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## RESEARCH ARTICLE | SPECIAL ISSUE: WOMEN'S STUDIES

# Investigating Female Students' Vision of Iranian Labor Market

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**Abstract:** Some researches in the domain of women's employment show that gender is a significant factor in the professional position i.e. gender makes women less likely to achieve lucrative and high-paying jobs compared to their men folks. However, in many countries, increasing women's education and skills are key indicators of their growing participation in the labor market. In Iran, despite a decline in women's illiteracy and spectacular rise in their presence at universities, even in some traditionally masculine fields, the unemployment rate of educated women is higher than those of men. This study is aimed at understanding the female students' opinions about the gap between higher education and their career prospects. For that purpose, a qualitative research in four government universities from four regions of Iran has been conducted. The data of the study shows that despite their growing number in these universities, most female students are worried about their professional future. In nutshell, it can be said that the massification of higher education has not resulted into more access of girls to the labor market, and there is much disappointment among them of finding a suitable job after graduating from universities.

**Keywords:** Female Students; Professional Prospect; Educated Women Unemployment.

## Introduction

Over the past four decades, the number of female students around the world has grown twice as fast as the number of male students. Still, ever-increasing access to higher education for women has not always accompanied with their career prospects (UNESCO, 2012: 57).

Statistics show that Iranian women in the 2016-2017 academic years made up 52% of the total number of students in higher governmental education institutions (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2016-2017). The results of a labor force survey in 2013 show that the unemployment rate

among graduate women or those still studying is much higher than the general unemployment rate for women. Based on the same data, although the general unemployment rate for women is 19.8% against 8.6% for men, this rate is 31.3% among women graduates and students than 12.9% for their male counterparts (Statistical Center of Iran, 2013).

The study of women presence in higher education in Iran shows that they have gradually been able to change inequality in higher education in their favor. The results of this study show that girls have gradually increased their presence even in the fields that are traditionally called male-centric, hence; women formed 30% of those admitted to technical-engineering fields in 2012-2013. Also, the study of the presence of women in higher education shows that in the 1990s and 2000s, they accounted for a large part of undergraduate students while a small minority in higher education, but their presence has enormously increased at post-graduate and doctorate levels over the past several years that show the narrowing gender gap in this domain. What poses a serious challenge to this situation is still the very minimal presence of women in labor market, a challenge that not only frustrates educated women, but causes the waste of huge national resources.

In this article, we intend to understand the view of female students about the gap between women's education and employment. Here we seek to review the role of universities from the perspective of female students in creating such a gap. This article has been compiled with the help of the data of a qualitative research on the problems of female students in Iranian

universities, which had been conducted between August 2016 and June 2017.

### Research Method and Tool

This study uses statistical data to gain an understanding of the trend of the women presence in universities in last decades. Then, by reviewing the statistics of women's presence in labor market, an understanding of the gap between education and employment among female graduates is obtained and applying a qualitative approach in the form of exploratory and in-depth knowledge, an attempt is made to know the job prospect in accordance with female students. A focused group discussion was prepared through various techniques of data collection in the qualitative approach.

The statistical population of this study is all government universities and for qualitative sampling, first one university from each of the northern, central, eastern and western provinces was selected. The University of Mazandaran was selected from the north, Arak University from the center, Sistan and Baluchestan University from the southeast and Bu Ali Sina University of Hamadan from the west. Between seven and twelve students from each of undergraduate and graduate courses in humanities, engineering, basic sciences, agriculture, and arts were invited to participate in the focus group discussion. A total of 91 female students were participated in the group discussion sessions. The method of analyzing our data is a thematic one. I have also benefited from some of the interviews conducted in the course of my research in recent years in the field of gender and employment, as well as interviews with some experts in the fields of economics and higher education, some of which are cited in research findings.

## Literature Review

### *The Gap between Girls and Boys in Universities*

A report on gender equality by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that the gap between cognitive skills among girls and boys up to the age of 15 is similar in different countries, after which, boys do better in math whereas girls in writing comprehension. The results show that young boys are much more likely than girls to pursue a bachelor's degree in science, technology and engineering and the share of women in these fields is much lower at higher levels. The differences in the choice of the field of study seem to be related to the position of young people (motivation and interests) in each field rather than their abilities and educational outcomes in schools (OCDE, 2011).

