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STRUCTURAL POSITIONS, HIERARCHIES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY: INSIGHTS FROM A SLOVENIAN RESEARCH ORGANISATION

ABSTRACT

Based on a study of gender equality issues in a research organisation in an Eastern European post-socialist country, the paper argues that the increasing precariousness of academic employment and project-based work lead to workplace dynamics that must be considered in a specific setting. The results of a survey of employees at ZRC SAZU show how one's position within the academic hierarchy and structure, as well as the nature of the work regime, shape employees' opinions. The largest differences in opinion exist between junior female researchers and senior male ones, but there are also relevant differences in the views of women working as research and as administrative staff. The results indicate that an analysis that takes into account the forces of the neoliberal academic market has the potential to illuminate regimes of inequality that are gendered through the relationship between work and social reproduction rather than through identity categories as such.

KEYWORDS: *gender equality; academic structure; intersectionality; precariousness; work-life balance.*

Strukturni položaji, hierarhije in dojemanje enakosti spolov: spoznanja iz slovenske raziskovalne ustanove

IZVLEČEK

Na podlagi študije o enakosti spolov v raziskovalni organizaciji v vzhodnoevropski postsocialistični državi članek nakazuje, da vse večja prekarizacija akademskih

delovnih mest in projektno delo ustvarjata dinamiko na delovnem mestu, ki jo je treba vključiti v analizo v konkretnem okolju. Rezultati raziskave med zaposlenimi na ZRC SAZU, opravljeni na podlagi anketnega vprašalnika, kažejo, da položaj v akademski hierarhiji in strukturi ter vrsta delovnega režima oblikujejo mnenja zaposlenih. Najbolj izrazite razlike v mnenjih se kažejo med raziskovalkami na nižjih pozicijah, ki so najmanj zadovoljne s svojim položajem, in raziskovalci na višjih pozicijah, ki najmanj pogosto prepoznava spolne neenakosti. Raziskava je pokazala tudi pomembne razlike v pogledih med ženskami, ki delajo kot raziskovalke, in tistimi, ki delajo v administraciji. Rezultati kažejo, da analiza ki upošteva sile neoliberalnega akademskega trga, omogoča osvetlitev režimov neenakosti, ki se udejanjajo prek razmerja med delom in družbeno reprodukcijo, in ne prek identitetnih kategorij kot takih.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: enakost spolov; akademska struktura; intersekcionalnost; prekarnost; usklajevanje poklicnega in zasebnega življenja.

1 Introduction¹

Gendered inequalities among people working in academia have become a noted problem, a researched topic, and a target of public policies across Europe. Extensive evidence shows that gendered differences persist and are manifested in a lack of women holding the highest academic titles in certain disciplines (e.g. Holmes et al. 2015; Tiwari et al. 2019) and positions of leadership and decision-making (e.g. Bernard and Cooperdock 2018; Kuhlmann et al. 2017), in the gender pay gap in most countries, and in the division of labour and care work both at home and at work (Cukut Krilić et al. 2019), to name a few areas.

Several factors maintain and reproduce gender-based and structural inequalities in research and higher education institutions, as typical examples of “gendered organisations” (Acker 1990). The gendered division of labour in the private sphere, in which women still conduct a larger share of care and domestic work, remains an important factor, especially in times of crisis, as the 2008 economic crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have confirmed (Gabster et al. 2020; Flaherty 2020). While gender stereotypes and biases have decreased over time, rigid hierarchies in the academic world remain a fertile ground for flourishing practices of exclusion and exploitation, based not only on gender but also on

1. This paper is based on the research done in the framework of the Horizon 2020 project R&I PEERS (Pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations, 2018-2022), funded by the European Commission (grant number 788171).

other overlapping identities and experiences (class, race, social background, ethnicity, migration, age, sexual orientation, etc.). The intersectional approach has thus become influential in the analysis of (and in policy interventions mitigating) gender inequalities and multiple discriminations in academia (Nichols and Stahl 2019) and is in general central to the study of inequality, identity, and power in the field of work and organisations (Rodriguez 2016; Acker 2012; Vallas and Cummins 2014).

1.1 An Intersectional Approach to Gender(ed) Inequalities

The economic and cultural, and indeed ideological, shift towards a neoliberal agenda and structural changes in the ways higher education and research are funded led to the sector being increasingly labelled “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Rhoades 2009) or “the neo-liberal academy” (Ivancheva et al. 2019; Kinman 2014). The progressive decrease in the share of public investment has pushed research institutions into a search for external funding and has brought marketization, business-oriented management models, and a focus on productivity and excellence (and their measurement), all of which increase competition among and within organisations. These changes have increased the precariousness of research and academic jobs, especially for younger and junior staff, with generational and gendered consequences as well (cf. Murgia and Poggio 2019). However, these changes affect people differently, depending on their positions within the complex (and ever more diversifying) structure of the scientific sector, which determines the stability of their positions, their career progress options, their work-related requirements, and the interference in their private lives (Petrović 2021: 46). This structural conditioning interplays with gender and other dimensions of a person’s identity.

