

Job Mobility in the Millennial Generation: The Roles of Gender and Education

Introduction

Millennials known as the Y generation consider work to be of less significance in their lives, prioritize leisure to a greater extent, and exhibit a weaker work ethic compared to individuals from the Baby Boomers and Generation X (Twenge, 2010). Moreover, Millennials are perceived as people who are motivated by higher pay, quickly become dissatisfied and leave their jobs (AbouAssi et al., 2021). Simultaneously, young employees expect job stability as much or even more than their counterparts from the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations at the same age (Twenge, 2010). Larasati and Aryanto (2020) point to Generation Y as a generation that, despite many advantages, such as self-confidence, independence and social activity, has a poor reputation as job-hoppers. Young people, being at the beginning of their careers, are more likely to switch jobs than their older colleagues (Steenackers and Guerry, 2016). Moreover, young women tend to job-hop significantly more than young men (Larasati and Aryanto, 2020).

In our study, we focus on Poland as an example of a country where unemployment among young people is particularly low compared to other European countries (Eurostat, 2023). Simultaneously, in Poland, traditional gender-based social roles are still considered important (Kasprzak, 2023). We used data from the first and second waves of the Polish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), which were conducted in 2010–2011 and 2014–2015, respectively. While the realm of Millennials' behaviour in the job market has been thoroughly explored, there are still some gaps that lead us to the following research questions: Q1) What are the differences in the impact of factors determining job mobility based on gender? (Q2) What impact does education have on the risk of job changes?

Our contribution is twofold. First, we aim to go beyond previous studies, by identifying differences by gender in the impact of factors such as education, age, and having a child on the risk of job mobility. Second, we make full use of the longitudinal approach, taking into account in the analysis not only job changes but also the duration of each job episode as well as changes over time in the values of other characteristics, such as education or marital status. Thus, the results of our study contribute to research on the importance of the role of gender and education in the employment decisions of young people and on the factors that predispose individuals to follow a specific career path.

Theoretical framework

There has been a long-standing debate in the literature about the gender differences in employment and wage (Wootton, 1997; Pedulla 2016; Blau and Kahn, 2017; Reichelt et al., 2021; Zamarro and Prados, 2021) as well as the relationships between paid work and motherhood (Boeckmann et al., 2015; Zhou, 2017; Cabello-Hutt, 2020; Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak 2020; Schmitt, 2021). In the initial stages of their careers, women are more likely than men to change employers (Steenackers and Guerry, 2016). This is related to the search for a rewarding and stable job that will allow for childcare after starting a family. Also, young Polish women, before starting a family, are highly active in their search for a stable position in the labour market that would enable them to pursue their professional lives and have children (Matysiak, 2009). Kaufman and White (2015), examining gender differences among Swedish workers, showed that having secure employment is more important for women than for men. Unfortunately, differences in women's professional mobility, particularly in relation to their maternal status, lead to disparities in their earnings and negatively impact their future professional careers (Looze, 2017).

The results of research on the relationship between education level and job changes are not fully consistent. Based on the research by Ignaczak et al. (2022) it can be concluded that higher education affects professional careers in two different ways. Well-educated employees are demanded by companies, which makes it easier for such people to find a job that meets their expectations and at the same time lowers the risk of future dismissal. On the other hand, higher demand in the labour market makes such people more confident when deciding to change an employer, because the action is less risky. Thus, workers with a college degree have a higher tendency to switch jobs frequently than individuals with a relatively low education level (Ignaczak et al., 2022). In contrast, Steenackers and Guerry (2016) in their study of the Belgian labour market state that the level of education has no impact on the job-hopping behaviour of an employee and having more job alternatives is not always connected to an increased tendency of job switching.