A 2015 UNESCO report also shows that educational sciences are the most popular with women among the four main fields of study. This is while men make up the majority in the fields of civil and industrial engineering in all 84 countries about which information is available. Even in countries like Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the United States where women have potentially achieved equality or even make up the majority of graduates in the field as a whole, they account for only one-fifth of graduates in civil and industrial engineering (UNESCO, 2015).

Global studies show that the increasing degree acquisition is in favor of reducing inequality in labor market. This also as reducing the impact of stereotypes in education is the main goal of political leaders in OECD countries. Reducing the employment

gap between the two genders is another goal of them. Women who fail to obtain a high school diploma have a low employment rate (49% on average), while those with secondary and university degrees have 66% and 79% of employment, respectively. These data show that the increasing level of education in member countries has significantly reduced the employment gap between men and women. All of these statistics contain encouraging messages, especially about reducing the gender gap in education and employment. They, however, acknowledge that some stereotypes are still prevalent that make it very difficult for a woman to reach a high level of education in a scientific field, and get an important and lucrative job in labor market. France, compared to other OECD members, suffers more from these problems, although it should be noted that it is far from the most unequal in these cases (Le Monde, March 7, 2013).

Researches indicate that the educational-orientated gender distinction is done out of indifference and is likewise, seen as a logical expression of sexual differences. On the other hand, girls and boys are still not raised equally in families (DuruBellat, 2004; Gautier, 2008; Fontaini, 2011).

While we are witnessing more equal liberal ideas, this does not call into question the intense gender role in family. According to Duru Bellat, the parental dual discourse becomes a source of psychological problems for girls from adolescence age because they want girls to study well, but at the same time "girls are asked to give their jobs and professions a second place and are reminded that the career advancement should not impede their family responsibilities." Also,

from adolescence age, girls have less self-esteem than boys. As such, expectations about the compatibility of the feminine role with those of academic endeavors are at odds. According to Vouillot (2010: 62), parents have little knowledge of the situation and its consequences on the career-professional process, and nothing has been done to inform them. Research conducted for the Ministry of National Education (Vouillot, 2004, cité in Fontaini, 2011) shows that when the parents were asked to state 12 important criteria that play a role in the academic orientations, they (fathers and mothers) classified the student's gender factor at the 11<sup>th</sup> place.

The results show that the parents greatly magnify the school's equal practices in the education of girls and boys and their entry into the labor market. This blindness of parents intensifies with regard to the effect of children's gender on their choice of field, their educational stance, which leaves their wards free to choose their interests. The influence of the family on the formation of students' career choices is important. Parents' educational level, professional activities of mothers, their knowledge of the labor market and socio-cultural characteristics all play a role in shaping professional ambitions of girls and boys (Fontaini, 2011).

### ***Gender: Significant Factor in Professional Position***

Overall, most researches on gender and work emphasize that gender is a significant factor in professional status. The same makes women less likely than men to have access to jobs, high- and lucrative ones. But in many developed countries, the level of women's education and skills are key indicators of their

growing participation (Curraize et Hugounenq, 2004). For example, a report by the French Ministry of Science and Research on vocational postgraduate students who graduated in 2012 shows that there are more female graduates than male when they leave the university. The recruitment rate for men and women is same for 30 months after graduation, but working conditions between the two sexes are organized to the detriment of women. Based on the report, one of the most important reasons of this gap is the fields of study chosen.

Accordingly, the areas where women have higher share, working conditions are much worse. But in areas where women are fewer, professional inequalities are evident. On the other hand, regardless of their fields of study and differences in how they are recruited, women are more likely to work in public and private institutions with lower incomes and on temporary contracts. The report shows that job inequality among male and female graduates persists, and that income inequality, in particular, is becoming increasingly evident. The report shows that the university orientation based on gender leads women to fields where less suitable professions await them (Sixième enquête nationale sur l'insertion professionnelle des diplômés, 2015).

### **An Insight into Women Presence in Academic Disciplines in Iran**

The statistics of employed women in the academic year of 2012-13 show that the highest number of female students working in higher governmental education centers of the country, 63.1% are from the field of humanities. However, empirical observations show that the labor market is very inadequate

for these disciplines. On the other hand, we see the concentration of women in the basic sciences, including mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. In the academic year 2012-2013, 69% of students in public universities were women (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2012-2013).

