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## Abating inequalities?

### – Job quality at the intersection of class and gender in Finland 1977-2013

#### Abstract

*Globalization with its many side-effects on working life is seen to pose accentuated risks especially for women and low skilled workers –resulting in increasing polarization of job quality. In contrast to “universal theories”, institutional theories claim changes in work life might vary according to the institutional and cultural frameworks which might mediate the global pressures of change. This study analyses job quality trends in Finland at the intersection of class and gender. The results, based on Finnish Quality of Work Life survey (1977-2013), find no clear evidence of polarization. In line with the institutional theory’s prediction of a low risk of polarization in coordinated and inclusive Nordic countries, improvements have occurred for blue-collar workers in terms of autonomy and opportunities for development at work, reducing the gap between social classes. Furthermore, the negative sides of work life, such as insecurity and time pressures have become common experiences regardless of social class. The ‘welfare state paradox’ hypothesis on the comparative disadvantage of women in higher positions in the labor market does not gain support in 2013: the upper-white collar women have attained roughly similar level of job quality as their male counterparts.*

## **Introduction**

The rise of the knowledge society, the technological change, and tertiarization are seen to affect the well-being of the workforce, especially posing risks for women and low skilled workers (see e.g. Gallie et al. 2013; Green et al. 2013). In contrast, the highly educated have seen to be insulated from the degradation of job quality (Clark 2005). In consequence, the gap between men and women in different class positions is expected to grow, resulting in the increasing polarization of job quality.

And indeed, polarizing developments between employees in different class positions have been reported according to many aspects of work life. According to several studies, there has been growth in employment in both the highest- and lowest-skilled occupations, with declining employment in the middle of the skill distribution, which is also reflected as polarizing wage levels (Fernandez-Macias et al. 2012; Goos & Manning 2007; Tåhlin 2007). Furthermore, polarization has been observed in terms skill development and task discretion afforded to employees (for UK Gallie 2007b; Green & al. 2013; Feldsted et al. 2007; for the US see Kalleberg 2011).

In contrast to “universal theories” of change in work life, institutional theories, such as production and employment regime theories (e.g. Hall & Soskice 2001; Gallie 2007a)

discuss how job quality trends as well as polarization risks differ depending on the institutional contexts. This claim has been supported by comparative studies which find the risk of polarization both in terms of employment structures as well as quality of jobs was low in the inclusive economies of Nordic countries (Gallie et al. 2007; 2013; Green et al. 2013; Eurofound 2013). Controversially, notable gender gaps, according to various work life indicators like wages, job authority and quality of jobs, have been found in the Nordic countries, despite them being regarded as female friendly welfare states (see e.g. Gallie et al. 2007; 2013; Mandel 2012; Stier and Yaish 2009)

Despite intriguing results, these previous studies have limitations: many of the studies are restricted to cross-sectional data or rather short time spans due to a lack of available data (Gallie et al. 2007; 2013; Holman 2013a; 2013b; Stier and Yaish 2014), and thus provide only limited possibilities to make conclusions on long-term polarizing developments or other trends. Furthermore, critically evaluating the research settings in studies that tackle inequalities reveals shortages as class and gender have been treated as two autonomous domains of inequality. It has been established that studies concentrating on inequality between genders might obscure inequalities among women in different class positions (e.g. Korpi 2000; McCall 2001; Mandel 2012). Despite various calls for intersectional

perspectives when conducting working life research it has yet to be sufficiently translated into empirical studies (e.g. McBride et al. 2015; Mulinari and Selberg 2013).

The current study builds on prior work by drawing on the hypothesis on abating inequalities – in terms of the quality of jobs in Finland – from the field of institutional theory. It contributes to this field by using a unique and extensive high quality dataset, the Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey, to study the alleged polarization in work life over four decades. We investigate changes in job quality among men and women in different class positions, between 1977 and 2013. The study follows the tradition of the multidimensional approach to job quality of what makes a “good job” and what explains the roots of inequalities that are determined by other factors than just wages (e.g. Muñoz de Bustillo et al. 2011). Job quality is understood as an umbrella concept that gathers together several aspects of work life that are central to worker well-being, such as the possibility to develop and use skills at work, the level of task discretion, and work pressures and job insecurity (see also e.g. Gallie 2007a; Green 2006; Hauff & Kirchner 2014; Osterman 2013; Sengupta & al. 2009).

The next section of the article presents the institutional setting by discussing the connections of institutional theories and job quality in Finland, showing how these theories open interesting perspectives for analyzing the polarization of job quality on the national

level and describing the kind of developments they predict according to class and gender as well as their intersection. The data, the methodological choices and the key variables will be presented. Thereafter, we proceed to the results of the empirical analysis: the evolution of the various aspects of job quality in Finland over the last four decades. The article concludes with a summary of the results and a discussion.

## **Theoretical background**

Research literature on changes in work life could roughly be divided into universal and institutional theories (see Gallie & al. 2007; 2013; Green & al. 2013): universal theories assume the forces of stratification in the labor markets would result in similar polarizing developments irrespective the context: lower skilled would suffer from the rise of the knowledge society and computerization as rising skill requirements would make lower skilled work more vulnerable and as lower skilled would assumingly face difficulties in assimilating new technology. Restructuration of the economy and offshoring of production has made many jobs and professions vulnerable to dumping of working conditions in developed countries. Furthermore, process of post-industrialism (economic restructuring) intensifies gender segregation and inequality as it confines women into service and care

jobs (Dwyer 2013; Webb 2010). These developments would lead into increasing polarization of quality of jobs. In contrast, institutional theories, which will be further developed in the next section, introduce diverging views by explaining why polarization risks do not necessarily materialize in all political economies.