While there is a consensus that gender inequality in academia should be examined (and tackled) in connection with other types of social inequalities, there are differences in both how the problem is conceptually grasped and how it is methodologically approached (Vallas and Cummins 2014: 239–240).

On a conceptual level stemming from the tradition of Western liberal feminism, the concept of “gender equality” (in academia) stands for a demand for equal opportunities for women and men to attain and progress in an academic profession (Ely and Meyerson 2000). Due to the increasing relevance of the intersectional approach, this demand has spread to ethnic, social, and other minorities and is based in the idea of social justice and equity (e.g. David 2004). Within this framework, analytic attention turns towards individuals and groups that are subject to mechanisms of inclusion in and exclusion from privileged academic positions.

The other camp of feminism (and indeed political theory), stemming from a Marxist analysis, approaches the concept of equality in relation to social reproduction (cf. Fraser 2016), examining how it influences the distribution of power in society. In the context of the academic field, Bourdieu (1984, 1993) has translated the notion of power as economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital; and due to their uneven distribution, academic institutions are deeply hierarchical structures. Here, analytic attention turns towards modes of work and production in the academic field and how they keep power/capital from being equally available to and attainable for everybody.

This line of thought is less prominent in scholarship on issues relating to gender equality in academia (cf. Clavero and Galligan 2021) and policy interventions of “gender mainstreaming” (Çağlar 2013) within the European policy framework (Van Eerdewijk and Davis 2013). However, we argue that analysis that takes into account the modes of production, in particular in the academic setting, has the potential to illuminate regimes of inequality that are gendered through the relation between work and social reproduction, rather than through identity categories as such.

The majority of intersectional studies focus on subjectivities and explore how intersections of identity categories lead to inequalities experienced by individuals and groups (Rodriguez et al. 2016). The intersectional approach inherently navigates around the pitfall of taking identity categories as given and struggles to grasp how societal relations create and reproduce identity categories (Vallas and Cummins 2014). A comprehensive literature review in this field pointed out that intersectional research does not pay enough attention to how different subjectivities interplay with systemic processes and structures, institutional arrangements, and micro-level encounters (Rodriguez et al. 2016: 204; also Choo and Ferree 2010).

We support this invitation to shift the research focus towards a deeper understanding of how a particular structural and institutional context (that creates the working environment of a particular academic organisation) is conducive to creating inequality regimes (Acker 2006). Starting from a modest and pragmatic survey design aimed at detecting gendered inequalities in particular research organisation, we realised the limitations of our own study, which did not take into account the deeper structural and relational aspects of our case. Our study provides enough indication to suggest that the increasing precariousness of academic employment and project-based work is creating workplace dynamics and status hierarchies that are relevant to understanding what is fair and equal in academia and that these need to be taken into account within a specific setting. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to open avenues for further research that have been underexplored, especially in the setting of a post-socialist country.

In the following, we first present the methodology of the survey we conducted among the employees at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and then outline our most important findings. First, we present results showing typical gender(ed) inequalities between senior male researchers and junior female ones. We then focus on how gender and academic seniority intersect to produce different views on career advancement issues. Finally, we discuss the different views of women researchers and administrators as a reflection of the different structural positions they find themselves in and the different relationships between work and social reproduction they experience. In conclusion, we outline promising avenues for further research.

2 Methodology of the Research

2.1 Study Setting

This study was executed as part of designing the gender equality plan (GEP) for the ZRC SAZU – one of Slovenia’s largest research organisations active predominantly in the fields of humanities and social sciences – within the European Union’s Horizon 2020 project “Pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organisations” (R&I PEERS). The adoption and implementation of GEPs has been one of the ways to tackle gender asymmetries in academic organisations and is highly recommended by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE 2016), Athena SWAN (Scientific Women’s Academic Network), the Charter for Women in Science in the United Kingdom (Ovseiko et al. 2017), and many gender equality experts (cf. Holzinger et al. 2018). The European Commission has supported the creation of gender equality plans for research organisations with targeted funding (cf. Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace 2017; Clavero and Galligan 2021) and by making GEP an eligibility criterion for funding under the framework programme Horizon Europe, starting with application calls made in 2022. This means that all public institutions applying for such funding need to have a gender equality plan (cf. Mihajlović Trbovc 2021). In Slovenia, as in many other Eastern European post-socialist countries, the practice of implementing GEPs is quite new; in February 2019, ZRC SAZU was the first academic organisation in the country to adopt it (Mihajlović Trbovc 2023).

Gender experts advise (cf. EIGE 2016) that, to create a gender equality plan, a research or higher education institution should first evaluate its present state of gender equality indicators (e.g. gender ratio among staff, in higher positions, and in decision-making bodies) and prevalent institutional culture patterns, locate problems, and recognise needs for change. One of the usual steps in this process is for the organisation in question to create a survey and distribute it among its

employees, which should help detect their lived working experience and needs, thus providing input for creating adequate measures that fit the specificities of that particular institution. Following this logic, the team of the R&I PEERS project at the ZRC SAZU created such a survey for the needs of the R&I PEERS project, which was then translated and distributed also to seven piloting partner organisations. It was conducted with the aim of gathering employee opinions about the state of gender equality in these organisations and of evaluating which of the suggested mitigation measures would be adequate. Therefore, the survey covered perceptions of gender (in)equality in the organisation and specifically in decision-making processes, in career advancement, in practices of science outreach, and in employment practices, as well as opinions on work-life balance measures and the integration of the gender dimension in research and curricula. When devising the questionnaire and measurement scales, the project team modified and simplified questions from a much more comprehensive survey, the British Athena Survey of Science, Engineering and Technology (ASSET, c.f. Aldercotte 2017).