If we look at the trend of women in different fields of study in developed countries, we see that although their presence in the field of humanities is high worldwide, but the trend of women concentration in basic sciences in Iran does not match with the global trend. One of the problems of higher education in Western countries is the lack of interest of women in mathematics and physics, which has prompted politicians in the field of higher education, especially those sensitive to gender inequalities, to find a solution. For example, according to a 2006 report on gender equality in higher education in France, the most important inequality involves young girls not being able to study science and technology. "There are still far fewer women than men in some fields of study, including mathematics, physics, information and communication technology, and engineering in schools and universities," the report said. While women make up 57% of the university population, they make up only 27% in basic and practical sciences, and only 25% make up engineering students" (Rapport sur l'égalité professionnelle entre les femmes et les hommes dans l'enseignement supérieur et la recherche, 2006). However, it seems that the inclination of Iranian women toward basic sciences is due to the lack of desire of men to participate in these fields as well as the lack of attention of girls to job opportunities since the labor market for these fields in Iran is muchscarce.

As some graduates of these majors in Iran point out, girls think little about the job market while choosing a major, the opportunity has been taken over by men. It should be noted that these choices and opportunities are formed in a relationship that is highly gendered and different expectations of men and women in accepting social roles (Keshavarz, 2015). For example, Narges, a PhD student in chemistry, tells about choosing her field: "We women do not have much job ambition. I did not think about working at all. I loved my field and as I remember my chemistry teacher once told me that you could not find a job and I said its okay. But I think fewer boys might say its okay not to find a job. For this reason, boys go to fields that are more efficient in order to get money sooner"(Interview with Narges, PhD student in Chemistry, Shahid Beheshti University, 2014).

Considering the presence of more than 60.1% of women in the fields of agriculture and veterinary science (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2012-2013), it can be said that these fields have become gender-based in the labor market and traditional Iranian agriculture does not provide job market for girls. On the other hand, as some graduates of these fields say, many girls graduating from these fields are not interested in working in these fields, which are difficult and require a lot of time, skill and risk (Interview with Firoozeh, Agricultural Graduate from University of Tehran, 2015).

Statistics show that we are facing a growing presence of girls in graduate schools. The data on registration and admission in master and doctoral entrance exams in 2015 showed that women constituted 51.4% of registrants and 47.9% of those admitted to the master's degree

exam which was up nearly 10% compared to the previous academic year. Information obtained from the National Organisation of Educational Testing in the same year indicates that there was also an increasing trend in the number of registrants and those admitted to the doctoral program. In a way, women made up 43.4% of the registrants of the doctoral exam in 2015, and 43.3% of them admitted (National Organization of Educational Testing, 2015)

Based on the available data, the presence of women in humanities, from 30% in the academic year 1992-93 reached to 62% in 2012-13, in basic sciences increased from 35% to 68%, in agriculture and veterinary from 3% to 62%, in technical and engineering from 5% to 30%, in medical sciences from 44% to 57% and in the art group from 33% to 65% (Women in Higher Education, 2017). It seems that the low presence of women in mathematics, physics, and technical and vocational fields is the main obstacle to their participation in engineering. The data show that the women presence has increased enormously in other fields apart from humanities over the years. At

the first glance, this change can be attributed to a change in the socio-cultural perspective of the Iranian society. There is also an increasing trend in women's participation in technical and engineering fields which shows the failure of some gender stereotypes in this area. However, as mentioned earlier, one of the main concerns of female graduates is their widespread unemployment, which makes the sweetness of their widespread presence in various fields of study bitter due to the closure of the labor market on them.

### Unemployment of Educated and Studying Women

An insight on the unemployment of men and women who have graduated or are studying over the past 10 years or more, with regard to their field of study, lead us to a better understanding of their unemployment rate. As Table 1 shows, the unemployment of educated women with 31.3% is approximately 2.5 times higher than the unemployment of educated men with 12.9% (Labor Force Survey, 2013; Statistical Center of Iran, 2016-17).