### *Institutions shaping quality of jobs*

During recent years there has been a growing interest in so-called non-pecuniary job quality. The comparative studies show that the quality of jobs is high in the Nordic countries (e.g. Green 2006; Holman 2013a; 2013b; Oinas et al. 2012; Olsen et al. 2010), a result which has been shown to be associated with specific institutional arrangements, such as strong unionization (Esser and Olsen 2012).

Furthermore, (labor market) institutions coordinating the markets are seen to explain the low polarization risks in the Nordic countries. More specifically, a hypothesis on the low risk of polarization in Finnish work life can be drawn from institutional literature and mainly from production regime theories, such as the varieties of capitalism (VoC) tradition by Hall and Soskice (2001) and the employment regimes, which take into account the power of organized labor (see e.g. Gallie 2007; Korpi 2006). The Nordic countries are

considered typical examples of coordinated market economies (CMEs). CMEs emphasize product market strategies based on complex ‘diversified quality products’ that increase the demand for specific skills (Gallie 2003; 2007a). This is supported by a strong vocational training system. The Nordic type of CME may also be called “state-led social partnership skill systems” (Green 2013) as the government plays a rather central role both in adult education and training as well as in initial education. In the Nordic type of CME the companies are encouraged (by institutional regulation, but also by their own high quality product strategies) to have a long-term perspective in terms of financing, investment and relationships with their employees. In other words, the risks of polarization between high- and low-skilled workers would be minor due to the employer strategies and institutional factors mentioned above. Thus, the specialized skills required for a coordinated economy would be supported and needed across the workforce, resulting in a higher quality of work life with a higher prevalence of new forms of work organization, higher autonomy and better decision-making responsibilities also among the low-skilled. (Gallie 2007a.)

Similar outcomes are predicted according to employment regime theories, which also take into account power relations between the, employers and, employees and the state as a mediator (Gallie 2007a; see also Korpi 2006): Nordic countries represent an *inclusive employment system* aimed at protecting the rights of workers in general. The role of



organized labor is highly institutionalized and the large public sector offers both employment and work-family policies to support employment.

In the institutional framework a practical example of the special power relations and thus worth mentioning are the specific work life programs that were developed in the Nordic countries since the 1970's. The development programs were driven by national policies, unions as well as employers and aimed at improving learning possibilities and the organization of work, including both the physical as well the psychological conditions of work (Elvander 2002; Gallie 2003; Gustavsen 2007). Efforts were targeted to improve the quality of work of the low-skilled and to provide more effective ladders for skill enhancement (e.g. Gallie 2002). Consequently, these policies and programs might have contributed to lower polarization risk in the Nordic countries.

*Gender inequality and job quality: the adverse effects of institutions*

Earlier comparative research has pointed out that class equality is sometimes achieved at the expense of gender equality (e.g. Cooke 2011). Although, as noted above, the risk of class polarization has been found to be low, the gender gap according to skills, autonomy and job security was found to be most pronounced in Sweden when compared to similar political economies, such as Germany (Gallie et al. 2007). Whereas women in Finland have

exceeded men in terms of educational attainment and employment rates (Sutela and Lehto 2014, 17-19), the gender gap in terms of pay (especially among the higher skilled) and job authority remain comparatively high in Nordic countries (Evertsson et al. 2009; Mandel 2012; Mandel H and Shalev M 2009b; Sutela and Lehto 2014, 191; Yaish and Stier 2009).

Consequently, it has been discussed how the welfare institutions might affect the employment of females in unpredictable ways. For instance, production regime theories assume that an emphasis on skill formation systems and employer strategies could have rather different implications for men and women. Estevez-Abe (2005) has argued that women in coordinated economies, such as Finland, would be disadvantaged in the labor market compared to men. The argument is that an emphasis on specific skills would lead to the discrimination of women, especially in private sector jobs, as employers would be reluctant to invest in the training of employees who would be likely to have career interruptions for maternity leave or work shorter hours due to the family responsibilities. Moreover, strong employment protection as well as the generous family benefit policies characteristic of the Nordic countries tend to intensify employer discrimination against women (Mandel and Shalev 2009a). The strong employment protection constrains employers' possibilities to lay-off, but this means employers also have difficulty in finding temporary replacements to employees on family leaves due to the specificity of the skills

required. Hence, extended maternity leaves are seen as especially damaging to women's employment in economies reliant on specific skills.

This controversial phenomenon has been identified as the "welfare state paradox" (Mandel and Semyonov 2006) because the social democratic type of work-family policies considered female-friendly are also considered to have harmful side-effects. Although generous welfare state policies facilitate female access to the labor force by creating public sector jobs and by providing employment protection and childcare, they do not facilitate entry to the private sector and high-quality, high-skills positions. In consequence, the labor markets would be distinguished into occupations and sectors that are characterized by high levels of female employment and those in which women struggle to achieve good quality jobs. Critics point out that strict employment protection as well as regulations imposed by strong unions benefits the careers of females and their quality of employment, preventing them from becoming labor market outsiders (Rubery 2011). In addition, generous work-family policies such as affordable, good quality, public child care facilitate women's continuous employment (e.g. Dieckhoff et al. 2015; Steiber and Haas 2012) and should reduce employer discrimination against them in the Nordic countries. Societal changes, such as changing values towards gender equity (Scott 2006) and increasing participation of men in household work and childcare (Pääkkönen and Hanifi 2012) together with

institutional efforts towards gender mainstreaming as well as creating family policies targeted explicitly to fathers could be expected to reduce gender differences in work life over time. However, women are still the main users of the family leaves and others claim that extensive work-family policies are most often (explicitly or implicitly) targeted towards women, thus reinforcing the cultural image of women as mothers and primary caregivers, whilst damaging the image of mothers being also workers (see also Ellingsaeter 2013), which increases the gap between men and women in work life.

#### *Job quality at the intersection of class and gender*

In addition to separately considering the class polarization risks and the gendered implications of the institutional frame, it has been suggested that production strategies and skill specificity have different implications for women who occupy different class positions (e.g. Mandel and Shalev 2009a; Mandel 2012). According to this idea, it is women at the higher end of the skill continuum that are in an unfavorable position in the Nordic countries.

