

REVISIONS/REPORTS

The Unequal Occupational Distribution of Women in Israel

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The unequal and imbalanced occupational distribution of employed women in the labor market is characteristic of all societies and, in my opinion, plays an important role in the perpetuation of the inferior status of women. Economists and politicians who either wish to enlarge the national labor force, especially the number of technical and well-educated workers, or who seek a solution to the problem of manning economic positions during emergencies (such as periods of total mobilization) confront the reality of women's absence from key positions in the economy. They should be no less concerned by the following discussion of women's rate or intensity of participation in the labor market than those who advocate the equality of the sexes.

The possibility of examining the occupational distribution of women in Israel with some accuracy was provided by the statistical data of the Israel Census of Population and Housing for 1972, which used, for the first time, a new and much more detailed classification of occupational titles.¹ However, since only a representative sample of 20 percent

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1. The detailed data of the Israel Census of Population and Housing for 1972 have not been published as yet. The data reported and analyzed in the present study are from the computer printouts borrowed from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics in accord with a permit from the Ministry of Labour. My thanks to both. Data contained in this census concerning detailed occupational distribution according to sex, and their correlation to education and income, are used for the first time in this report.

of households was interviewed—all members of each household over fourteen years of age were asked to report on their occupation, education, and income—we cannot say for sure whether certain occupations do in fact employ very small numbers of women or whether only few women in those occupations were asked for and gave information. In such cases, information regarding education and income may easily be nonrepresentative. Thus only information concerning the more populated occupations will be considered in this study.

Compared with women as a whole, who comprise 31 percent of the total Israeli labor force, Jewish women represent 34 percent of the Jewish labor force. As we might expect, Jewish women are not equally represented in the nine branches of the economy (see table 1). They are underrepresented in production branches and overrepresented in service branches. Now if we look at the nature of the distribution of all women in Israel among nine occupational categories, compared with that of men, we see that women's representation is balanced in only two occupational categories, namely, scientific and academic workers, and salesworkers. It is excessive in the categories of clerical and related workers, as well as service workers; it is weak in those of skilled workers in industry, transport and building, the most populated category for men, as well as in administrators and managers, a category of workers who have great influence on the labor market and the economy in general (see table 2).

This imbalance is even more conspicuous when we examine the representation of women in the diverse occupations separately. If between 30 and 50 percent of the workers in any given occupation are women, then the occupation may be considered balanced, devoid of sex typing, male or female. But such occupations are very rare, and the population of women employed in them is small. Of the 383 occupations recorded in the 1972 census, 294 are male sex typed. Of these, 108 engaged 70–90 percent men; 163 additional occupations are overwhelmingly male sex typed, with 90 percent or more of their labor force

Table 1

Jewish Women in the Israeli Economy

| Branch of the Economy | % |
|---|------|
| Agriculture | 20.7 |
| Manufacturing | 24.1 |
| Electricity and water | 10.6 |
| Construction | 4.0 |
| Commerce, food services, and hotel | 32.7 |
| Transport, storage, and communication | 13.6 |
| Finance and business | 44.6 |
| Public and local services | 47.6 |
| Other personal services | 43.3 |

Table 2

Distribution in the Israeli Labor Force (%)

| Occupation | Women (100) | Men (100) | Israeli Working Women in the Occupation (31) |
|---|----------------|--------------|---|
| Clerical and related workers | 22.8 | 12.7 | 52.0 |
| Other professional, technical and related workers | 20.6 | 8.5 | 54.5 |
| Service workers | 20.4 | 7.8 | 54.0 |
| Skilled workers in industry, mining, building, and transport, and other skilled workers | 10.4 | 37.4 | 11.6 |
| Salesworkers | 6.7 | 8.5 | 26.8 |
| Scientific and academic workers | 6.4 | 6.3 | 33.6 |
| Agricultural workers | 3.8 | 7.8 | 17.2 |
| Other workers in industry, transport and building, and unskilled workers | 3.2 | 6.1 | 15.7 |
| Administrators and managers | 0.1 | 4.3 | 7.5 |

NOTE.—Total percentages in parentheses.

consisting of men; and in twenty-three of these occupations there are no women at all. Thus 70.7 percent of all occupations are male sex typed to some extent, 42.5 percent are distinctly male sex typed, and 6 percent of the occupations exclude women altogether. In the large category of skilled workers, 68.9 percent of all occupations are distinctly male sex typed; likewise, in the category of managers, nine out of fourteen occupations are distinctly male sex typed.