**Table 1. Unemployment rate of graduated men and women or those in higher education in 10 years and above with distinction of fields of study**

Principal Fields of Study	Female	Male
Teacher Training and Educational Sciences	11.2	3.5
Art	34.6	9.2
Humanities	25.5	6.2
Behavioral and Social Sciences	38.4	9.1
Journalism and Information	7.5	3.7
Business Administration	37.5	10.7
Law	46.5	10.3
Life Sciences	36.9	6
Physical Sciences	40.4	11
Mathematics and Statistics	34.5	10
Computer Sciences	38.1	22.3

Engineering and Engineering Professions	46.2	18
Industry and Processing	39.3	21.8
Architecture	55.5	20.8
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	56.2	18.5
Veterinary	21.2	12.8
Health	8.9	3.5
Health Services	24.1	3.3
Personal Services	25.7	10.1
Environmental Protection	57.7	16
Security Services	37.2	3
Transportation Services	0	1.7
Unspecified and Undeclared	29.1	11.3
Total	31.3	12.9

Source: Labor Force Survey Results of 3013, Statistics Center of Iran: 95-96 (Labor Force Survey, 2013; Statistical Center of Iran, 2016-17).

### Qualitative Research Findings

#### *The Closure of Labor Market in the Eyes of Female Graduates*

Relying on the results of interview with a group of female university students, we have tried to gain understanding about their view toward the career prospects they face after graduating from universities.

Our field research data show that although access to higher education is an inalienable right of citizens and has spread among young women and girls, but female university students are extremely concerned about their future career prospects. They see the phenomena bleak career outlook. In a sense, it can be said that the expansion of education has not given girls more access to the labor market. However, the higher we go up the educational ladder, the more frustration there is among girls. This seems to be an even more disappointing for disadvantaged universities where students evaluate their degree and skills for accessing to the labor market in a very negative way

compared to those from universities in Tehran and some other big cities.

Considering the research data, it can be said that the most important problem of the students who participated in our research was their worry about finding a job after graduation. With the exception of students majoring in accounting and, to some extent, psychology, it can be said that most students are hopeless in finding a job. Students talked about non-interest and frustration due to the lack of work vision. Some turn to continue their education further because of the closed labor market. Below we discuss the narratives of some female students in this regard.

#### *Hopelessness and Non-interest due to Lack of Career Prospects*

According to some students, the university is a huge unemployed and unmotivated output. Some of them believe that even the first graders have no motivation, the most important reason being hopelessness in finding a job in proportion to education.

Fatemeh, a master student in chemistry at Arak University says: "I chose my field with great interest. I had a bachelor degree from Malayer University. Now I am a post-graduate and have a child. I'm very much interested in research, but I'm not sure if I can find a job in future. Maybe I can find tuition. My goal is to work, otherwise why should I study?"

This hopelessness with the job market is tied to fears of different quotas for a small number of job offers, leading to a sense of injustice among students. In this regard, Fatemeh, a biology student at Arak University says: "When you enter the university, Terms 1 and 2 are ideal but non-interest begins with Term 3 and ends with a boiling point in Term 6. You don't even care about the grade point anymore. Unfortunately, a number of points that are considered for employment quotas bring the motivation down. Our country has not been less involved in foreign affairs. Some people owe us a lot, but the rights of others should not be violated. Why should the rights of the one that came up with the effort be lost?"

Masoumeh, a second-semester theology student, also expresses her frustration with access to employment. According to her, professors are hopeless too: "Our professors use to say to study hard, make efforts but do not hope for a future career. Study for your own dignity. According to our teachers, we will succeed if we memorize the Qur'an. Success is hard, though it is possible although they want a small number."

Basic science students are in a much more difficult situation. We don't find a single basic science student with a clear vision of the job market. The only way these students see for themselves is to learn professions that do not require any university education. Fatemeh, a

biology student at the University of Mazandaran, narrates: "When our professors are talking themselves about this issue, they say you must now develop interest in knowing, and you can create a job for yourself in a field later. That is, in fact, we have nothing to do in the future and we have to find a job. Like many other people who are working in a field has nothing to do with the field they have studied."

Although there is still a view prevalent among students that women do not have a duty to secure living expenses, but realities of life of many girls have led them to the conclusion that work is necessary for their lives and consider the gender-based division of work i.e. men working outside and women working at home as unrelated to the real life and inflation. On the other hand, this lack of work prospects forces some girls to give up their right i.e. the "right to work," and surrender when their husbands ask them not to work. Fatemeh, a sixth-semester biology student at Arak University says: "I am married now and before marriage, I thought about working but now my husband talked to me and I decided not to work. My husband promised that he will provide the family with financial needs, but he has no problem with my studies at all. I also gave my positive node because I knew there was nothing for biology in this country."