More specifically, although the expectation of the discrimination of employers against females can be connected to the behavior of women as a group, class also matters. Positions

involving high training costs can be assumed to be mostly given to stable and productive workers, meaning that highly skilled women would be disadvantaged in competing for good quality jobs. Furthermore, employers should have less of a reason to discriminate against women when considering them for low-skilled jobs as the costs for replacing and training the employee are not as high (Estevez-Abe 2005; Mandel 2012). Consequently, class and gender can be expected to interact so that the gender gap in terms of job quality would be higher among the high-skilled and less pronounced among the low-skilled. In contrast, women in lower echelon jobs would benefit from the regulations and strength of the organized labor as it is mainly in the lower skilled jobs where the regulations make a difference.

The varieties of capitalism (VoC) argument and its “feminist and classed” perspective have also been challenged. Edlund and Grönlund (2008) have questioned whether strict employment protection actually leads into gender discrimination. They argue how, although employees in the Nordic countries possess considerable firm specific skills in terms of tenure and on-the-job training (i.e. time required to learn to do the job well), employers do not seem to experience any greater difficulties in replacing their employees if they left. In addition, gender and class differences in tenure in Nordic countries are negligible. (ibid.) Furthermore, according to Webb (2010) Swedish women have not demonstrated greater

difficulties in accessing higher occupational positions compared to UK. Consequently, it could be interpreted that employers possibly do not treat these groups very differently.

### *The research hypothesis*

To summarize, the aim of this paper is to find out how job quality has developed in Finland over the past five decades among different groups of employees. Thus we ask if the “universal predictions” of polarization have occurred or has the institutional framework managed to prevent the inequalities from growing larger? Following production and employment regime frameworks (which are supported by earlier research) the risk of class polarization in Finland is expected to be low, whereas the gender inequality is expected to be rather high. Furthermore, the intersection between class and gender is expected to result in an even wider gap between high-skilled men and women compared to those in lower skilled occupations.

Institutional theories, such as production and employment regimes, have been successfully used as a framework for comparative studies, thus providing support for the idea that the cross-national variation in job quality is a result of institutional differences (e.g. Esser and Olsen 2012; Holman 2013a; 2013b; Olsen et al. 2010). As this study concentrates only on

analyzing the case of Finland and is not comparative by nature, institutional theory is employed to highlight the specificities of the Nordic labor market and its possible effects on the dispersion of the quality of jobs among different groups of employees.

## **Data, measures and methods**

### *Data*

The empirical analyses are based on the pooled data of seven cross-sectional Finnish Quality of Work Life surveys (1977, 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008 & 2013) carried out by Statistics Finland. The Quality of Work Life Survey (QWLS) is an extensive personal interview survey conducted to monitor employees' working conditions and changes in them. The data are collected through face-to-face interviews using a standardized questionnaire. The sample is obtained from the participants of Labour Force Survey by choosing either employed persons or wage and salary earners. Between 3,000 and 5,800 people were interviewed in each survey round. The response rate in the QWLS has varied between 91 and 69 per cent with a declining trend. The analysis is restricted to employees from 15 to 64 of years of age.

We use the standard classification of socio-economic status defined by Statistics Finland as a measure for individual social class. The classification takes account of a person's occupation and employment status, and is supplemented by divisions describing the nature of occupation and industry. The Finnish official socioeconomic classification is an evolved version of the old Nordic socio-economic classification, but with a stronger emphasis on skill differences and educational requirements. In general, the Finnish classification may be interpreted similarly as Erikson-Goldthorpe classification. For the purposes of this study, social class is classified into three groups of employees: 1) blue-collar workers, 2) lower white-collar workers and 3) upper white-collar workers. In 2013 survey major occupations (ISCO-88) belonging to upper white-collar group were professionals (90 %) and to a lesser degree managers (9 %). Lower white collar group includes technicians and associate professionals (48 %), service and sales workers (35 %), and clerical support workers (17 %). Blue-collar group consist mainly of craft and related trades workers (35 %), plant or machine operators and assemblers (24 %), elementary occupations (18 %), and service and sales workers (14 %). The change in the production and educational structure resulted in major changes in employment structures during the QWLS period and a marked increase in white-collar wage and salary earners.



### *Dimensions of job quality and measures*

There is no single definition or way to measure job quality. Economists tend to define job quality in terms of pay, while polarization is understood as the growing gap between high and low paid jobs. Nevertheless, in this paper the approach to the quality of work is sociological, therefore the definition of job quality is broader, including a range of job features. This study concentrates on measuring job quality, namely employee experiences at the level of the job, compared to wider labor market conditions, such as the unemployment rate or the level of social protection (e.g. Muñoz de Bustillo et al. 2011).

*Possibilities for skill development.* Training days provided by the employer in the year prior to the survey was chosen as the objective measure of possibilities for skill development. The indicator of participation in training is an average of training days, including “zero-answers” i.e. those who did not receive any training. To evaluate the subjective experience of the skills development aspect, workers were asked if they assessed their opportunities for self-development good, fair or poor. The original scale was further recoded into a dichotomy (good vs fair or poor). The question was not in the survey of 1984, but the analysis was conducted for all the other surveys.

*Autonomy.* The extent to which employees have an influence on their jobs is assessed with one measure. The dataset includes six questions that describe perceived autonomy, that is, a worker's own influence and control over the work process. Respondents were asked the following questions: are you able to influence (a lot, quite a lot, a little or not at all) the content of your tasks; the order in which you do your tasks; the pace of your work; your working methods; the division of tasks between employees; who you work with? The scale varies between 1 and 4, recoded as higher values to represent higher autonomy. The Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was 0,806 and every item increases it. The question on autonomy has been in the survey since 1984.

