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**THE GENDER BAROMETERS INVESTIGATING ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND  
GENDER EQUALITY IN FINLAND**

Submitted by Statistics Finland \*

1. The Finnish 2004 Gender Barometer is the third in succession and will be published in November 2004. The first barometer was compiled in 1998 and the second in 2001. This paper concentrates mainly on the sample, non-response and representativeness, questionnaire and some findings between the years 1998 and 2001 with few references to the 2004 Gender Barometer.

**I. BACKGROUND**

2. The Gender Barometers investigate the division of labour and power between women and men in society and the acceptability of the prevailing situation in various walks of life at any given point of time through the assessments, attitudes and experiences of women and men in Finland. Comparison of the results obtained at different times produces data on continuity or change in the mutual relationships between women and men.

3. The Gender Barometers consider femininity and masculinity as historical variables. The topics examined for the barometer loosely reflect the debate on gender equality in Finland. The Gender Barometers include each time partly the same material and partly some new material. With new topics the barometer seeks to analyse current circumstances. As far as the common material is concerned, the barometers examine the change that has taken place.

4. The barometers have been financed by the Council for Equality (in 1998 and 2001) and the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (in 2004). The interviews

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\* Paper prepared by Pia Pulkkinen. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Statistics Finland.

and the analyses were conducted at Statistics Finland, but the questionnaires and the analyses were formed in co-operation with a steering group consisting of researchers and other experts.

5. The data for the Gender Barometers were collected by means of computer-aided telephone interviews. In 2004 and 1998, the interviews were conducted as part of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), in 2001 the survey was carried out as an independent, computer-aided telephone interview. Before the surveys the questionnaire and the length of the survey were tested with some trial interviews. The interviewers received guidelines for the interview beforehand and the respondents were also approached in advance with a letter. The interviews followed an electronic Blaise form, starting with the Labour Force Survey and proceeding to the Gender Barometer questions.

6. Planning of the sample and sampling, planning of the questionnaire and programming it and the interviews cost approximately 41,000 EUR in 2004 of which the costs for the interviews were 33,500 EUR.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE SURVEY

7. **The sample size** has been approximately 2,500 people aged 15-74. In 1998, acceptable replies were received from 77 per cent of the sample, i.e. 1,872 people (943 women and 929 men). In 2001, the study material consisted of 1,885 replies (969 women and 916 men) and in 2004, acceptable replies were received from 1,907 people (966 women and 941 men), which was 75 per cent of the sample size. The barometers contain data on different topics for which data collected in other ways also exist.

8. The original sample has been drawn from the register-based population information system to represent exhaustively the population of Finland by gender, age, level of education and geographic area. The ready availability of register data from the population information system has also made asking certain background questions unnecessary.

9. In the different survey years **the duration of the barometer interview** has been about 15 minutes. Parts of the interview have been targeted at certain groups. The interviews of persons who do not have a family and are not employed have been the shortest, whereas those of persons who have a family and are employed have been the longest.

10. A target included in the original sample for the Gender Barometer could become a **non-respondent**: either the interview could not be started or the interview became interrupted as it progressed to the Gender Barometer questions. There has also been partial non-response. It has occurred at the latter part of the interview from a certain question onwards. In 2004, six per cent of the original sample refused to answer to the Labour Force Survey and its additional module and four per cent refused to answer the additional module. In 1998, one per cent of the respondents who refused to answer quoted the sensitivity of the topic as the reason.

## III. THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND SOME FINDINGS

11. The questionnaire is formed so that all respondents do not answer all questions. Background questions identify the respondents into groups like employed people, students, families with small children, families with children under the age of 18 and single people.

12. The survey proceeds from estimates of and attitudes to society in general to the interviewee's assessments and experiences of his/her own workplace or educational establishment, then to personal experiences of reconciling family and work, and finally to very personal feelings concerning the interaction between women and men. Although the barometers

describe prevailing attitudes, they do not directly answer questions concerning the mechanisms that produce differences or discrimination.

13. The survey questions have varied a little over the years, but the removal of questions must be done so as not to weaken the comparability of the surveys.

### **3.1. General questions**

14. The first general question is “If we evaluate quite generally the mutual status of Finnish men and women at present, which one of the following statements corresponds to your own view the best?” The most common answer from year to year has been “The status of men in society is slightly better than that of women”.

15. The barometer does not analyse what people mean by gender equality. In 2001, another study was carried trying to find out what people think when they answer these questions. People often mentioned commonly known issues – such as equal pay or equal opportunities – when they were asked what they regarded as gender equality.

16. With regard to the statements it has been observed that the direction of a statement can influence answers. The answers to statements with which respondents disagree strongly are divided more widely between different reply categories than is the case with statements respondents find it easy to agree with.

17. Already in 1998 the Finns agreed most with the statement “Married women have the full right to work whatever their family situation”: at that time 91 per cent of women and 87 per cent of men fully agreed with this statement. The unanimity has increased during subsequent research years.

18. The reactions to the statement “Men should be the main breadwinners in the family” were strongly dispersed especially among men. No such unanimity between the sexes as with the reaction to women’s right to work was achieved in this issue.