### ***Worthless Degree in Labor Market and Inclination to Education***

This hopelessness with finding a job after graduation has led many students to continue their education further. Samieh, a public administration student at Sistan and Baluchistan University says: "Now it has



become credentialism. I also wanted to go to work after graduation. Basically, we all wanted to go to work. But when there's credentialism, bachelors not master preferably goes to work. One of the reasons we want to continue our education is that the road ahead may be a little smoother for work because working has become necessity for us."

However, the motivation to continue education has decreased among some students due the rise in unemployment among postgraduate and doctoral students. Marjan, a final-year student in industrial engineering at Bu Ali University in Hamadan while pointing about the worthlessness of university degrees and lack of job prospects, says: "I used to think that in order to enter the job market, I had to study a master program to improve my situation, but on campus, I realized this was not the case, and many seniors were unemployed. My sister is currently studying master in applied chemistry in Ahvaz. It means that just a university degree does not make anyone to go to work."

On the other hand, many of the students do not see any way forward in the absence of a job horizon than continuing their education, a way that has become useless in the eyes of some students with the growing unemployment among graduates.

### ***Closed Labor Market on Women due to Strong Gender Stereotypes***

The existing gender discrimination in professional recruitment also lightens the concern of educated girls. Sima, a final year chemical engineering student at Arak University, says: "When you graduate and want to go to work, there is no place for a woman at all. For example, a chemical

engineer wants to work in a refinery. At the [Arak] refinery in all its parts, there is only one female engineer working over there. They do not prefer women at all."

According to female students, the gender discrimination and ignorance of girls' abilities are very common in technical environments and factories. This diminishes the hope of getting a job related to the field of study. Arezoo, a chemical engineering student at the University of Sistan and Baluchistan, recounts her experience of a scientific visit: A man who was showing us furnace said well! You girls don't want to see it, boys come forward. When we ask why we don't want to see: He said that you cannot, there were only four steps, nothing else."

Girls have stories of sexist attitudes in professional environments. Arezoo explains: "An engineer was the regional head. He said very openly that who had asked a girl to study chemical engineering?" Did you really think we would let you girls come to work? We do not want you to enter our work environment at all. He continued, do you know what words we speak in this environment?" For example, once he very easily told a girl that he will hit with his shoes and she will spread on the wall. He said this is an example so you know why should not come to the industry."

According to Marzieh, a PhD student in electrical engineering, the condition for women engineers in technical professions is very difficult: "I could not find a job in my hometown (Shahrekord). I would go to the industrial area and submit my resume. They said that my grade and the software knowledge are too good but unfortunately the environment does not allow them to hire me. In some places, women are not allowed to

work and companies are fined for hiring. I appeared in an exam for an oil company and I got through, but my way was blocked as they simply told me that I was hit the human resource ceiling. I accepted in finance but the same happened to me again. Those who had quotas were accepted. For example, I stood first in both entrance and interview, but ultimately I was placed as a reserved candidate. Then you see it's not working and you say, 'Well, let me continue my education. Maybe I can go to scientific-research environments, but again, the higher you go, the more frustrated/hopeless you become.'

In the view of Zeinab, a sociology student at the University of Mazandaran, "stereotyped views have led to the suppression of self-confidence of women and girls, those who are capable but lack ways to show those capabilities."

### ***Job Insecurity for Women and Sexual Violence***

Sexual violence at workplace and job insecurity for women is a global phenomenon. This violence intensifies and takes more victims when women are marginalized more. When the labor market is closed on women, some employers or managers often take advantage of their positions and force women to comply with their sexual desires in exchange for keeping their jobs. Sometimes, sexual violence takes milder forms and sometimes more acute ones, but in all cases, as many global studies show, they target women's self-confidence and abilities. This is while on many occasions, victims' behaviors and characters are being questioned and they are placed in the position of accused and are

forced to remain silent. Sima, a student of chemical engineering at Arak University, says: "An educated person can no longer sell clothes. In many places, when we look for jobs, we may be given bad offers, and this has become very common in our society. Is it as if they have to take something from you, to do something for you?"