The primary driver for job changes among Millennials is the pursuit of job satisfaction (Campione 2015; Hassan et al., 2020). Generation Y's inclination for frequent job changes in pursuit of fulfilling work poses a challenge for employers in retaining skilled labour and coping with high turnover within this generation (Hassan et al., 2020). Companies wishing to retain Millennials in the organization should focus primarily on work-life balance issues, flexible time, and paid leave, and avoid extreme hours and irregular work schedules (Twenge, 2010; Campione 2015).

Data

To model the employment trajectories of young individuals in the Polish labour market, we utilized data from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the Generations and Gender Survey Poland (GGS-PL). The GGS-PL survey is part of an international research programme the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) designed to obtain information on demographic processes with consideration of the economic, social, and cultural context. In our analysis, we included respondents who, at the time of the second survey, were aged between 18 and 29 and had previously undertaken at least one job in the private or public sector (excluding self-employment). The upper age limit of the respondents was based on Arnett's (1998; 2006) findings, in which he states that young people reach full social maturity around the age of 30. Given the assumptions adopted in our study, the total number of participants was 543, with 49.63% being women (270) and 50.37% men (273).

Methods

In our study, we used a generalization of the Cox proportional hazard model. The base form of the Cox model is dedicated to estimating the occurrence of a single event (Cox, 1975). In 1982 Andersen and Gill proposed a generalised version of the Cox proportional hazards model dedicated to recurring event data called the Andersen-Gill model or intensity model (Andersen and Gill, 1982). This model relates the event recurrence intensity function to the covariates in a multiplicative manner. The Andersen-Gill model aims to estimate the same quantity as the Cox proportional hazard model, but the estimation is based on more information because the person who experienced the event remains at risk of subsequent events. The Andersen-Gill model has been extended into the frailty model by adding random effects to it, which allowed us to consider the unobservable heterogeneity of individuals. The model created in such a way is called the shared frailty model. It is assumed that for each individual there is more than one observation within each cluster and all the observations within the cluster share the same level of frailty. The use of the frailty term makes it possible to correct some or all of the errors in the coefficients caused by unobserved heterogeneity. The model is estimated with the use of the penalized partial likelihood method (Ripatti, Palmgren, 2000).

Results

We revealed that, among Polish Millennials, gender did not influence the risk of job change, whereas it did play a significant role in determining the impact of other factors on job mobility, including education level.

Gender disparities in the labour market often stem from traditionally held social roles for women, with a key aspect being motherhood (Kaufman and White, 2015; Steenackers and Guerry, 2016; Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak 2020). This is confirmed by the results of our research, which indicate that the impact of having a child on job mobility was significant only for women. Furthermore, women with at least one child had a lower risk of job changes compared to childless women. Based on our findings, it can be concluded that, in the case of men, having a child does not directly impact professional mobility. However, the stabilization of men's careers occurs with age and is associated with leaving the family home as well as marriage. In the case of women, these factors had no impact on professional mobility.

While women are, on average, better educated than men (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz, 2016), their employment situation is not necessarily more favourable. We found that the level of education mattered for job mobility for Polish Millennials, but this factor shaped the labour market behaviour of men more strongly than women. Nevertheless, our findings are in line with previous research, indicating that individuals with higher education exhibit a stronger inclination toward professional mobility compared to those with relatively lower levels of education (Ignaczak et al., 2022; Ng and Johnson, 2015).

Considering the employment sector, AbouAssi et al., (2021) note that American youth tend to change jobs frequently, but only within a given sector, not across sectors. Moreover, the strongest predictor of public sector employees changing jobs within the sector is job dissatisfaction. In the case of Polish Millennials, the employment sector was significant only for women, with the risk of changing jobs being lower for women employed in the private sector. It can therefore be concluded that the public sector, previously associated with employment stability, is no longer attractive to young people.

Frequent job changes among young individuals pose a significant challenge for employers. Considering the costs of turnover, employers have to make every effort to attract and retain valuable employees, particularly Millennials (Campione, 2015). The findings we have obtained can provide decision-makers with valuable insights for shaping strategies aimed at reducing employee turnover among Generation Y.

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