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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WHAT KIND OF RISKS ARE GENDER RISKS AT WORK, AND HOW CAN THEY BE MEASURED?

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Abstract

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Introduction:-

It is common to hear about gender issues in terms of deplorable conditions for women compared to men.

The problem is of such magnitude that gender equality is among the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN. This programme consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals divided into 169 objectives to reduce poverty and forms of inequality and to promote lasting and sustainable economic growth. Objective 5 concerns gender equality, and among its goals is to guarantee women full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities at all levels of the decision-making process in political, economic, and public life.

However, talking about gender equality and gender risks is not the same thing. So what is meant by gender risk? This risk is the probability of being exposed to danger to safety and health. If the damage is to be discriminated against on the basis of gender in a given social environment, then gender risk expresses the probability of suffering damage from this specific type of discrimination. For example, in different areas of work and political life, women do not have the same opportunities as men (De Simone & Scano, 2018; De Simone et al., 2018).

The mechanism that promotes gender discrimination pertains to sexism and in particular to the sexual objectification of both women and men (Fredrikson & Roberts, 1997; Martins et al., 2007; Pacilli, 2012) and to dehumanization (Baldissarri et al., 2013; Volpato, 2012) for which people are treated as objects or tools and not as human beings (Gervais et al., 2013).

In Italy there is a legal obligation to detect and eliminate this type of risk in the workplace: do not make it a crime. The current legislation (Legislative Decree 81/2008, art. 28) mentions gender differences as among the "particular risks" on which an employer is obliged to intervene. In fact, what the law requires is to check whether there are situations or events in the company that involve a risk to health and well-being caused by gender membership.

Since 2003 the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has analysed gender issues in the field of safety and health at work (EU-OSHA, 2003). The agency makes clear that improving working conditions should concern both women and men. It indicates that assessments of gender risks and consequent interventions should be followed in a number of areas: the actual type of work, hours worked, discrimination in all its manifestations, relationships at work, representation in decision-making processes for health and safety at work at all levels, segregation between 'female' or 'male' jobs, and work-life balance.

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The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has provided indications on how to implement good practices on gender risk (Copsey & Schneider, 2018). In common risk prevention practices the average male worker is taken as the standard, but this does not do justice to either women or men. A gender-sensitive approach takes into account the different working situations of women and men, and stereotypes in the workplace are questioned (Copsey & Schneider, 2018).

Therefore, there is a need for an instrument that can measure gender risks in the workplace and that can functionally mitigate them through appropriate interventions. In this regard, work is being done on the validation of a tool that measures the risk perceived by working staff regarding gender membership and which is compared with specific indicators provided by the company's human resources office.

This instrument is being developed taking into account the indicators that contribute to the calculation of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). The GEI is a tool for measuring the progress of gender equality in the EU and offers greater visibility to areas that need improvement. This index was developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality, an EU agency dedicated exclusively to gender equality. Account was also taken of principles of gender equality devised by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, an international organization based in Paris which aims to define policies that promote prosperity, equality, and well-being according to a gender approach. Several studies and scientific reports were also consulted which have addressed the following topics: the association between gender equality and health (King et al., 2020), the concepts and methods for calculating gender equality indices (Bericat, 2012), gender issues in the field of occupational safety (EU-OSHA, 2003), the gender approach to risk prevention and health promotion in the workplace (EU-OSHA, 2014), and gender inequality in decision-making power and access to resources (Plantenga et al., 2009).

The tool consists of 36 items that intend to explain nine indicators. Each item is duplicated by gender so that women and men can express their subjective perception, taking into account their situation and what happens where they work. The same items are proposed to the employer or to those who manage the personnel office to provide objective data.

INDICATORS	NUMBER OF ITEMS	EXAMPLES OF ITEM In the questionnaire, each item is introduced by the phrase "Where I work it happens that:"
Career prospects (possibility to receive professional advancement and to cover strategic or important roles)	5	Men have more chances than women to play strategic roles
Contractual conditions (remuneration, benefits, and job security)	7	Women are more likely than men to request time off for personal reasons or to take care of family members
Working hours (possibility of working full time and obtaining concessions during working hours)	4	Men, more than women, can adapt their working hours to their needs, within certain limits
Equipment (possibility of having suitable equipment to carry out the work, also in relation to personal protective equipment)	2	The personal protective equipment supplied is more suitable for men than women
Treatment (impositions that staff receive, including language used in corporate communication especially around gender)	3	Women are treated better than men
Relations (possibility of being isolated, marginalized, or verbally abused)	6	Women are marginalized compared to men
Content of the work (considering whether the job is boring or challenging and if it is traditionally or	3	Men do more boring and repetitive jobs than women

typically done by men or women)		
Representation (possibility to access union representation roles and in prevention and protection services)	2	Men have more chances than women to play a role in prevention and protection services
Environment (availability and suitability of toilets and/or changing rooms.)	4	The toilets are more comfortable and suitable for men than for women

The questionnaire returns four indexes. The first two indices measure a subjective perception, the other two express an objective data.

An index expresses the degree of perceived gender inequality and ranges from -1 to $+1$. At 0 the index indicates that there are no perceived inequalities between men and women. When the index tends towards -1 it indicates a perception of negative discrimination towards men, and when it tends towards $+1$ it indicates the perception of negative discrimination towards women.

A second index expresses the perceived degree of dehumanization and goes from 0 to 1 . Values closer to 1 indicate the perception of the presence of dehumanization in the company, and values closer to 0 indicate the perception of an absence of dehumanization. The perception at value 0 is that both men and women are respected for their gender, and on the contrary, the perception at value 1 is that there is no regard for men or women.

A third index measures objective gender inequality and goes from -1 to $+1$. Values closer to 0 indicate that there is no objective evidence of inequalities between men and women. When the index tends towards -1 it indicates the presence of negative discrimination towards men, and when it tends towards $+1$ it indicates the presence of negative discrimination towards women.

A fourth index expresses the objective degree of dehumanization and ranges from 0 to 1 . Values closer to 0 indicate the absence of dehumanizing actions and conditions, and values closer to 1 indicate the presence of dehumanizing actions and conditions. The condition at value 0 is that both men and women are respected for their gender, and on the contrary, the condition at value 1 is that there is no regard for men or women.

The evidence obtained from the analysis of the indices will provide information that can, firstly, reduce the risks related to gender that occur in the workplace and, secondly, promote the health and well-being of the staff in a gender humanization approach.

This type of evaluation and intervention should be considered not so much for the legal consequences, but because where employees are doing well the whole organization is doing well, and this state of health and well-being leads to an increase in productivity and corporate profitability (Harter et al., 2003).

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