

Understanding the gender pay gap between and within occupations: what is the role of individual job tasks?

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Until today, men and women often work in different occupations and women face persistent disadvantages in the labour market, particularly with respect to wages. Previous research has shown that occupational sex segregation and the gender pay gap are systematically connected as female-dominated occupations yield lower wages, both in Germany and elsewhere. Yet, it is still an open question why a higher share of women in an occupation comes along with lower wage levels. To answer this question, a growing body of literature concentrates on the role of occupational task profiles showing their importance for explaining the gender pay gap and its trend over time. First evidence further shows that gender-specific task profiles also seem to contribute to explaining gender wage differences within occupations.

Our paper aims at combining these two perspectives by asking how individual task profiles contribute to our understanding of the gender pay gap between and within occupations in today's German labour market. Our theoretical considerations are based on the perspectives of skilled biased technological change and the task-based approach, which both discuss the rising demand of certain occupational tasks dimensions and thus their rising remuneration over time. Empirically, we rely on individual job task profiles in the adult study of German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS, SC6), which were implemented in wave 4 of the study. Based on the task-based approach of Autor et al. (2003), five dimensions of general job tasks are covered: analytical, physical, interactive, and routine tasks, as well as autonomy. First, we use an Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition of the gender pay gap based on gender-specific random-effect models. Second, we base the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition on a hybrid model or more precisely a between-within model to differentiate the influence of individual tasks on the gender pay gap between and within occupations.

In line with our theoretical considerations, our results show that men benefit from performing less routine tasks than women and from performing higher levels of autonomy and especially more analytical tasks, while women benefit from performing more interactive tasks and less physical tasks than men do. The same holds true with regard to the gender wage gap within occupations as well as when analyzing only the variance between occupations. In sum, our results suggest that women benefit from being overrepresented in occupations that come along with higher rewarded tasks. However, within these occupations women are (self-)selected in less rewarded tasks.