*Work effort.* To describe the subjective experiences of the intensity of work, an indicator of time pressures was employed. Workers were asked to indicate adverse factors present in their work environment and also to assess the extent to which the burden in question affected their work. One of the possible adverse factors was "time pressure and tight time schedules". For the descriptive analysis, the original 5-point scale was recoded so that the respondents who assessed time pressures as disturbing their work very much or quite a lot, were combined into the category termed "high work effort" and compared to the rest.

*Insecurity.* The subjective perception of insecurity is simply measured with one question: Does your work carry any of the following insecurity factors: threat of a temporary

dismissal; threat of dismissal; threat of unemployment? A respondent was counted as insecure when answering “yes” to any of the categories.

### *Methods*

The empirical analyses are conducted by using various methods. First, the figures are used to gain an overall picture of the development of various job quality measures in different groups. In this descriptive analysis we employ combined classifications of gender and social class. The figures are based on mean comparisons and cross tabulations and they are presented in order to see where and what kind of change has happened over time. Second, the change in the hypothesized gender gap and the polarization between occupational positions is tested with cross-product terms in linear regression model with controls. We employ linear models for both continuous and binary variables (Linear Probability Model). Linear probability model (LPM) has some clear advantages over logistic regression and other nonlinear models which are further clarified below.

LPM is simply standard linear regression used to analyze binary dependent variable. Three issues are generally related to using linear models for binary data: 1) The possibility of predicted probability falling outside 0 to 1 range, 2) heteroscedastic and non-normal

residuals leading to inflated standard errors, and 3) misspecified functional form. However, these issues are not as serious as it is often claimed (see Mood, 2010; Hellevik, 2009). In contrast, LPMs have some clear advantages over logistic regression and other nonlinear models. Coefficients from a LPM may be interpreted as the difference in probability for having a certain value on the dependent variable for units with different values on an independent variable. Also, in LPMs coefficients are comparable over models, groups, and time; which is not the case with logistic regression (see Mood 2010). The effect estimates of LPM are in fact unbiased and consistent estimates of a variables average effect on probability of the event studied.

As hypotheses of development of gender and occupational differences are rather simple i.e. strengthening or weakening of these differences, we use survey year as linear period effect in regression models. This way results are easily interpretable, especially with regards to interaction effects. Significant interaction effect of gender with linearly coded survey year indicates, depending on the slope and intercept, either strengthening or weakening of gender differences. Same applies to differences between socioeconomic groups. However, linear trend does miss information on periodical variation in trend caused by e.g. changes in economic situation. As we are addressing only general trends of increasing or decreasing differentiation, the simplification of these more nuanced periodical changes is necessary.

## **Results**

The results are presented for each job quality aspect separately, leaving the summary until the discussion. Figures 1 to 5 depict the overall uncontrolled development in the dimensions of job quality by combining gender and social class.

In Finland there have been major changes in the working population during last three decades. The most notable changes have been the steep rise in the level of education, especially for women, and population ageing influenced by a particularly large baby boom cohort (see supplement material). As it is important to take these changes into account we added measures of education, age-group, family status and employment sector into the models as controls in addition to gender and class. Controlling for these factors enables us to obtain a more reliable trend of development in job quality.

Regression analyses on the overall linear change in each job quality measure and the significance of gender and class differences in this general trend after controlling for changes in employment structure is presented in supplementary table 1. There were

statistically significant three-level interactions between gender, class and survey year with regard to all job quality aspects except for autonomy. These interactions give reason to look more closely into the development of the inequalities and interpret the trends. Consequently, in table 1 we present intercepts and slopes derived from regression analyses for each job quality measure by gender and class. Together with interaction terms the group-level intercept (i.e. initial status) at 1977 and the slope (i.e. linear change) during observation period (1977-2013), provide clear interpretation whether or not there has been increase or decrease in gender or socioeconomic differentiation with regards to job quality. Table 1 will be employed to support the analysis and interpretation of the descriptive trends of each job quality aspect presented in figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

**Table 1.** Trend of job quality measures during 1977-2013 in Finland by gender and occupation

Occupation	Gender	Training days/year		Development opportunities		Autonomy		Time pressure		Job insecurity	
		Intercept	Slope	Intercept	Slope	Intercept	Slope	Intercept	Slope	Intercept	Slope
Blue-collar	Male	1.83	0.03	0.22	0.17**	2.13	0.34**	1.78	0.45**	0.31	<0.01
	Female	0.67	0.35	0.19	0.11**	2.00	0.30**	2.13	0.44**	0.24	0.11**
Lower white-collar	Male	3.76	-0.61	0.55	-0.02	2.50	0.03	2.02	0.13	0.17	0.06*
	Female	1.39	0.34	0.27	0.15**	2.25	0.08*	1.92	0.52**	0.18	0.16**
Upper white-	Male	6.22	-1.77*	0.68	-0.04	2.78	-0.21*	2.12	0.05	0.12	0.23**

collar			**				**				
	Fem ale	2.77	0.67	0.48	0.18* **	2.65	-0.07	1.79	0.34* **	0.14	0.27* **

Variable scales: training days 0 to 98; development opportunities 0 to 1; autonomy 1 to 4; time pressure 1 to 5; job insecurity 0 to 1.