### ***Concerns about Discrimination and Need for Support to Find Job***

It is a common belief among students that it is not possible to find a job without having a party (outside/political support). This is a belief that leads to more de-motivation among female students. Zahra, a chemical engineering student at the University of Mazandaran, says: "What motivates me to study? When I come, I see that there is no job in engineering and when I want to enter a job, they ask me who introduced you. Do not ask what grade point you have? Which university did you study? How can I be hopeful then?"

Some students do not even consider the scholarship program, which makes it easier for graduates to find employment, to be a flawless. On the other hand, girls are dissatisfied with discrimination and income inequality between women and men at the workplace. Equal income for equal work is an old demand of women's movements in the world, but sometimes, according to girls, the extent of this discrimination is in a way that de-motivates women to work.

### ***Lack of Plans and Programs for Connecting University with Labor Market and Society***

Students criticize the unlimited expansion of universities and their non-connection with labor market. On the other hand, many

experts agree that there is no specific strategy for identifying the needs of the labor market and plans for training the workforce in Iranian higher education, and in practice, the relationship between education and financial institution in Iran is broken.

According to some experts, there is no planning body to either determine the country's needs for specialists nor the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology is inclined to train those specialists. Dr. Abolhassan Riyazi, then the director of student affairs at the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology says: "It seems that we are facing sectoral planning in the country. The energy sector, the education sector, the agricultural sector each is planning for itself. For instance, the agricultural sector plans to become self-sufficient without seeing if the energy sector can sufficiently provide it with water. The question, for example, what forces the education sector should train for agriculture, is not raised" (Interview with Dr. Riyazi, May, 2016).

Some experts believe that the development of higher education should be based on needs of the labor market, and industry and commerce should determine in what areas expertise is needed, and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology should request these needs from other ministries and plan accordingly. According to Dr. Amini, economist and labor market expert of the Planning and Budget Organization, "the announcement of needs should be based on the direction of technological developments. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology is passive with request from executing ministries to their stated needs. Every year, the ministry announces in its

tables indicating needs from disciplines. The economic sectors are also going their own way, and there is a view from the industrial sectors that the skills of the graduates from the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology are low". (Interview with Dr. Amini, May 2016).

Students' account of disconnection between the university and the job market reflects their relative knowledge of problems they face. Sayeh, an educational technology student at Arak University says about this as: "I think the infrastructure encounters many problems. Higher education is not actually meant to deal with them at all. I myself thought that the university was a much planned organization, but now I see that it is not much different from the school except in the form of teaching. With respect to the labor market, nothing has been thought about it at all."

The disconnection is more evident between the university and the labor market, especially in some disciplines such as basic sciences. Fatemeh, a biology student at the University Mazandaran, says: "It is said that the society, especially in European countries, needs more basic sciences than other fields because the basis of medicine is biology. In our country, they think that someone who has studied biology should become a teacher although they do not even accept us as teachers."

Lack of sufficient skills to enter the labor market is an issue that has been acknowledged by many students and job professionals. In the current context, it can be said that, mostly girls are being kept away from the labor market. According to some students, they graduated from some fields without knowing

the real skills and job requirements. Likewise, students are also critical of lack of practical training at universities.

On the lack of enough skills for entering into the labor market, Marjan, an industrial engineering student at Bu Ali Sina University in Hamadan, says: "I would like to tell about motivation, I myself loved industrial engineering very much. But now I do not like to continue it at master level. I even thought of taking an entrance again for the paramedical field because I feel that an engineer is not respected in Iran. It does not have a high level at all. It only bears the name of engineer, otherwise we have no experience."

One of the reasons of not having skills to enter the labor market is lack of non-seriousness during post-graduate skills training. Arezoo, a chemical engineering student at the University of Sistan and Baluchistan tells about this as: "I myself was in technical field. Laboratory units were not bad either, but again, when you go to industry, it is much better. In bachelor's degree, we only had two units of industry to go and see practical work. But the industry itself does not cooperate at all. I went to the Shiraz refinery myself. Maybe half that time we were allowed to enter the refinery that too only until noon. All the engineers who were about to explain us the work were on the run."

The need of skilled training which is low in our society is one of the issues raised about students' lack of skills to enter the labor market. Dr. Azoji, a labor market expert with the Planning and Budget Organization believes, "graduates need additional training in order to be able to enter the labor market. They need skills called training. The university empowers the individual and when he enters

the labor market he must be capable. The informal education system must actually prepare these graduates for the labor market (Interview with Dr. Azoji, May 2016).

