment, education, or political participation. Gender stratification wasn't mainstream in social sciences, until the 1970's due to popularization of feminist academic thought. Previously, gender differences were considered "biological" or "natural". Indicatively, Structural functionalism, the most popular sociological school in America during the post war period, considered that gender stratification was natural, and that women were fulfilling a functional role of upholding social order, such as childbearing and being homemakers [4].

Feminist academics challenged traditional conceptions of gender in sociology. Giddens identified three main feminist schools of

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thought. "Liberal feminist" theorists focused on issues such as cultural and social attitudes that lead to inequalities in education, the workplace, or the media. Marxist and "Socialist feminists" viewed that social forces that oppress women are rooted in the capitalist system and also criticize patriarchy, which they view has a basis in private property and social production relations. Radical feminists concentrate on patriarchal structures. Patriarchy is the systematic domination of women by men, who hold a monopoly in social institutions, such as the family.

Feminist theories aren't without criticism. For example, the concept of patriarchy is criticized because there isn't the same degree of patriarchy in all societies (i.e. traditional Islamic societies have higher level of patriarchal social control than in Western countries). Other critics also argue that feminists ignore discrimination men may face, as well as ignore other marginalized groups such as ethnic, racial and religious minorities.

Nevertheless, despite criticism of feminist theory, and ideological and philosophical diversity, the prevailing consensus amongst sociologists is that there is gender stratification and inequality, with varying degrees and focuses [4].

Stratification exists in various forms in Cypriot society. For example, Cyprus has a large, poorly integrated immigrant population [5], as well as separate ethnic communities [6], and socioeconomic division [7]. Gender is an interesting aspect to examine because women can belong to various aspects of socioeconomic class or cleavages (the traditional focus of social stratification studies), but overall have less opportunities than men. It is also an aspect of society where inequality is openly acknowledged and accepted, despite all citizens being theoretically equal under Cypriot and EU law.

Examining education and employment is a suitable way to scrutinize gender stratification in Cyprus. This can be done by viewing both statistics, as well as social attitudes recorded in qualitative studies, thus getting a well-rounded overview of gender stratification. Education will be analyzed in terms of education rates, the overall education system and also the education work sector. Education reveals aspects where women may have a perceived advantage (i.e. higher tertiary education rates, or more primary and secondary educators) but where men still dominate key positions. Employment is often measured by social stratification researchers, as it reveals various aspects about social conditions and human activity. Employment data, as well as academic theory and studies recording views and experiences about employment and gender will be examined.

According to the Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service, there is wide reaching gender inequality in various aspects of life, not just in education and employment. For example, women in Cyprus are more likely to be victims of poverty [8].

Cyprus is classed as an industrialized, western country. Nevertheless, there are still lots of traditional influences, particularly Greek Orthodox religion and the Greek Orthodox Church [9]. These traditional influences affect gender inequality. Cypriot society is patriarchal, and notions about "traditional gender roles" exist, where the men are expected to be the material provider, while women are expected to be homemakers [6]. For example, despite the fact that women have full legal equality, there are still socially restrictive customs such as "dowries", where women are expected to have a sum of money or property to offer upon marriage [10].

Women in Cyprus used to have higher rates of illiteracy, as some women from previous generations would be stopped from receiving educations. However, this rate has now evened. Women overtook men in tertiary education rates after 2006 and have retained this higher rate over their male counterparts since [8].

According to Menon, Cypriot students know the benefits that higher education can bring to their career development. More education has conventionally meant better employment and social mobility opportunities. However, when interviewed; female high school students reported less expected earnings after finishing their tertiary studies than their male counterparts, which was characterized as realistic [11]. These pre existing views show that this is systemic, particularly when it's confirmed by lower gender earnings and that this is considered "normal" by Cypriot women.

Vryonides examined the views of parents and students regarding higher education. The qualitative study revealed that people of various social backgrounds held paternalistic, traditional views, and were more willing to divert resources towards their male sons who were expected to become the breadwinners, rather than to girls for whom respondents didn't always think was as important to establish careers as for boys. Vryonides believes that this hinders women from achieving their full potential [10].

Regarding education levels compared to other countries, Lamprianou & Vryonides described that Cyprus is achieving gender egalitarianism in terms of women obtaining higher tertiary education rates than men. This is higher than in many other EU countries examined in the European Social Survey. However, the researchers mentioned that there are still systemic factors that limit women's education progression, and that there is ingrained inequality [12].

Besides prevailing social attitudes about education and gender recorded in studies, an examination of tertiary education study choice also demonstrates that there is a clear gender divide in the education system. Males are more likely to choose Engineering, Mechanics and Computing careers, and women are more likely to choose education, humanities and arts [8]. Similar trends exist globally, which researchers attribute to factors such as gender expectations and stereotypes about certain careers and academic fields [13].