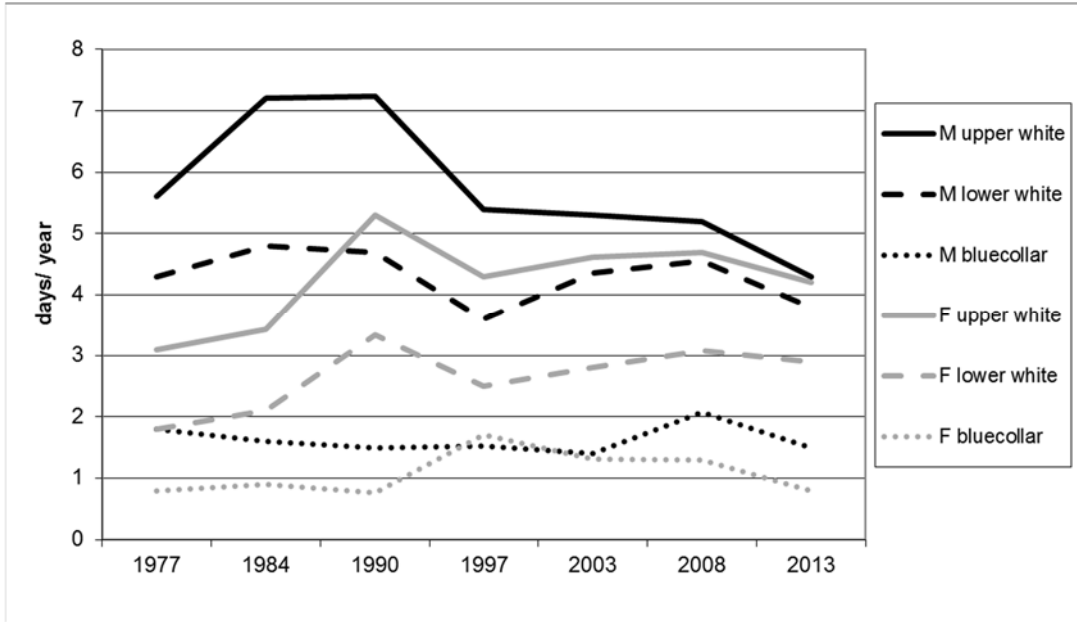
Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients controlling for age-group, couple status, presence of children, education and sector

(\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001).

Intercept refers to the initial status of job quality measures in 1977 and the slope to the linear change from 1977 to 2013

*Possibilities for skill development: participation in training provided by the employer*

Access to training is, and has been, very tightly linked to social class (Figure 1): In 1977-1990 male blue-collar employees received less than two days of training during the year prior to the survey, whereas male employees in lower white-collar positions 4 days and upper white-collar workers over 7 days (Figure 1). The class differentials were highest in 1984 and 1990 before the economic crisis hit Finland after which especially the upper white-collar men have gradually lost their advantage. Convergence between social classes is mainly due to this development. Although the differences between the classes have diminished, on average white-collar employees participated in training three days more than blue-collar workers in 2013.



**Figure 1.** Training days of employees during the past 12 months by gender and occupation

The gender gap is evident and persistent in access to training (Figure 1). In general, men got more in-house training than women in all social classes but the training possibilities for white-collar women have improved since the 1980s. After 2008 there has been a general decline in training possibilities for both men and women in all social classes, most likely linked to economic recession. In line with the VoC prediction, upper white-collar women suffered from comparative disadvantage during the 1970s and 1980s but the gap has



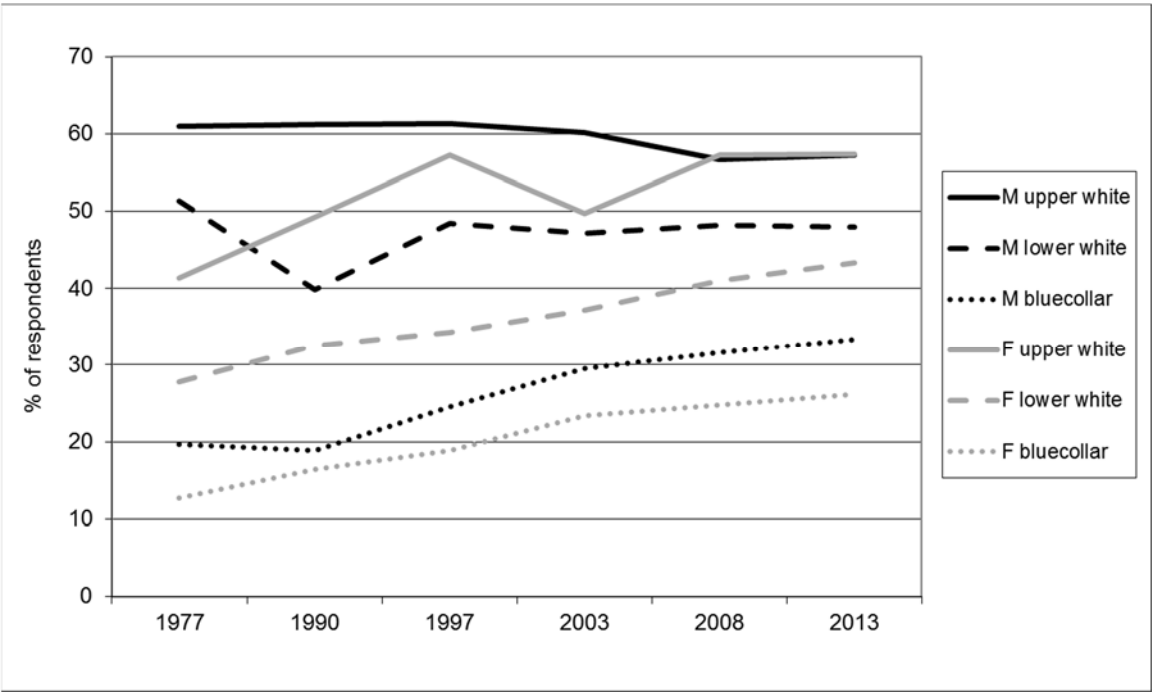
reduced significantly and in 2013 upper white-collar women participated in training at similar frequencies to those of their male counterparts. For blue-collar workers the gender gap has been small but persistent in favor of men. In contrast, the gender gap in training seems widest in the lower white-collar employees' category and has clearly declined slower than for upper white-collar workers.