19. The statements have also revealed answers that are difficult to interpret. In 2004, a general statement “Men, too, benefit from increased gender equality” was added to the barometer survey. Interestingly, the vast majority of men agreed with it. However, this result could be interpreted in diverse ways. Should the answers be interpreted so that improved position of women would also benefit men? In a partner relationship, an improvement in the spouse’s position in working life would manifest as risen income for the whole family. Alternatively, do men perceive that increased gender equality improves men’s position in situations where their position is worse than women’s? Then again, could it be interpreted so that the respondents would have been thinking about an abstract principle of general usefulness of equality to everybody?

### **3.2 Working life and the studying environment**

20. Questions on working life have been presented to those whose main activity is being employed. The wage earner respondents answer a variety of questions concerning disadvantages in their present work in certain matters, such as salary, fringe benefits, access to training, etc. The matters have remained the same during the entire research period.

21. Only very few respondents report experiences of outright discrimination, so asking about disadvantages has proved a more rational way of finding out whether one gender feels it is

missing out on some advantages that are allowed to the other. Disadvantages have most frequently been experienced in pay, distribution of work-related pressures, career advancement and appreciation of professional skills. The survey questions are not limited to these four aspects, because removal of too many aspects would weaken comparability between the survey years. Besides, the question on the whole has otherwise functioned very well.

22. The share of female employees having experienced no disadvantage from their gender has increased over the years. The direction of this change is the same among women and men employees, but the level is much higher among men. Half of employed women still feel disadvantaged by their gender.

23. Student respondents have been asked: "Do following matters disturb your studying?" The listed statements include, for example, "Study materials reflect too much the concrete world and experiences of the opposite sex", "Some teachers draw too much from the concrete world and experiences of the opposite sex in selecting the contents of their teaching", etc.

24. The general assessment of school children and students concerning the implementation of equality in educational establishments is similar to that of the employees concerning the implementation of equality at the workplace. The share of those considering that gender equality is implemented very well in their educational establishment was 43 per cent in 2001. The students most frequently reported that "Some teachers rate the achievements of the opposite sex higher" and "Representatives of the opposite sex dominate the conversation and answering".

### **3.3. Reconciling family and work**

25. Questions concerning reconciling family and work are mainly presented to a certain group of interviewees. Some questions about the workplace are presented to all wage earners. Some questions concern only those respondents with children under the age of 12 or those with children under the age of 18. Some questions concern couples or families with a spouse, and others single people only.

26. A new chapter was added to the 2001 barometer inquiring on how easy or difficult it is to leave the workplace for different kinds of statutory family leaves. The questions were presented to all wage earners and concerned their views of the situation at the workplace, not their personal experiences.

27. The results indicate that according to the views of the wage earners, mothers have practically no problems in taking a maternity or family leave for nearly one year. The wage earners tend to think that it is a little more difficult for fathers to take a paternity leave for three weeks at most and for mothers to stay home to take care of their child who is under 10 years old and has suddenly fallen ill. It is still somewhat more difficult for mothers to take a nursing leave until the child's third birthday and for fathers to stay at home to take care of their child who has suddenly fallen ill. It is the most difficult for fathers to take a family leave of between one to six months, and a nursing leave until the child's third birthday.

28. Although family leaves are expressly intended for both parents, workplaces tend to restrict their use primarily to women only. The "silent necessity" of family finances may support this restriction: a family leave taken by the father who has a higher pay than the mother means less income for the family.

29. Despite the aforementioned interesting findings, the questions have resulted in large proportions of "Not applicable to my workplace" and "Don't know" answers. Among the reasons

for this uncertainty might be that there are no fathers of small children at the workplace who have even considered taking this type of a leave.

***The prevailing tradition of responsibility for household work***

30. The question concerning the sharing of responsibility for household work has been asked in the barometer survey since 1998. The questions concerning all other household duties except the supervision of the children's homework and taking care of small children (washing, dressing, feeding) were targeted at all parents of two-supporter families with children under the age of 18 living in their household. Only those who had children under school age were asked the question concerning childcare and only those having school-age children were asked the question concerning the supervision of their homework.

31. Mothers were mainly responsible for washing, ironing and cooking on weekdays. Clear men's responsibilities were maintenance and repair of vehicles and other maintenance, repairs and construction. Shared responsibility became apparent in matters connected with the care of children, for example.

32. The selection of activities was based on the results of the Time Use Survey. Other kinds of activities, mainly male-dominated ones, were also suggested, but the working group suspected that if the time used for the activity was minimal, the question would not produce reliable data.

33. In 2001, a simple sum variable was formed to examine the amounts of responsibility for household work. In this variable the responsibility for each household duty received value 1. The amount of household work that mothers were alone responsible for was double compared to the amount of household work that fathers were alone responsible for.

34. The question "Have you considered lately that you bear too much responsibility for household work?" described better than the rough sum-variable the difficulty of sharing responsibility between the parents. Men hardly ever thought they bore too much responsibility for household work, while women quite generally felt they did so. Performing of household work was the commonest cause for disagreements.