### Sparkles of Hope

As mentioned, there is a heavy atmosphere of frustration and hopelessness among students, but sometimes sparkles of hope are seen among some students. The light of hope is brighter in some disciplines, such as psychology and accounting, and even if a discipline is chosen carefully and consciously. Atefeh, a law student at the University of Mazandaran, who entered this discipline from an experimental field out of her interest and perseverance, says: "My discipline and teachers are too good, their levels are also great and I'm hopeful to become a lawyer."

Bahar, a master's degree student in psychology at Bu Ali Sina University in Hamadan, although sees a grim atmosphere, is satisfied with her field of study and batch mates: "I think the motivation for work and progress, especially in the city, is very low. Our group is good, with each having own concerns. For example, I like to work in the domain of children now. Another loves working with addiction. But other groups lack high motivation. In the dormitory, I see only my group to be little active. Rest says they would merely get a degree and go insisting where's job to work with? But the field of psychology is very wide. I myself started with children with autism. This is a very small tributary of a larger sea."

Razia, another master's degree student in psychology at Bu Ali Sina University, is not disappointed with the job market. A native of

Malayer who has a bachelor's degree from her hometown, says about her future career: "I will definitely find a job if I get experience in my specialized field. I have high hopes." By the way, she considers a job in her field in a small city like her own as suitable: "If I want to work in neuro feedback (a treatment method) in Tehran now, it will not work because that has been done by others a few years ago. But in Malayer, it is still not available and there is only one such place in Hamadan. That means we will definitely get response in new areas."

Other students whose families enjoy some cultural, social, and economic capitals also see greater prospects ahead. Marzieh, an English language student at the University of Mazandaran says about this: "I came here after my father permitted on the condition that I must study till doctorate and if acquired good grades, he will open an institute for me".

The problems illustrated here have created a situation that many of our students make immigration to Western countries a priority for them. The students narrated cases where the idea of immigrating abroad was on the minds of undergraduates. According to PhD students, the option of migrating abroad is on the table of most doctorate students. However, such an idea is sometimes, promoted by some professors. In other words, some professors also create the illusion of finding a better job in other countries.

### **Discussions and Conclusion**

As the study of the process of women's participation in higher education shows, women have gradually been able to change inequality in higher education in their favor. The results of this study show that girls are gradually gaining a remarkable presence even

in the fields that are traditionally called male-centric. Also, in recent years, there has been a significant presence of women in master and doctoral programs, indicating a narrowing gender gap in this domain. But what makes this situation a serious challenge is the very minimal presence of women in the labor market. It should be noted that the university has had many cultural and social achievements for girls, and these achievements are more evident in deprived regions. What has been discussed in this article is the view of female students on labor market conditions in Iran and the difficulties they face in entering into it.

It seems that creating a job prospects for female students is one of their most important priorities, and reducing the issue of unemployment among educated women is one of the most important demands of these girls. This depends on inter-ministerial strategies, i.e. the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology alone cannot solve this problem and requires collective will among the relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Economy and the Vice-Presidency for Women and Family Affairs. The experience of other countries in reducing gender inequality in the labor market also shows that this cannot be improved by simply holding certain ministries accountable. Measures such as 1) sensitizing, informing and educating employment counselors about professional equality between men and women, 2) strengthening the joint presence of men and women at the time of recruitment, and 3) facilitating the return of women to work by improving job quality as well as by removing barriers at

workplace, are among the solutions adopted in some countries.

The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology can initiate such agreements with relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Economy and the Vice-Presidency for Women and Family Affairs to reduce the labor market inequality. The lack of planning seems to have created an imbalance in the market. These agreements and the creation of working groups to improve the employment status of educated women, consisting of members of the relevant ministries, could put an end to the lack of planning in this regard.

The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, itself, can initiate reducing inequality between men and women in its affiliated universities. The author's observations show that some departments have no women faculty while girls make up more than 60% of the students there, and women are only at levels such as clerks, secretaries, or servants. This is while, the role of female heads of colleges and universities in removing gender prejudices in specialized professions is very important. The presence of women at higher levels of academia can inform students about their social and political rights, empower them, broaden their horizons, and demonstrate the possibility of advancing two types of tasks i.e. women can specialize and be successful in serving the community and as a wife and mother.