Results from regression analysis with linear period effect and controls for structural change mainly support descriptive results (table 1 and supplementary table 1). There was evidence of gender-convergence only in white-collar employees. The main cause for this was decrease in men's training days. With regards class differences the main result is of persistent differences for women. For men the clear drop in upper white-collar training days has decreased the class differences to some degree.

#### *Possibilities for skill development: subjective evaluation*

The main result is towards convergence between the social classes (figure 2). The descriptive results reveal that the convergence is due to the marked improvement in the development opportunities of manual workers and women in intermediate and upper positions. The development opportunities of male professionals have not improved over

time. Despite the positive trend among lower-skilled workers, development opportunities still vary greatly depending on class still in 2013. While approximately every fourth blue-collar worker rated their prospects for development as good in 2013, the same answer was given by over half of the upper white-collar workers.



**Figure 2.** Percentage of employees with good development opportunities at work by gender and occupation

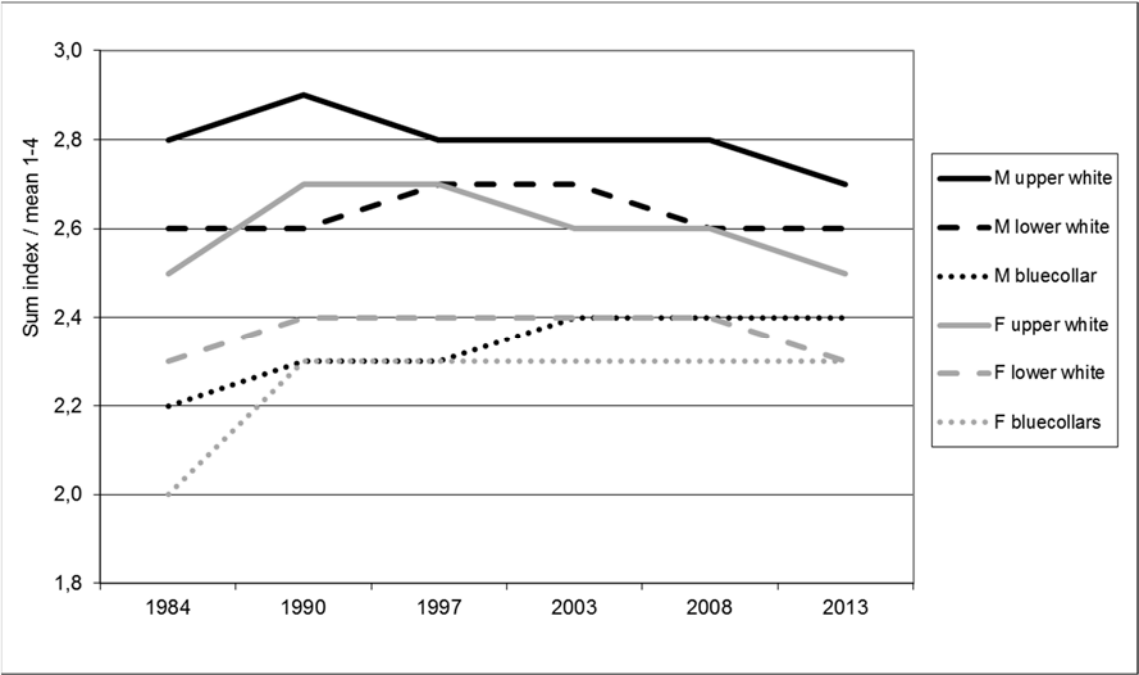
Women have fewer possibilities for development than men in general, but the gender gap has disappeared over time for white-collar workers (figure 2). The gender gap has stayed the same among blue-collar workers throughout the study period and is currently the only group where significant gender gap is found. The hypothesis on the comparative disadvantage of higher educated women was somewhat true in 1970s, but as the gender gap has declined over time, it has not been valid since 2008 onward.

Regression adjustment for structural changes does not alter main results (table 1 and supplementary table 1). There was increase of development opportunities in all groups except for white-collar men. This resulted in decrease of gender gap for white-collar employees. In blue-collar group gender differences have stayed virtually the same for the whole observation period. The class differences have stayed the same for women and decreased for men because of improved situation of blue-collar employees.

### *Autonomy*

With regards to the level of autonomy, the overall pattern is towards class convergence. (Figure 3). The convergence between class groups is mainly explained by the rise in the

level of autonomy of blue-collar workers and the decline in the amount of discretion afforded to the upper white-collar men.



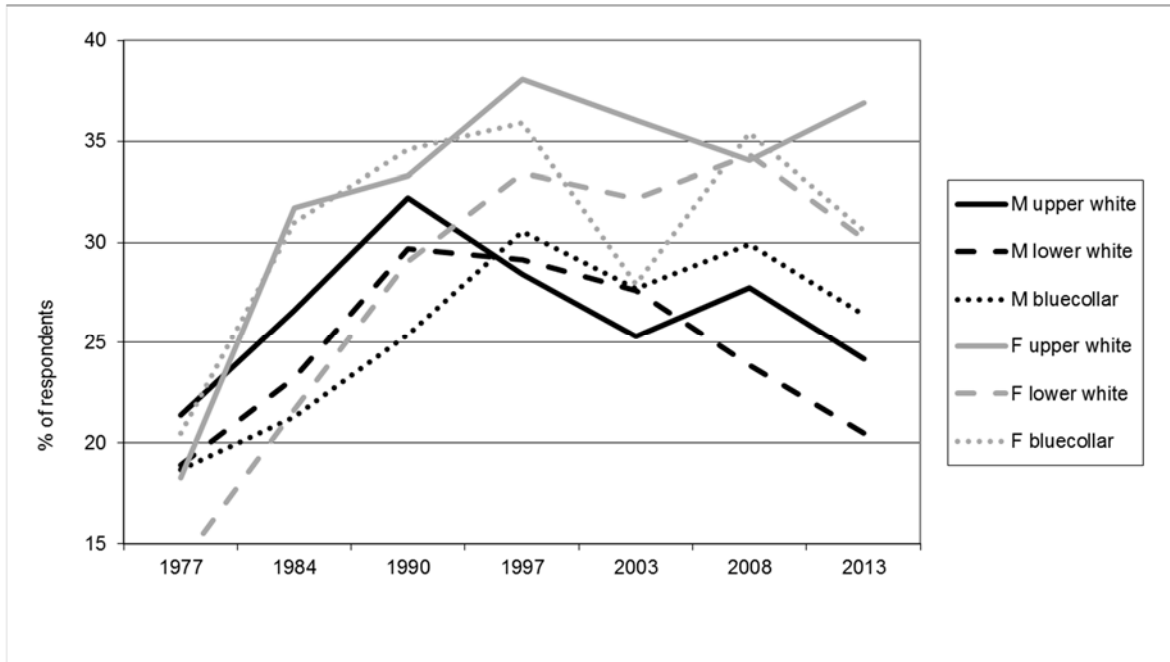
**Figure 3.** Level of autonomy by gender and occupation