There are a growing number of studies that used surveys of small or large academic populations to examine the work experience and perceptions among academic staff and to compare them across gender and other demographic descriptors and scientific disciplines. Recurrent findings in many such surveys indicate that women experience academic working culture differently from men and usually feel (and are) disadvantaged in it (e.g. Aldercotte 2017; García-González et al. 2019; Drew and Marshall 2021; Ovseiko et al. 2019; Popp et al. 2019; Probert 2005; and in Slovenia: Jogan 1998; Mladenić 2006; Ule 2012, 2013; Flander et al. 2020). However, most of these surveys focus on academics and, with rare exceptions (e.g. Ovseiko et al. 2019), do not include administrative staff.

The novelty of the survey performed in the framework of the R&I PEERS project was that it was distributed to research staff and faculty, but also to administration and technical staff. By including this variable in the questionnaire, we were trying to find out which GEP measures would be suitable for which group of employees and wanted to design GEP strategies that will address the needs of as diverse a population of employees as possible. We were following the logic that informed interventions into academic structures require "differentiating between academics and other types of university employees whose terms and conditions differ fundamentally" (Kinman 2014: 232). In our survey, we also wanted to take into consideration the views of administrative staff, since their involvement is indispensable for implementing a gender equality plan. Such plans usually contain some changes in institutional procedures and practices, the collection of data, and the monitoring of indicators, all of which demands the involvement

of the administrative staff. While gender equality plans predominantly aim at correcting gender asymmetries among researchers and/or teaching staff, they usually depend on the (additional) work of the administrative departments.

While our choice to include administrative staff in the survey had pragmatic reasons, this resulted in richer raw material that enabled us to correlate data on gender, seniority, and type of work. This data gave us a glimpse into how different modes of work create different relations between one's professional work and one's involvement in social reproduction. Our analysis showed that this relation is to a large extent conditioned by the structural setting (such as, different modes of labour, the stability of the work contract, the norms of career progress), almost as much as it is conditioned by hierarchical gender order (Connell 1987).

The study focusing on one academic organisation is informative for several reasons. As a research centre covering predominantly fields of the humanities and social sciences, ZRC SAZU is representative of the academic organisations in which women constitute the majority of the staff (57.4%, see Table 1).² Specificities of such a nominally "feminised" work environment are under-researched, while the predominant focus of the studies (that take gender equality in academia as their theme) is on the disciplines in which women are obviously underrepresented. Therefore, our case is a good place for a nuanced examination of relations between different aspects of work in an academic institution and the different structural positions (different) women are subjected to, in both private and professional life.

Furthermore, our study is situated in a context that is broadly representative of post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Existing since 1981, ZRC SAZU (as well as its employees) has experienced a significant shift from the stable public funding of research activities that characterised the socialist period to increased dependence on competitive and unstable funding schemes provided by the state, international and EU programmes, and the market. These structural changes, and their ramifications for the nature of academic work and the work environment, have been underresearched particularly in connection with gender(ed) inequalities in academia.

Finally, the categories of race and class (and their intersection with gender) function differently in this specific socio-historical setting than in the original setting

2. For comparison, on the national level, women constitute 62.5% of doctoral graduates in the social sciences, journalism, and information and 62.2% in the arts and humanities, both figures being somewhat higher (approximately 7 percentage points) than the EU average (European Commission 2021: 36), while the overall share of women researchers in Slovenia is around the EU average (32.3%, *ibid*: 97).

from which intersectionality theory emerged (Black feminism in the United States), and also differently than in the Western European countries where the intersectional approach is commonly used. Therefore, our study is an attempt to conduct an analysis with the intersectional approach in mind, without using identity categories as such.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This article draws from two sets of data. First, we analysed the results of the survey conducted at ZRC SAZU in July 2018, discussing differences in opinions and perceptions among different groups of employees, dividing them by gender, whether they are research or administrative staff, and their level of seniority within the academic hierarchy. Second, we analysed the transcript of the workshop conducted in Ljubljana in October 2019 in the framework of the R&I PEERS project that brought together research and administrative staff from several research organisations, thus offering an additional and enriched perspective on the dynamics between research and administrative staff.

