

Occupational Gender Segregation and Discrimination in Western Europe

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This study examines the role of labor market discrimination in determining the occupational distributions of men and women in Europe. Using data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), the paper documents the degree of occupational segregation in a sample of three western European countries from different occupational sex segregation regimes, Denmark, Germany and the UK. The paper then presents a simple model of Occupational attainment with gender, education, age, main activity of the employer, and the number of children in the household as predictors. The effects of gender on the probability of working in an occupation, controlling for other personal characteristics, are estimated and compared across categories and across countries. Finally, to determine the role of labor market discrimination in assigning men and women to different occupations the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique is applied to the determinants of the probability of working in an occupation.

Labor market discrimination appears to play the largest role in Germany, though the overall degree of discrimination does not vary substantially across the three countries. The levels of discrimination differ across occupations, however. Thus, it appears that in a country with a substantive commitment to gender equality (Denmark), men and women are on average employed in separate occupational categories, but the differences in the probabilities of working in these occupations are largely due to the differences in personal characteristics or individual preferences, rather than discrimination alone. In the traditional family-centered country (Germany), on the other hand, women and men are treated very differently in the labor market, while the degree of occupational segregation is somewhat lower than in the substantively-egalitarian country (UK).

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