Results change only little after controlling for structural differences in working population (table 1 and supplementary table 1). Regardless of the declining class gap, also in 2013 autonomy is closely linked to class and gender: upper white-collar workers have more

autonomy than lower white and blue-collar workers. However, it is notable that when comparing the workers of same gender in 2013, lower white and blue-collar workers have identical levels of autonomy: blue collar and lower white collar women perceive their autonomy rather similarly as do blue collar and lower white collar men. In other words, gender gap is more persistent than class difference in these groups. Although in 2013 men are more likely to perceive more autonomy than women in blue collar and lower white collar groups, upper white collar women have reached same level of autonomy as their male counterparts (table 1).

### *Time pressure*

The intensification of work is evident in Finland. The amount of employees reporting time pressures and working to tight schedules as disturbing factor rose remarkably in all social classes during the 1980s and 1990s, after which it started to slowly decrease but mainly in job occupied by men (figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Time pressure and tight deadlines as adverse factors at work by gender and occupation

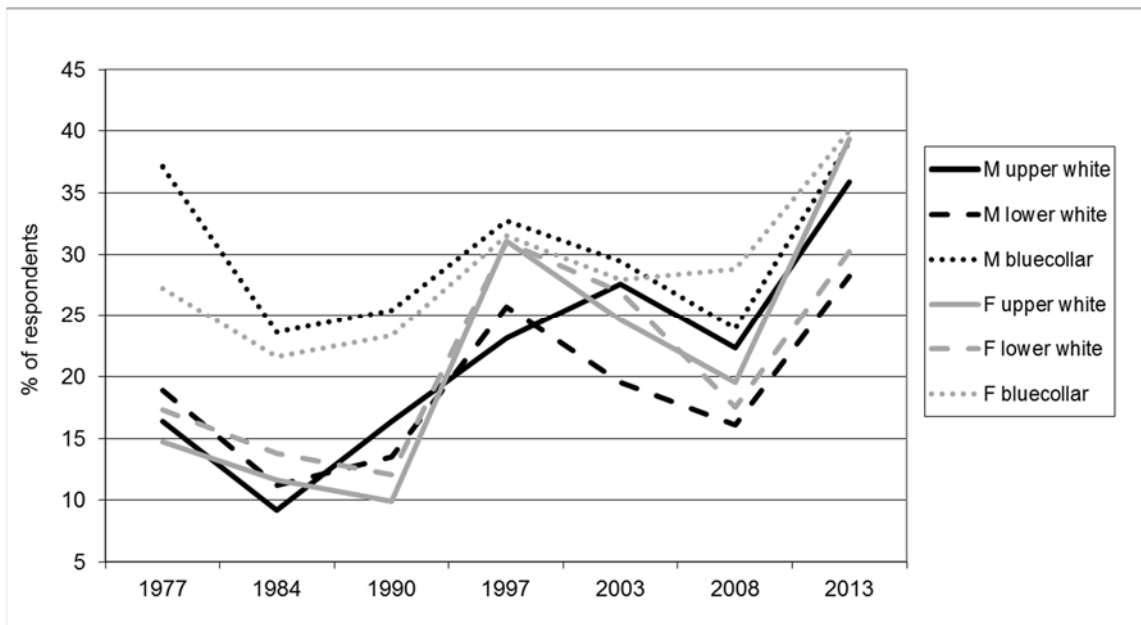
Growing work pressures are not inherently attached to social class in Finland, since according to the descriptive analyses none of the social classes has been saved from intensification (figure 4). It is evident that time pressures have become more of a problem of female employees in all classes whereas male employees would be moving towards the levels of intensity experienced during the 1970's and 1980's.

Regression adjustment does not change results considerably (table 1 and supplementary table 1) although this strategy hides some of the variation between different time points (the peaks). It is evident that work intensity has increased for women in all classes, whereas the long-term trend for white-collar men does not show significant changes. However, in contrast to the descriptive analysis in figure 4 controlling for various individual and structural factors alter the picture regarding the assumed disadvantage of higher white-collar women as according to regression models in 2013 they experience similar levels of time pressure as their male counterparts. For men only group experiencing long term intensification are the blue collar employees.

### *Insecurity*

The measure reflecting job insecurity as perceived by employees seems to be tightly related to the situation of the national economy. Subjective insecurity for most employee groups was on a low level during the years of intense economic growth in the 1980s but increased drastically after the 1990s deep recession and mass unemployment and even more during the economic crisis since 2008 (Figure 5). Until 1990 job insecurity was more closely related to social class and more of a problem for blue-collar employees. The recession of

the 1990s has made job insecurity more or less a commonly shared experience for employees in all classes.