The survey data are representative of the whole organisation since the response rate was relatively high – 180 persons out of 340 employees (52.9%) completed the online form – and the sample of respondents largely reflects the distribution of the employees' groups in the overall population (see Table 1). Our division of the sample into groups of employees is based on the demographic data that respondents provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. The respondents self-defined as either research/teaching or administrative/support staff, junior [*začetniška/niša pozicija*] or senior [*uveljavljena/višja pozicija*], and by gender: female, male, or other [*drugo*]. Since only two individuals declared as "other", we did not include them in the survey analysis, so the analysed sample encompasses 178 persons. We opted for respondents to self-declare whether their position was junior or senior, rather than classifying them according to their academic or job title, because we believe that this is a matter of symbolic power rather than the title of a position per se.³ Therefore, we cannot accurately establish the representativeness of the survey sample in regard to the seniority

3. The largest group in the academic staff at ZRC SAZU has the title Research Associate [*znanstveni sodelavec_ka*], which is in the middle of the academic hierarchy in the Slovene system of academic titles. It seems that some researchers classify this position as junior, while for others it is a senior position. We do not consider this to be a methodological flaw, but rather a reflection of the fact that the context of a particular working environment (e.g. institute/department) and the actual attainment of power define whether one would be (self-)perceived as a "senior" much more than an official academic title would.

of academic staff, but this group of employees had a higher response rate than administrative staff (see Table 1). Therefore, there is a margin of nonresponse bias, but it is low.

Table 1: Representativeness of the survey respondent sample at the ZRC SAZU.

Share of	ZRC SAZU		Survey respondent sample		Response rate
	number	percentage	number	percentage	
Female research staff	151	44.4%	86	48.3%	57%
Male research staff	112	32.9%	63	35.4%	56.3%
Female administrative staff	53	15.6%	19	10.7%	35.8%
Male administrative staff	24	7.1%	10	5.6%	41.7%
Overall	340	100%	178	100%	

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

The data were analysed using the SPSS software, version 25. We employed bivariate statistical analysis based on the assumption that there could be significant differences⁴ in opinions among the six clusters of respondents: male senior research staff, male junior research staff, female senior research staff, female junior research staff, male administrative staff, and female administrative staff. In the statistical analysis, we divided administrative staff only by gender, not by seniority, because doing both did not produce groups that would be statistically significant. In other words, the group of men working in administration who participated in the survey was too small (n=10) for it to be meaningful to divide them into senior and junior groups and analyse them as such.

The survey comprised 34 closed-ended multiple-choice questions and five optional open-ended questions. Therefore, we supplement the statistical analysis of the survey results with a content analysis of the open-ended questions, which collected 189 substantial comments.⁵ This means that an average of 21% of the respondents answered each of the open-ended questions, which is a high response rate for a non-obligatory question.

As this article focuses on differences in opinions between administrative and research staff, we supplemented the survey results with another set of data: transcripts of the focus group-like discussion that took place as part of the R&I PEERS

4. In statistical analysis, relevant discrepancies between the values are considered to be below 0.05, which assures that there is a statistically significant difference in opinions between the observed groups (Moore et al. 2013).

5. We excluded answers such as "I have nothing to add."

project workshop that was held on 16 October 2019, involving five administrative and seven academic/research staff from seven institutions from Slovenia and one from Serbia; the discussion was in English.⁶ The workshop followed the methodology called Structured Democratic Dialogue Process (SDDP, c.f. Laouris and Michaelides 2018), which starts with a “triggering question” to which participants provided answers, i.e. ideas for a solution to the common problem. The triggering question for this particular workshop was: “What measures/actions (administrative, organisational culture-related, financial, legal...) should be taken to make Gender Equality Plan implementation beneficial for all employees in research organisations?” In the course of several rounds, participants expressed various opinions and formulated 29 ideas, which they then compared and correlated, guided by the workshop leader and with the use of the software specifically designed for SDDP (c.f. Laouris and Michaelides 2018). This workshop had some basic features of a focus-group method: selected participants, a specific question, and a moderated discussion in which each participant is invited to present an opinion. We did not apply a particular method of analysis for the transcript, but rather quote in this paper opinions that corresponded to open-ended questions in the survey.

3 Research Findings: How (Limited) Intersectionality and an Analysis of Structure Capture Social Reproduction

While the overall opinion of the employees on all topics covered by the survey is quite positive about the level of gender equality at the ZRC SAZU, women noted gender disparity and deprivation at a higher rate or they agreed less with statements claiming the existence of equality within the institution. When asked if one gender is more advantaged, a majority of all respondents claimed there were no significant differences between genders, but when differences were noted, they were more often to the advantage of men. This is in congruence with survey results from academic institutions abroad, where female employees in general perceive more gender bias than males do (García-González et al. 2019; Drew and Marshall 2021; Ovseiko et al. 2019; Popp et al. 2019; Probert 2005). Our study is also congruent with previous studies done in Slovenia. A survey of the PhD holders of both genders showed differences in the attainment of positions of power, influence, prestige, reputation, and decision-making – statistically more men

6. The workshop was led and moderated by one of the co-authors of this article, who does not speak local languages.

than women held all of these positions and reached them in a shorter time than their male peers (Ule 2012). The most recent survey of academic staff in Slovenia showed that male staff members are more satisfied with their employment, work, and academic environment than female staff is (Flander et al. 2020: 5).

Therefore, we expected and we did find a similar typical binary cleavage between men and women in perceptions relating to gender equality issues: in all but two questions (out of 34), gender was a statistically relevant variable. In addition, we noted significant differences in opinions between senior and junior research staff, as well. While gender is more relevant than seniority, the starkest differences in opinion are between senior male and junior female researchers, as we discuss further in detail. Finally, there is a relevant difference between the working experiences of women in research and women in administration, especially regarding certain aspects of balancing job-related demands and care work in private life.