Although women may exceed men in tertiary education rates, they lag behind men in higher education employment. Reflecting global trends in Research and Development careers, or in Higher Education, the majority of teaching and administrative staff at tertiary education establishments are men. There are twice as many male researchers as female ones, and only slightly more women in supporting staff positions. There are less doctoral female candidates, possibly due to the "glass ceiling" [8].

The R&D sector in Cyprus reveals systemic inequality, as women and men have no conceivable intelligence differences [14]. This shows that there are other factors (i.e. men dominating R&D administrative positions) that stop women from achieving research positions.

In primary and secondary education, there is a much higher level of females in teaching and administrative positions than men. Rentzou attributes this to kindergarten and primary teaching being considered a female profession in Cyprus due to preconceived views about gender, which dissuades many potential male candidates in pursuing this career. Males are dissuaded from

following pre primary and primary education careers because of potential social criticism about their sexuality and masculinity [15]. This is one of the few instances where males face discrimination for their profession in Cyprus due to their gender, at least from what was discovered within the scopes of this academic study.

Despite more female pre-primary, primary and secondary educators, even in this sector, men have a significantly higher rate of administrator (i.e. headmaster) positions compared to their overall numbers than women [15]. This indicates the general picture of the education system in Cyprus, where men have more "power" positions just as in other employment sectors, and women's qualifications do not play a determining role, as males dominate social institutions.

In employment, the most evident form of inequality is the "gender wage gap". The "gender wage gap" is the difference in wages among genders for the same profession. The "gender wage gap" has been gradually shrinking in Cyprus, where it is slightly below the EU average of 16.2%, at about 13.9% [16]. In Cyprus, there is a phenomenon of the gender wage gap being higher for lower paid professionals, as well as for higher age groups [17]. This reveals layers of discrimination against women amongst generations and shows how older Cypriot women are marginalized. Mavrikiou's study also hints at stratification by age [18] as it showed that pensioners of both genders are vulnerable groups.

Besides a sizeable "gender wage gap", there are much less women in administrative & managerial positions than men in Cyprus, and at a lower rate than the EU average. Women have different working patterns, such as higher part time rates, due to their social expectations of being homemakers, and also due to discrimination of not being hired as full time workers. Women have higher levels of unemployment than men. There is segregation in various sectors, for example women are more likely to work in healthcare or primary education, while there are much more males in administrative positions or in the construction sector [8]. Similarly, Cyprus has some of the lowest levels of female political representation in the Western world, whether it is at municipal or national level. This is due to facts such as women receiving much less exposure in the media [19].

In her examination of Cypriot women's networking practices in the business world, Socratous found that there are systemic hindrances that block women's opportunities to network. Socratous defines networking as an important aspect of business and career progression. Cypriot women are expected to compromise and try to fit in the world of men. However, even when Cypriot women "play the game", they still find a "glass ceiling" (which is a metaphorical ceiling that exists as an invisible barrier, but could be broken).

Women were excluded from networking activities at their workplaces, whether it was deliberate or self-imposed. This was due to notions of "male" and "female" activities (i.e. football, or after-work drinking being for "males"). Women weren't invited to after-office football sessions, and were afraid to be misconceived to go for a drink with a man in a professional context, due to how this would be perceived by others. Women would try to establish their own professional networks, but these are underdeveloped and not as far reaching as male networks [20].

[21] Carried out a qualitative study regarding Cypriot women's views about gender equality in the workplace. The study revealed that respondents believed that although they were given equal opportunities by their employers on the surface (or officially),

some of them had the impression that they were undervalued as employees when compared to their male colleagues [21]. This study reveals similar social attitudes about gender, as in the aforementioned studies, which hinder women from progressing in the workplace.

Compared to other western, industrialized countries, Cyprus has similar gender wage gaps to the EU average, as well as more female unemployment than the EU average. Tertiary education rates are similar to the EU average, where women tend to have higher tertiary education rates than men. In other words, the gender stratification present in Cypriot education and employment is similar to other EU countries [16]. This reveals that gender stratification is a global phenomenon, and not only specific to Cyprus, thus making it appropriate to apply general gender stratification theory in the analysis of gender stratification in Cypriot education and employment.

The reasons for the many instances of inequality mentioned above can be ascribed to socially instilled "systemic inequality". According to Hughes and Koehler, sociologists reveal systemic social inequality when examining social stratification [22]. Systemic refers to something that is inherent to a whole social system, not just an individual. This inequality is socially ingrained, and reproduced by social institutions.

Examples of social inequality producing institutions include the education system [23] and the mass media [24].