35. The direction in the development of shared responsibility for household work does not follow the expressed attitudes according to which the division of labour by gender in families should be dispelled rather than strengthened.

36. Among women there is a clear connection between the amount of responsibility for household work and the experience that the other spouse is too seldom at home. When there is much responsibility for household work, it is often regarded as too extensive and the other spouse is considered to be away from home too often. The inter-correlation of these three matters has been very significant.

37. Experiences of the relationship with the spouse are more loosely connected with this entity. Women seem to feel that their relationship is not good if their responsibility for household work is heavy. Sharing responsibility makes couples happier. The problems of reconciling family and work were bigger in families with small children under school age than in families with older children.

### ***Single people have reservations about families and partnership***

38. The attitudes of unmarried single people concerning family life and relationships were also examined. Single people answered to these statements: “A regular partnership may involve mental or physical subordination (1998) / violence (2001)”, “The household work inevitable in a family would limit my leisure activities and hobbies”, “A regular partnership as such would reduce my freedom of choice in my own life”, and “It would be difficult to agree over money matters in a family”.

39. It was commonly agreed that a regular partnership might involve subordination or violence. This is also the only statement where the views of men and women differed statistically significantly. It also seems that cherishing leisure activities and hobbies have received more emphasis at the turn of the millennium. By contrast, only few unmarried single people considered agreeing over money matters a problem of family life.

40. The examination concerned the attitudes to general statements, not any personal reasons for being single. If we presume, however, that these attitudes are not completely outside the solutions in the lives of the respondents, the replies would seem to reflect the generalisation of the “single way of life” emphasising personal freedom or at least a critical attitude to the old forms of married life.

### **3.4. Interaction between the sexes**

41. This chapter examines experiences of interaction between the sexes in various environments. First we wanted to look at the development during the examination period in patronising or disparaging attitude towards the opposite sex.

42. Patronising or disparaging attitudes towards the opposite sex were inquired by asking: “Are there in your various environments any members of the opposite sex (in the interview: men/women) who at least sometimes take a patronising or disparaging attitude to your comments or suggestions?” In this context the various environments denoted “workplace, school or study environment, associations and societies, relatives, neighbourhood, leisure environments and other friends”.

43. Patronising or disparaging attitudes by the opposite sex seem to be particularly connected with youth. In almost all environments, women more often than men have members of the opposite sex taking a patronising or disparaging attitude towards them. This difference was statistically significant in the following environments: school or study environment, workplace, association and society, and relatives. Among other friends the result concerning such attitudes has been either significant or symptomatic (0.088) during the research period.

44. To study development in the occurrence of sexual harassment, a new target of examination introduced in 2001 was the party guilty of it. Those who had fallen victim to a certain form of sexual harassment were asked “Who has or have made impertinent remarks concerning your body or sexuality?”, “Who has or have proposed sexual relations to you in an improper context?”, “Who has or have told dirty jokes or used expressions that you have considered insulting?” and “Who has or have made a physical pass at you?” The reply options were: “colleague, superior, customer or student, fellow student, teacher, family member, other relative, ex-spouse or companion, neighbour, person belonging to personal circle of friends, other acquaintance, unknown and other”.

45. The difference between the sexes is the greatest in telling dirty jokes. Men tell dirty jokes to women much more often than women do to men. Twenty-two per cent of women but only four per cent of men reported having experienced such harassment in 2001. The next biggest difference between the sexes is in making impertinent remarks about the body or sexuality of another person. Nineteen per cent of women and six per cent of men reported having suffered such remarks. In physical passes the difference between the sexes was such that 13 per cent of women and six per cent of men reported having had physical passes made at them.

46. Unknown molesters are the most common group of single molesters in all forms of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment does not, however, mainly occur between people unknown to each other. The shares of women mentioning someone they knew in different forms of sexual harassment were as follows: sixty-three per cent of those who had been proposed sexual relations in an inappropriate situation knew the person who proposed, 64 per cent of those who had experiences of physical passes, 74 per cent of those who had been victims of impertinent remarks concerning their body or sexuality and 87 per cent of those who had been told dirty jokes. All in all, the total share of known molesters is bigger than that of unknown ones in all forms of sexual harassment when all known molesters added together.

47. The barometers also examine fears of being subjected to violence. The barometers ask *whether the interviewee is afraid of becoming a victim of violence or whether he/she is on guard because of it*. The quoted environments where people might fear or be on their guard were: when alone outdoors at night, in public transport vehicles, on duty or in the family circle. As a result we saw that the way women experience the threat of violence varies strongly according to the environment. When it is the question of moving about in public places at night, those women who never fear or are on guard constitute a minority. Differences between the sexes in fearing are also very significant when it is the question of moving about outdoors or in public transport vehicles or when being alone at home or free-time residence. Those women who have already experienced sexual harassment fear more often than others.

48. In conclusion, the barometers provide answers to some interesting questions, such as how largely women and men in Finland agree about sharing of responsibilities, how the parents of families with children share everyday responsibilities at home, how gender equality is implemented at the workplace and whether an appreciative attitude towards women has spread to different areas of life.

#### SOURCES:

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