3.1 Typical Gender(ed) Inequalities in Academia: Differences in Views Between Senior Male Researchers and Junior Female Ones

Our data shows that senior male researchers tend to be the most satisfied with the status quo and are the least prone to recognise that women are disadvantaged in achieving their career ambitions and potentials. As noted above, employees of the ZRC SAZU generally share positive opinions about the state of gender equality in their institution. The results of bivariate statistical analysis show that a large majority of the employees find that men and women are treated equally at their institute or department (79.2% agree or completely agree), that they are equally able to develop their potentials (75.5% agree or completely agree), and have equal access to and influence in decision-making bodies (71.9% agree or completely agree) and opportunities for career advancement (63.4% agree or completely agree). However, such opinions are significantly more prevalent among senior male research staff than among female staff members, especially those in junior positions. For instance, almost all (94.9%) senior male researchers agree (or completely agree) with the statement that "men and women are treated equally in the ZRC SAZU", while junior female researchers share that opinion at a significantly lower rate (73.2% agree or completely agree) (see Table 2). The largest difference in opinions is precisely between these two groups: while 64.1% of senior male researchers completely agree, only 19.5% of junior female researchers are of the same opinion.

Table 2: Agreement with the statement: “In general, men and women are treated equally in the ZRC SAZU, that is, in my department/institute.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Over-all	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Completely disagree	f %	0 0	1 5.3	1 2.6	0 0	0 0	2 4.9	4 2.2	34.815	0.003
Disagree	f %	1 10	4 21.1	1 2.6	2 8.3	10 22.2	7 17.1	25 14		
No opinion	f %	2 20	1 5.3	0 0	1 4.2	2 4.4	2 4.9	8 4.5		
Agree	f %	3 30	10 52.6	12 30.8	10 41.7	19 42.2	22 53.7	76 42.7		
Completely agree	f %	4 40	3 15.8	25 64.1	11 45.8	14 31.1	8 19.5	65 36.5		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

Similarly, male researchers agree (or completely agree) with the statement that “women and men are equally able to develop their career potentials” at an extremely high rate (92.3% of seniors and 95.9% of juniors). On the other hand, female researchers agree with the same proposition at a significantly lower rate (66.7% of seniors and 61% of juniors).

These data seem to show a smaller gender gap than in some foreign surveys. For instance, the ASSET survey of individuals working in STEMM⁷ academia conducted in the United Kingdom in 2016 found that three quarters of the women in the sample (75.7%) thought that it was easier for a man to get a senior post in their department, while almost half of the men (47.3%) found it to be the same for women and men (Aldercotte 2017: 24). This difference might be explained by the fact that the ASSET survey examined organisations in STEMM fields, while the ZRC SAZU is predominantly conducting research in the humanities and social sciences, which are in general more “feminised” disciplines.

To understand better what the statistical results of our survey mean, we turned to the open-ended questions. In the answers to the question “Describe other reasons you find relevant for the disadvantaged position of women in your institute/department”, some of the survey respondents said that career breaks due to maternity leave women hindered in the current system of research evaluation

7. STEMM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine.

and career progress: “Maternity leave has a huge impact, as it puts women’s careers on hold for more than a year, while our male colleagues continue their research and publishing and advance their careers. In reality, this frozen status for women is actually a regression in their careers” (221-FRS);⁸ “Project-based work and financing, and consequently an uncertain future, do not go well with longer career breaks due to parental leaves. This is one of the biggest problems” (79-FRS). Some of the respondents point to “general social climate, stereotypes, and existing structures that still treat women as unequal to men, which inevitably also impacts relations within ZRC SAZU” (284-FRS). Others emphasize structural inequalities as more relevant than gender-based ones: “Disadvantages of young researchers are a serious problem, and the relationship of senior researchers to those at early career stages, be it men or women” (435-FRJ). Some respondents insist that “the system provides absolute equality in rights [*popolno enakopravnost*]” and explain that “there are fewer women in high positions because they restrict themselves in making career-related decisions [*ker se same prikrajšajo, ko sprejemajo odločitve o karieri*]” (308-FRS). Invariably, whether this statement is a stereotype-driven or self-fulfilling prophecy, it reveals ambiguities in understanding the very notion of equality.

We noted this gradual differentiation of opinions along the continuum – senior male – junior male – senior female – junior female – in answers to many questions in our survey (see also Table 2, Table 3, Table 5). Slightly more than a half of the responses (18 out of 34, that is 52.9%) in our survey showed this exact pattern. For instance, when respondents were asked whether women have influence and roles equal to that of their male peers in decision-making bodies, there is a tendency in the following direction: the higher the position of male researchers, the more they agree with this view; and the lower the position of women, the less they agree (see Table 3).

8. When quoting respondents, we refer to their serial numbers in the survey and demographic data. The meanings of the acronyms used throughout the text: FRS (female, researcher, senior); FRJ (female, researcher, junior); MRS (male, researcher, senior); MRJ (male researcher, junior); FAS (female, administrative, senior); FAJ (female, administrative, junior). The same acronyms (but without the serial number) are also used when quoting statements of the workshop participants.