Theories that can explain "systemic inequality" are patriarchy and social constructionism. Patriarchal theories state that men hold a monopoly of power in social institutions, such as family, over women and this monopoly of power is transferred into future generations. It challenges traditional views of gender differences being reduced to biological differences. Patriarchy isn't only sexual control over women, it's a wide rooted system that constantly shapes social opinion. Men control the main positions of power in society, such as creating standards of beauty or behaviour in the media. [4] Patriarchy is socially constructed and institutionalized [25].

Theories of patriarchy hold that men create gender roles, such as the idea of woman as a homemaker or mother, creating barriers for women and make it difficult to escape from this preconceived role. Social constructionism views that social reality is constructed (i.e. about gender or about family) by individuals interacting with other individuals in society [4]. Gender roles are constructed through male controlled social institutions. An example of males controlling social institutions is the much higher amount of males in administrative and legislative positions.

Fiaccadori views that social constructionism is a theory that allows challenging gender stratification, because it shows that gender is socially constructed rather than having a natural "essence" [26].

Although patriarchy is criticized as a theory, due to patriarchy being present in differing degrees from society to society (thus allegedly not being a universal explanation for gender inequality), the fact that there are differences according to society and culture reveals that this is a socially-constructed and not a "natural" state. This is because even if gender has biological dimensions (i.e. physiological differences), gender roles are constantly changing and differ by culture and nation. Therefore, it can be viewed as subject to interpretation and not to "nature".

Gender inequality may be difficult to eliminate due to its systemic

quality. However, there could be steps that could be taken in order to reduce it. For example, there can be more schemes to get women more active in education disciplines outside the humanities and arts, such as science and engineering. There can be more affirmative action schemes, perhaps enacting legislation where there will be women required to be in a minimum number positions in a faculty or in parliament, such as in Norway, which later affected legislation in other countries [27].

Generally, in response to the study's research questions, gender stratification is evident in Cyprus through education and employment in various ways. Examples of gender stratification and inequality include the "gender wage gap", segregation of study choice by gender, and lower levels of administrators and legislative positions despite higher tertiary education rates. Gender stratification and inequality can be explained by patriarchy and social constructionism, where gender roles are constructed through male dominated social institutions such as the media and education, which uphold systemic inequality. Ways that this can be possibly remedied is through education initiatives and employment legislative reform.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Cyprus is a country with various levels of social stratification. Gender is one of the main bases for social stratification, and gender stratification is evident through examination of education and employment.

In education, although women have higher rates of tertiary education, this isn't translated into higher job opportunities as it would for men. The school education system is characterized by having much more women educators; however, there are much more male administrators in proportion to their much lower numbers. In higher education and research, there are much more male educators and researchers than females. The education system also reveals rare instances of discrimination against men, as evident in the patronizing views about men involved in pre primary and primary education. There is also gender segregation in study choice, with women choosing humanities, education and arts, and males choosing science, engineering and computing, reflecting global trends.

In employment, there is a "gender wage gap", as well as lower employment rates for women. There are much less women administrators and women in political "power" positions. These differences reflect similar situations when compared to other EU countries, thus showing it's not a local but international phenomenon.

The reasons for this phenomenon can be seen through official Cyprus government and EU statistics, as well as viewed through social attitudes examined in studies. Social attitudes reveal preconceived views about gender, which are seen by some as "normal" due to it being characteristic of society (e.g. "its normal" for women to receive less money than men for the same work). These preconceived gender attitudes can contribute to the "glass ceiling" in education or workplace, and hinder women from progressing to positions as high as men do.

These phenomena can be explained by patriarchy and social constructionism. Cypriot society still has outdated gender customs such as "dowries". Patriarchy is upheld through male controlled social institutions that dictate such customs. Patriarchy is present

in varying degrees, but constantly changing gender roles show that this system is subjective (thus socially constructed) and not "natural". Ways gender inequality can be lessened includes education initiatives and enacting equal opportunities labour legislation.

Limitations of research included time, material and space constraints. There were limited studies done on gender stratification in education and employment in Cyprus. Also, patriarchy and social constructionism might not explain all aspects of social and gender stratification. There are also very few studies about discrimination against males (as opposed to a significant amount of women's studies perspectives), such as in the pre primary education sector example, and thus the danger of defining gender stratification as being solely synonymous to female inequality in relation to men.

Finally, examining one aspect of social stratification, such as gender, may often reveal others forms of stratification, as was found with discrimination against older women and pensioners in general by Mavrikios. Studying such diverse topics such as social stratification by age deserves its own study altogether and couldn't be included in this one regarding gender stratification due to space limits.

This study can potentially be applied to a field study that can examine gender inequality in education and employment, so that it can maybe be overcome. It can hopefully inspire more studies for students of social stratification.

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