**Figure 5.** Perceived job insecurity by gender and occupation

Nevertheless, the gender gap has been quite small for entire observation period (figure 5). In 1977, blue-collar men experienced little more insecurity than blue-collar women, but the situation has reversed by the 2013. In contrast, upper and lower white-collar women



experienced rather similar levels of job insecurity with their male counter parts, both in the 1970's and 2013.

Results from regression models confirm descriptive results (table 1 and supplementary table 1). There has been significant increase in subjective job insecurity in all groups except for blue-collar males with whom the experience of insecurity was very common already in 1977. In 2013 it was the upper white-collar women who experienced insecurity most often. In fact, women face threat of unemployment or dismissal most often in all social classes. There is indication of gender convergence in blue-collar and divergence in lower-white collar groups. In both cases the main reason was the larger increase of subjective job insecurity for women. Class differences have decreased for both women and men, but the change is more evident for men. The main reason for class convergence is the relatively strong increase of job insecurity for upper white-collar employees.

## **Conclusion**

This study has concentrated on analyzing whether risks for polarization in terms of quality of jobs have materialized in Finland. Compared to earlier research settings, our study relies

on an exceptionally long time series and high-quality dataset, while simultaneously looking at the developments in a broad range of job quality measures. Contrary to the expectations laid by the universal theories on increasing disadvantage of lower skilled, the analyses reveal that improvements have occurred for blue-collar workers in terms of autonomy and opportunities for development at work, reducing the gap between social classes – a result which is consistent with the institutional theory’s prediction of a low risk of polarization in coordinated and inclusive Nordic countries (Gallie 2007a). Results are also in line with earlier comparative research pointing towards low class (skill) inequality in job quality in regulated Nordic countries compared to liberal economies reporting higher inequality and polarization based on skill levels (see e.g. Esser and Olsen 2012; Gallie et al. 2007; 2013; Green et al. 2013; Stier 2015). The result is also in line with the argument that especially the lower skilled would benefit from provision of services and the protection provided by institutions. (e.g. Soskice 2005; Mandel 2012)

On the other hand, it seems that institutions, such as trade unions, have not been able to insulate employees from negative trends of work life. Nor were white-collar employees safe from the intensification of work or rising insecurity as some researchers envisaged. Insecurity and time pressures have become common experiences, regardless of the social

class. The results of the growing insecurity among various employee groups across countries resonates with other recent research in the field of precarisation, which has recognized that job insecurity has spread also into the more highly educated segments of the labor force across countries (e.g. Häusermann et al. 2015; Lempiäinen 2015; Solheim and Håkon Leiulfstrud 2015). Consequently, this pattern is not specifically Nordic. Yet several studies have pointed out that job security is still on a higher level in Nordic countries compared to more flexible labour markets (e.g. Gash & Inanc 2013; Stier 2015).

Noteworthy is also the finding on degradation of job quality experienced by upper white-collar men. Earlier research has reported declining trends for the high skilled in UK in terms of training possibilities (Green & al. 2016) as well as job autonomy (Gallie & al. 2004; Green & al. 2016). According to Green & al. (2016) the declining trend could not be accounted for by any of the individual or job characteristics available in the data, result which points towards trends in management culture in explaining these changes.

Looking at the gender gap more in detail, one of our main results is clearly against the assumptions of welfare state paradox: by the 2013 upper white-collar women have attained the same level of job quality as their male counterparts. Consequently, we could conclude

that the hypothesis on the comparative disadvantage of higher skilled women did hold true earlier in 1977 but not in 2013. Thus we do not have reason to believe that the framework Finnish welfare state provides, does not hinder women from accessing and working in high quality jobs. It is noteworthy that whether this hypothesis gains support or not, is also dependent on the time point of the research. Thus, the results also highlight the importance of longitudinal research as well as further (comparative) research to see whether this pattern is universal or Nordic.

However, gender gap persists tightly between the blue and lower white-collar men and women with respect to all measured aspects of job quality: *in general* men have better opportunities for development, influence on their work and on-the-job-training than their female counterparts, which is also in line with VoC theorization on gender inequality (e.g. Estevez-Abe 2005) as well as earlier research on persistent gender gap in job quality (e.g. Gallie & al. 2007). It is possible that the gender gap for instance in work intensification would be explained by occupational segregation as previous research has indicated that time pressures are most prevalent in health care, education and social work as well as in the local government sectors, which are female dominated branches (e.g. Sutela and Lehto 2014). Those sectors have faced cost reduction pressures due to the problems of public

financing, while working conditions have deteriorated, for instance, by not hiring substitutes.

Further, when considering the large gender gap for instance in the lower white-collar group, it should be noted that consists of heterogeneous occupations, part of which could also be defined as highly skilled employees as many held tertiary education (such as nurses and engineers). These differences might be partly due to the research technical issues and problems related to the different classifications. The deep occupational segregation of the Finnish labor markets leads to a setting where we are actually comparing employees in rather different jobs: for instance police men and engineers to nurses and women in various clerical and service jobs. Consequently one possible avenue for future research in inequalities in job quality would be to study the intersection of occupation and gender at the level of jobs (see e.g. Emslie et al. 1999).

What remained beyond the scope of this study is the preferences of women in how they participate in the labor market (see e.g. Hakim 2000) and whether these individual choices enforce the gender gap in job quality. The theories this paper has drawn from aim at explaining the structures in which women make their choices. In other words, it

concentrates on how institutional framework, welfare policies and the actions of employers frame possibilities and achievement for females in the labor market but it does not touch on the effect of women's choices and preferences within education and the labor market and how those choices affect job quality. Support for the explanatory power of institutional theories has been found. For instance, Stier and Yaish (2014) found that the gender gap in job quality would not be due to women's preference and occupational choices but rather the result of discrimination on the demand side. A more complete understanding of the mechanics that create inequalities in the labor market could be gained by combining an analysis of structural conditions with individual preferences and behaviors.

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