Table 3: Agreement with the statement: “Women have an equal influence and role in decision-making bodies as their male peers.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Overall	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Completely disagree	f %	0 0	1 5.3	1 2.6	0 0	3 6.7	0 0	5 2.8	40.111	0.001
Disagree	f %	0 0	4 21.1	3 7.7	0 0	8 17.8	6 14.6	21 11.8		
No opinion	f %	2 20	2 10.5	0 0	5 20.8	5 11.1	10 24.4	24 13.5		
Agree	f %	2 20	10 52.6	14 35.9	9 37.5	16 35.6	18 43.9	69 38.8		
Completely agree	f %	6 60	2 10.5	21 53.8	10 41.7	13 28.9	7 17.1	59 33.1		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

3.2 Gender and Academic Seniority Intersect to Produce Different Views on the Issues Relating to Career Progress

The starkest contrast in opinions between senior male and junior female researchers was on the issue whether men and women have equal opportunities for career advancement at the ZRC SAZU. An exceptionally large majority (92.3%) of senior male researchers agree or completely agree that equal opportunities exist, while only 29.3% of junior female researchers would concur (see Table 4).

There was a similar finding in the study of the medical and social sciences staff at the University of Oxford in 2014: “the highest levels of gender disparity in the perceptions of the university culture... were on gender equity and self-efficacy in career advancement” (Ovseiko et al. 2019: 183), the latter meaning confidence in one’s “ability to progress in career and overcome barriers to advancement” (ibid.: 170). For a comparison, a survey of junior female teaching staff working in two of the largest public universities in Slovenia in the mid-1990s found that the biggest obstacles to scientific advancement for female academics are family caring duties, which they carry out to a significantly greater extent than their male partners (Jogan 1998: 997-999).

Table 4: Agreement with the statement: “Men and women have equal opportunities for career advancement.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Over- all	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Completely disagree	f %	0 0	0 0	2 5.1	0 0	1 2.2	2 4.9	5 2.8	60,773	0.000
Disagree	f %	1 10	5 26.3	1 2.6	2 8.3	15 33.3	16 39	40 22.5		
No opinion	f %	1 10	1 5.3	0 0	5 20.8	2 4.4	11 26.8	20 11.2		
Agree	f %	2 20	10 52.6	15 38.5	8 33.3	17 37.8	7 17.1	59 33.1		
Completely agree	f %	6 60	3 15.8	21 53.8	9 37.5	10 22.2	5 12.2	54 30.3		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

In the answers to the open-ended questions “Describe additional measures that could improve career prospects, particularly for women” and “Please suggest other changes that would improve employment practices at your department/institute, particularly for women”, it is notable that both junior and senior female researchers had more ideas for improvements than their male peers. They suggest necessary measures and changes such as flexible working hours and the availability of telework (66-FRS; 223-FRJ), reducing the influence of informal ties and support among male colleagues (76-FRJ, 106-FRJ), improving communication patterns at some institutes (156-FRS), systematic career counselling (431-FRJ), etc. Male researchers in senior positions, on the other hand, typically did not see any need for changes or additional measures. For example, one of them stated that “at our institute there is no need for any improvement, particularly not for women. At well-organised institutes there is no need to segregate according to gender, because it is taken for granted that employees will have special needs at some stage of their career because of their gender, and the rest of the institute has to accommodate to these changing needs” (73-MRS); another male researcher in a senior position (338-MRS) is against “special treatment of anyone based on her or his gender” and sees it as discrimination.

This data illustrates that not only gender, but also one’s position within the academic hierarchy influences an individual’s opinions and the way they experience

the work environment. On the one hand, this might indicate a generational shift in opinions among male researchers – that is junior, and thus generally younger male researchers are more sensitive in recognizing gendered differences and disparities in their work environment. On the other hand, junior male researchers are more often than their senior peers in precarious work positions, which might make them more prone to recognise structural inequalities. This is also visible in the descriptive answers to open-ended questions, where male researchers in junior position support measures that would facilitate the reconciliation of work and private life for both genders (suggesting e.g. “additional vacation days for young parents”, 188–MRJ), but also point to structural inequalities that make early-career researchers’ positions precarious and difficult to maintain and advance, particularly if they have family duties: for example, one male researcher in a junior position argued that all researchers would profit from greater predictability of career paths and stabler employment, as this would improve their mental health and reduce the stress that is transferred from the workplace to private life (241–MRJ). In contrast to such views, male researchers in senior positions often neglect the inequalities based on gender, as described above, while some of them even “blame” female researchers for their own disadvantaged position by explaining it with “stupidity, incapability and low self-esteem of a female individual” (73–MRS) or with “an archaic belief that women must be recognized in academia regardless of their actual value” (100–MRS).