Most Jewish women in Israel are employed in a very small number of occupations.² Sizable women's groups (over 5,000) can be found in only fifty-two out of 383 occupations, that is in 13.6 percent of the total spectrum of occupations. Such women's groups can be found in three somewhat male sex-typed occupations and in eight occupations that are not sex typed. All the other occupations are feminine sex typed. In twenty of these occupations 50–70 percent of all workers are women; in ten, 75–90 percent; and in eight, over 90 percent. The eight occupations where 90 percent or more of the workers are women employ 23 percent of all Jewish women. Thirty-eight occupations (9.9 percent of all occupations), all of them female sex typed, in fact employ more than 65 percent of the total Jewish female labor force. The ten largest women's occupations in Israel, ordered by size, are (1) secretary, typist, stenographer; (2) elementary school teacher; (3) cleaning worker; (4) salesperson; (5) nursemaid; (6) bookkeeper and assistant bookkeeper; (7)

2. I shall henceforth consider only Jewish women in this study. Arab women's participation in the Israeli labor market is much lower and their occupational distribution significantly different, and therefore they deserve a separate study.

household helper; (8) sewer in the needletrade industry; (9) practical nurse; (10) registered nurse. Of these ten occupations only two, salesperson and bookkeepers, are not feminine sex typed. In these ten occupations, over half a million women are employed.

Before we can ascertain whether the concentration of women in a relatively few sex-typed occupations has a negative significance for the status of women and for the economy in general, we must first examine the income criterion. According to the population census of 1972, the average income of employed women was £3.90 per hour as opposed to £4.92 for men, which means that women's average pay is 79.3 percent of men's. The difference is smaller for the self-employed, but many fewer women are self-employed than men; their average hourly income was £4.38 compared with £5.26 for men, or 83.3 percent.³

Such discrepancy calls for an explanation. It is customary in Communist countries and in the West to explain and to justify the facts of unequal income by pointing to women's inferiority in the general level of education and in vocational training as compared with men. This inferiority, it is claimed, should be reflected in a lower average income. The case of Israel contradicts that argument, however. Admittedly, it is hard to isolate the element of vocational training in the census, since all education of more than one year in any educational institution, whether academic or vocational, is lumped together. We see, nonetheless, that whereas the average educational level of Israeli Jewish men in the labor force is 9.7 years of schooling, that of Israeli Jewish women is 10.7 years. And whereas 40.7 percent of the men have studied less than nine years and 58.3 percent have studied nine years or more, among working women only 27 percent have studied less than nine years and 72.2 percent have studied more than nine years. The difference is especially conspicuous among those who have studied thirteen years and more: 18.2 percent of men compared with 37.5 percent of women. Only for the most educated group, sixteen years and more (in other words, those with a bachelor's degree and more), is the percentage of working women—8.6—slightly smaller than that of working men—8.9. It is, therefore, impossible to explain the inferior income of working women by reference to their lower level of education, since their average educational level is considerably higher.⁴

3. It should be remembered that these figures refer to hourly gross income and not net income, where women are somewhat further discriminated against by differential income tax regulations; as for monthly or annual income, the difference is still greater since a larger portion of employed women work part time—part of the working day, week, or year.

4. These figures do not reflect the educational level of Israeli Jewish women in general, since a large portion of this population does not participate in the labor market and since the tendency to so participate increases with the level of education. A much higher percentage of women with a very low level of education than of men of comparable education never participate in the labor market, or do so for only a few years.

This pay gap persists despite the existence of a law of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. It is well known that this law is violated and that agreements on lower wages for women for equal or similar work are still in effect within one and the same occupation. More often, women are paid less in the same workplaces simply by means of misleading descriptions which emphasize the comparative lightness of women's jobs. In workplaces where men and women employees are physically separate this can be done easily. Because there are also fewer openings for vocational training and for promotion in the workplace for women, a complex situation of overt as well as covert discrimination exists. Even in occupations, especially in public employment, where overt pay discrimination is ruled out, there is still a pay gap, largely due to the combination of two factors: (1) pay increases automatically with seniority and (2) women's average work life is shorter. Unfortunately, our data do not permit the exact isolation of the relative weights of these diverse factors—overt discrimination, covert discrimination due to misleading job descriptions, inferior training and promotion possibilities, and seniority. Moreover, we do not know the relative weight of the imbalanced occupational distribution and of the concentration of women in "women's occupations" in determining the pay gap.

We can, however, compare the size of the gap between the income of the sexes in occupations which are male sex typed, in neutral occupations, and in occupations which are female sex typed, mildly or in the extreme. To begin with male sex-typed occupations. In the electrical and electronic assembly, where women's education level is 0.4 years lower than men's, their income reaches only 60 percent of men's; among the self-employed in retail trade, women's educational level is higher than men's by one year, yet their income amounts to only 50 percent of men's. In balanced occupations, on the other hand, the picture is not clear-cut. There are occupations, such as those of general office clerks and cashiers, where women's educational level is slightly lower than that of men, yet their income reaches 64 and 67 percent of men's pay, respectively. In the occupations of salespersons and cleaning workers in public service, where women's educational level is slightly higher than that of men, the income gap is much smaller: women achieve 83.6 and 96 percent, respectively. As to the only balanced academic occupations—that of teachers in postsecondary institutions—women's educational level is lower by 0.6 years and their pay reaches 79.4 percent. We can say, then, that the situation in balanced occupations is slightly better for women than in decidedly male sex-typed ones.

