

Gender Differences in Perceived Employability between University and VET Students: an analysis of Emerging Adults in Spain.

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INTRODUCTION

- Self-Perceived Employability (SPE) is the conception that each individual has about their abilities and skills to find and keep a job (Rothwell et al., 2008). Identifying which variables affect the construction and maintenance of a healthy SPE is a central topic, especially (1) during emerging adulthood when the own perceptions of abilities to get a job will be a key element of emerging adult identity development (Arnett, 2000), and (2) in difficult contexts such as Spain, where the youth unemployment rate is much higher than in other European countries, as well as the rate of job insecurity.
- Gender-based employment discrimination has been documented in the Spanish context (INUJE, 2020), so it is interesting to know if there exist differences in self-perception of employability between men and women.
- Precarious employment refers to forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity and low wages (Vosko, 2006). It is higher among women, who in Spain earn less than their male counterparts in the majority sectors and at all levels of education, regardless of the type of contract or working day in question (Eurostat, 2021).

AIMS

- 1) to analyze gender differences in employability and perceived job insecurity, differentiating between university students and those studying VET;
- 2) to analyze whether perceived employability is predicted by job insecurity and gender. For both objectives, internal and external employability are analyzed differentially.

METHOD

The sample was composed of 2919 emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years. 1703 were university students (64.7% women; Mage = 20.61 SD = 2.49). 506 participants were VET students (37.9% women; Mage = 20.21, SD = 2.48). To measure SPE, we used the Spanish version (Vargas et al., 2018) of SPE's Original Scale (Rothwell et al., 2008). To evaluate precarious employment, we create a scale based on Olsthoorn's (2014) indicators. Descriptive and regression analysis were performed.

RESULTS

Table 1: SPE scores according to the training pathway by sex

	Men	Women	F	d
University Student	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Internal SPE	10.53 (2.69)	9.78 (2.59)	31.28**	.28
External SPE	20.32 (5.38)	18.51 (5.55)	42.25**	.33
Total SPE	34.17 (6.96)	31.79 (7.09)	44.00**	.33
Precarious employ.	5.85 (1.30)	5.90 (1.30)	.24	-.03
VET Student				
Internal SPE	11.56 (2.41)	11.35 (2.08)	.97	.09
External SPE	21.89 (3.97)	21.16 (4.57)	3.2	.17
Total SPE	37.00 (5.82)	36.39 (6.17)	1.1	.10
Precarious employ.	5.91 (1.31)	5.68 (1.29)	1.85	.17

Table 2: Interaction of sex and precariousness with SPE scores.

	Internal SPE	External SPE	Total SPE
	Betha (p)	Betha (p)	Betha (p)
Additive Model			
Precarious employ. Sex	-.23 (<.001)	-.56 (<.001)	-.76 (<.001)
Interactive Model			
Precarious Employ. Sex	-.22 (.017)	-.43 (.027)	-.58 (.024)
Interaction effect	-1.18 (<.001)	-2.3 (<.001)	-3.4 (<.001)
R ²	.061	.057	.071

CONCLUSION

- Men scored higher for SPE than women, but the difference was only significant among university students. This may be because women at university are distributed much more widely across different professional areas than in VET, where most female students are concentrated in highly feminized pathways linked to health and care professions, which have a high rate of job placement (MEFP, 2021). Young women in VET could perceive their opportunities in a more positive light than their university counterparts, who may face lower job placement rates in the future, something that may negatively impact their opinions and perceptions.
- Precarious employment contributes to the perception of lower employability, both internally and externally, and gender is also a variable that explains perceived employability.
- There is no interaction between SPE, precarious employment and sex so precariousness in employment affects SPE both sexes in a similar way.
- These findings highlight the need for universities to develop specific strategies and plans to promote employability and should focus mainly on female university students who, despite having enormous potential, feel less capable than their male counterparts of finding and maintaining a job. Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, achieving gender equality, requires girls to be empowered and their employability promoted.

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