3.3 Structural Positions and Social Reproduction: Differences in Views Among Women Working as Research and as Administrative Staff

Among ZRC SAZU employees, there is a clear discrepancy in views among gender groups on many issues, and this is true for both research and administrative staff. Nevertheless, the survey shows that there are certain differences in perceptions among women working as research staff and those in administration, especially in relation to the challenges of balancing work and private life. When offered the proposition that the ZRC SAZU provides satisfactory services helping to balance professional work and private life, women working in administration agreed (or completely agreed) at a significantly higher rate (73.7%) than their female research colleagues (juniors and seniors combined: 58.1%) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Agreement with the statement: “In general, ZRC SAZU provides satisfactory services helping to balance professional work and private life.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Overall	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Completely disagree	f %	0 0	0 0	1 2.6	0 0	0 0	1 2.4	2 1.1	23.072	0.197
Disagree	f %	0 0	1 5.3	3 7.7	0 0	10 22.2	7 17.1	21 11.8		
No opinion	f %	3 30	4 21.1	4 10.3	5 20.8	6 13.3	12 29.3	34 19.1		
Agree	f %	5 50	11 57.9	24 61.5	13 54.2	23 51.1	14 34.1	90 50.6		
Completely agree	f %	2 20	3 15.8	7 17.9	6 25	6 13.3	7 17.1	31 17.4		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

Similarly, when asked whether private life and care work contribute to their (presumed) disadvantage in fulfilling their career ambitions/potentials, women working as researchers found this to be relevant (or somewhat relevant) at a significantly higher rate (67.5%) than women working as administrators (42.1%) (see Table 6). Asked about additional measures that could contribute to improving opportunities for career advancement, female administrative staff mainly provided rather general suggestions, such as the use of quotas (370-FA), obligatory use of part of paternal leave by the partners of employed women (115-FA), and in connection with the reconciliation of work and private life, acquiring certification as a family-friendly company, trainings for decision makers, etc. (268-FA). In contrast, answers from the female researchers gave insight into a variety of very concrete challenges faced by women trying to navigate academic career advancement and caring duties in private life: how to meet the criteria of academic evaluation when on maternity leave and how these criteria should be transformed to accommodate women (243-FRS; 242-FRJ; 290-FRS; 334-FRJ; 360-FRJ); the pros and cons of flexible working hours and working from home (66-FRS; 223-FRJ; 246-FRJ; 409-FRS); and the male image of a scientist who is dedicated solely to his work that cannot accommodate women (283-FRJ). Rather than giving straightforward recommendations, answers from female

researchers of both generations revealed inner contradictions and entrapments of their professional position.

Table 6: Agreement with the answer “Private life and care work for their families” to the multiple-choice question “If women are disadvantaged in fulfilling their career ambitions/potentials, which of the following reasons are relevant contributing factors.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Overall	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Not an issue in my department/institute	f %	4 40	3 15.8	14 35.9	9 37.5	11 24.4	6 14.6	47 26.4	40.063	0.002
Irrelevant	f %	3 30	3 15.8	2 5.1	2 8.3	1 2.2	2 4.9	13 7.3		
Mostly irrelevant	f %	1 10	5 26.3	4 10.3	5 20.8	5 11.1	3 7.3	23 12.9		
Somewhat relevant	f %	2 20	2 10.5	14 35.9	7 29.2	11 24.4	14 34.1	50 28.1		
Relevant	f %	0 0.0	6 31.6	5 12.8	1 4.2	17 37.8	16 39.0	45 25.3		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

It is no wonder why work-life balance is a bigger challenge for women in research than for those in administration. Administrative work is mostly confined to the office and an eight-hour working day. While it is not flexible, the work shift generally ends in the office and the employee does not “take work home”. On the other hand, research work is usually much more flexible, often allowing working from home, and is not confined to working hours, which turns out to be a double-edged sword: work never stops and the researcher’s home becomes an office (Currie and Eveline 2011; Kinman 2014: 229; Petrović 2017). In addition, scholarly work is subject to constant periodical evaluations, and career progress depends on highly demanding results (peer-reviewed publications, project leadership, mentorship, etc.), including shorter and longer travels abroad. Answering open-ended questions, many female researchers pointed out how hard it is to fulfil the requirement of a one-month uninterrupted stay abroad as a requirement for attaining higher research positions, especially if one is a mother

with young children (337-FRS; 345-FRJ). As one of them pointed out, “In theory it might be possible, in practice I do not know personally any woman who did that” (221-FRS). In comparison, a study found that 25% of female PhD holders in Slovenia were not able to go to postdoc abroad due to family duties, while only 8% of male peers shared the same experience (Ule 2012: 636).

This feature of academic work explains why financial support for family-related needs in case of longer stays abroad (e.g. schooling expense, financial support for the spouse) is significantly more important to female researchers (at a rate of 86.0%) than to female administrators (at rate of 68.4%), who also have no opinion about this at a higher rate (31.6%) (see Table 7). This is another of several questions for which gender difference was not crucial when clustering answers, meaning that whether the answer was given by administrative or research staff was more relevant than their gender.

Table 7: Agreement with the answer “Financial support for family-related needs in case of longer stays abroad (e.g. schooling expense, financial support for spouse)” to the multiple-choice question “In my opinion, career advancement opportunities could be improved with the following measures.”