In extremely female sex-typed occupations, too, the picture is not uniform. For elementary school teachers, the educational levels are equal, and the pay gap is one of the smallest—4 percent. For registered nurses, the other large occupation, the educational level of women is lower by 0.4 years and their income comes up to 87 percent of men's.

Presumably this relatively small gap is the outcome of the high degree of organization in these two occupations. Indeed, for the occupation of secretary, typist, and stenographer, where the educational levels are identical, women's income is only 69 percent of men's; for that of cosmetician, where women's educational level is higher than men's, it reaches 74 percent; in practical nursing, where women's educational level is higher by almost one year, 69.7 percent; and for that of female sewers and stitchers in the needletrade industry, where education is higher by as much as 1.9 years, also 69.7 percent. We may conclude, then, that with the aid of a strong professional organization women may prevent or diminish pay discrimination, even in a decidedly female sex-typed occupation. In the absence of such organization, the pay gap tends to be much bigger in female sex-typed occupations than in balanced ones, even where women's educational level is significantly higher than men's.

In less extremely female sex-typed occupations, where women comprise between 70 and 80 percent of the work force, their income is relatively higher than in the extremely female sex-typed occupations (with the exception of the less discriminated against women teachers and registered nurses). Their income reaches 75.1 percent in the occupation of medical technicians, where the educational levels of the sexes are equal, and moves between 85 and 90 percent in the occupations of social workers, telephone operators, and technicians in the natural sciences, where women's educational levels are considerably higher than men's.

Taking another vantage point, we can examine the status or prestige of an occupation with a distinctive female sex-typed image among the occupations with workers of similar educational level. We can, in other words, determine how the average pay (of either sex) of a decidedly female sex-typed occupation compares with the average pay of men of the same number of years of education. Generally the pay ladder of occupations in Israel is in almost complete agreement with the educational ladder. The major exceptions are the occupations with distinctive feminine sex-typed images. Here the average pay lags considerably behind the average pay of men with comparable levels of education. To begin with the top of the educational ladder, the first feminine sex-typed occupation appears in the group with fourteen to fifteen years of education and refers to academic workers in the arts and humanities; the average pay here reaches only 63 percent of the average pay of men in that level of education. On the same educational level, female social workers get 63.8 percent of the pay of men; and with thirteen years of education, registered nurses get 68.9 percent the pay of men; with twelve years of education, kindergarten teachers get 86 percent the pay of men; with eleven years of education, secretaries and typists get 74 percent the pay of men; with ten and more years of education, punch clerks get 65 percent the pay of men; with ten and more years of educa-

tion, cosmeticians get 63 percent the pay of men; with nine years of education, nursemaids get 59 percent the pay of men; with eight and more years of education, sewers in the needletrade get 65 percent the pay of men; with eight and more years of education, kindergarten teacher aides get 65 percent the pay of men; with six and more years of education, household workers and cooks get 78.7 percent the pay of men. We can, then, estimate the rate by which an occupation with a feminine image reduces its proportional pay. Those with an educational level of fourteen years who work in a feminine sex-typed occupation earn less than the average man with an educational level of ten years; those with an educational level of thirteen years and more earn like the average man with 9.5 years of education; those with education of more than eleven years earn like men with eight years of education. Thus, even though there are a few distinctly female sex-typed occupations where the pay gap between men and women in that occupation is relatively small, all feminine sex-typed occupations, except for the occupation of kindergarten teachers, lag markedly behind the pay level of other workers with comparable education. The concentration of women in decidedly feminine sex-typed occupations is, then, one of the significant factors in determining their inferiority in the labor market. And it is particularly that large portion of women who work in feminine sex-typed occupations who receive a very low remuneration in proportion to their investment in academic and vocational education. It seems clear that this situation contributes to the reluctance of women to persist in working outside the home.

Those concerned with the economic status of women ought to combat sex typing of occupations and advocate the representation of women in the broader spectrum of all occupations. This demands that the feminine image of sex-typed occupations be blurred, that men of appropriate dispositions be attracted to work in the education of the young, in nursing infants and the infirm, in social work and welfare. In order to balance clerical and secretarial occupations, opportunities for professional advancement should be opened to women as equally as to men within their respective work organizations. Finally, women must make rapid entry into professional, managerial, engineering, technical, and skilled positions in all branches of the economy.

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