Likewise, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology can also be a pioneer in promoting the presence of female researchers in its research institutes and centers that could be a model for other research centers in the country.

As the results of the study were highlighted based on the narratives of female students in various fields in Iran, the gap between women's education and employment widens in a field where a large percentage of girls are practically directed to fields for which there is no suitable jobs in the country. At the university too, students are not provided with skills needed to be effective in the job market. Due to the male-centric structure of university, even on the campus, girls are less likely to encounter successful role models who have been able to combine successful career with family life. In the context of discrimination, along with a sexist ideology that emphasizes different worlds for men and women, these practically create a condition in which there are few opportunities for women to participate in the crisis-ridden and dysfunctional Iranian labor market.

Based on this study, suggestions can be made to improve the status of gender equality in education and employment: reviewing curricula and educational policies to avoid the transmission of gender-based stereotypes; encouraging girls to study in more efficient fields by emphasizing the necessary skills and knowledge; creating balance in academic body meaning more female teachers; putting women in jobs that are generally run by men. Improving the quality of education and promoting effective resource management to improve educational outcomes of girls and boys are strategies that can help improve the gender equality in education.

As research findings show, one of the problems students say prevent them from reaching the labor market is lack of skills that the market needs. According to students, many fields of study have little to do with the

needs of the job market. Probably, entrepreneurial skills and awareness-raising about the possibilities that women can use to start their own business is one of the necessities of our society, today. Therefore, efforts to make university courses more efficient, more communication between the university and the community as well as need for assessment to create the desired fields and eliminate those not required in the society, can be at the top of the agenda of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. Also, improving the quality of universities, reducing the gap between central universities and other universities, improving the quality of internships, creating postgraduate training courses to improve knowledge and skills of young graduates, and eliminate discrimination in recruitment can reduce the gender gap in the employment domain.

It seems that more participatory division of labor in the family can also help increase women's employment. Efforts to get rid of stereotypes that attribute men and women to two separate worlds should be on the agenda of educational planners and other social institutions from an early age. Efforts should also be made to encourage men to invest more in family life and women to invest more in professional life. As experiences of other countries show, the way to improving gender equality is to fight more actively against the forms of discrimination and promote women's rights. Likewise, efforts to guarantee women's property rights and inheritance, as well as to give them access to resources, can also help improve their employment situation. Women's access to bank loans and financial services can help increase women's empowerment in entrepreneurship and employment.


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## بررسی نگاه دانشجویان دختر به بازار کار ایران

خدیدجه کشاورز<sup>1</sup> 

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**چکیده:** برخی پژوهش‌ها در حوزه اشتغال زنان نشان می‌دهند که جنسیت عاملی معنادار در موقعیت حرفه‌ای است؛ یعنی جنسیت باعث می‌شود تا زنان در مقایسه با مردان امکان دسترسی کمتری به مشاغل دارای منزلت بالا و پردرآمد داشته باشند. با این حال در بسیاری از کشورها، افزایش سطح تحصیلات و مهارت‌های زنان، شاخصی اساسی برای مشارکت روزافزون آن‌ها در بازار کار است. در ایران با وجود کاهش میزان بی‌سوادی زنان و افزایش چشمگیر حضور دختران در دانشگاه‌ها حتی در برخی از رشته‌هایی که به لحاظ سنتی مردانه خوانده می‌شوند، نرخ بیکاری زنان تحصیل کرده به مراتب بیش از مردان است. هدف این پژوهش فهم نگاه دختران دانشجوی درباره شکاف میان تحصیلات عالی و چشم‌انداز حرفه‌ای آنان است. به این منظور پژوهشی کیفی در چهار دانشگاه دولتی در چهار گوشه ایران سامان داده‌ایم. داده‌های این پژوهش نشان می‌دهند که با وجود بالارفتن تعداد دختران دانشجوی در این دانشگاه‌ها، اکثر آن‌ها نسبت به آینده حرفه‌ای خود بیمناک‌اند. می‌توان گفت که توده‌ای شدن تحصیلات عالی، به دسترسی بیشتر دختران به بازار کار نینجامیده است و ناامیدی از یافتن کار مناسب بعد از فارغ‌التحصیلی در میان دختران با تحصیلات بالاتر، بیشتر است.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** دختران دانشجو، چشم‌انداز حرفه‌ای، بیکاری زنان تحصیل کرده.



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