		M adm. staff	F adm. staff	M res. senior	M res. junior	F res. senior	F res. junior	Over- all	Fisher's exact test	sig.
Not an issue in my department/ institute	f %	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	19.221	0.143
Irrelevant	f %	1 10	0 0	2 5.1	1 4.2	2 4.4	2 4.9	8 4.5		
Mostly irrele- vant	f %	5 50	6 31.6	10 25.6	4 16.7	4 8.9	4 9.8	33 18.5		
Somewhat relevant	f %	1 10	7 36.8	9 23.1	7 29.2	16 35.6	10 24.4	50 28.1		
Relevant	f %	3 30	6 31.6	18 46.2	12 50.0	23 51.1	25 61	87 48.9		
n=	f %	10 100	19 100	39 100	24 100	45 100	41 100	178 100		

Source: Černič Istenič et al. 2018.

Bearing in mind the structural problems of scientific financing, which are leading to precariousness in academic and research jobs in Slovenia (Hofman 2017; Fakin Bajec and Sitar 2017) as well abroad (Ivancheva et al. 2019; Murgija

and Poggio 2019), the stability and type of employment seem to influence individuals' perceptions of their work environment. Though administrative staff members are nominally part of the sector, their job positions are not directly subject to the rules of the neo-liberal research market, because they are usually not project-bound, but stable, thereby providing continuous income and a permanent employment contract. While in their open-ended questions both administrators and researchers mentioned a lack of stable funding as a structural problem, this problem clearly creates more practical difficulties for academics. So-called "project work" generates additional workload (administrative and management tasks) for researchers, while their research-related tasks still need to be done. As one of the female senior researchers pointed out in our survey, "The majority of researchers works on several projects at the same time, while each of these projects demands a lot of legwork with bureaucracy [uradovanje], reports, meetings. Since this amount of work exceeds an eight-hour working day, a lot of this work is done in 'spare time', meaning the time that should be dedicated to private life" (243-FRS). Moreover, scholarly work, organised predominantly in externally funded projects, often requires a scholar to "jump" from one research topic to the next, hindering meaningful continuity and development of the research process and one's research agenda, thus affecting the quality of academic output, all of which are relevant factors in academic career development.

Women working as research staff and those working in administration thus operate in profoundly different work regimes and face different sets of challenges in their working environments. This difference in experiencing what constitutes "work" may often diminish what is usually understood as "women's solidarity". This may also explain the dissonance in implementing gender equality measures at research and academic organisations that we have noted in our work: although the majority of the administrative staff that is supposed to implement these measures is female, they personally experience gendered inequalities to a lesser extent and would not directly profit from gender equality measures that usually target academics. In addition, in practice, the execution of a gender equality plan at an institution increases the workload for the administrative staff. Sharing views and experiences between research and administration staff is thus critically important for facilitating the implementation of gender equality measures in research organisations, but also for designing GEPs to respond to the needs of a diverse group of employees. Participants in the R&I PEERS project workshop in October 2019 also expressed this need. As one of them pointed out, "When we compare a researcher and an administrator, they should both have opportunities for personal development. [In order] to understand each other, maybe they should know more about each other's work, daily routines,

and obligations; if we would understand each other better, we would respect each other more, and [the cooperation] would be much easier" (FAS); another similarly stressed, "I am in administration and I don't know what kind of work a researcher is doing, [I interact with them] only when he or she needs something or when there is a problem, only then I get to know about [their work]. So, if I as an administrator can see more of the work [done] by the researchers, maybe there would be more respect and fewer problems" (FAJ). A similar point was raised in the study of the staff of Oxford University working in medical and social sciences. Although the study did not analyse administrative staff members as a specific statistical group, their opinions came up in the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions, where "many administrative... and support staff felt division between themselves and academics", and female administrative staff in particular "were more likely to report not feeling valued by academics" (Ovseiko et al. 2019: 180). Therefore, fostering meaningful communication and mutual respect between administrative and academic staff needs to be a first step in creating GEP, even when it primarily aims at transforming the work environment for academics of different genders.

4 Conclusion

Our research showed that academia has a persistent masculine habitus in which senior male researchers tend to be the most blind to gender inequalities, while junior female researchers see them most often. In early career stages, when work accomplishments are crucially important for securing academic progress and job stability, female academics are usually simultaneously bearing the demanding burden of care and family duties.

Furthermore, we found that work regimes, stability, and the type of employment also influence perceptions of gender (in)equalities. Junior researchers who more often occupy precarious work positions – short-term contracts and/or unstable employment that depends on project funding – are more prone to recognise structural inequalities than their senior colleagues are. Those who are more directly subjected to the rules of the neo-liberal academic market (e.g. continuous fundraising for salary) and to increasingly severe processes of academic evaluation experience harsher obstacles to balancing private and professional life, since many work-related tasks are being "outsourced" into the private sphere and the part of the day that is supposed to be dedicated to relaxation and leisure.

Our research indicates that the analysis of inequalities in the academic field could profit from taking into account specific modes of production in the particular

setting (e.g. less-stable and project-based funding, and the precariousness of job positions) and how they relate to social reproduction. We recommend further research to explore the structural positions individuals take within a particular organisation and their engagement in social reproduction as a promising avenue for finding gendered inequalities, thus going beyond identity categories.

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