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Gender Equality in Finland in the light of Gender Equality Barometer 2017

Note by Statistics Finland*

Abstract

The sixth Finnish Gender Equality Barometer was conducted by Statistics Finland in 2017 and published in 2018 by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The Centre for Gender Equality Information at the National Institute of Health and Welfare was responsible for the coordination of the barometer project. The Gender Equality Barometer steering group provided expertise in support of its preparation.

The barometer provides information on opinions, attitudes and experiences related to gender equality in various areas of life. It plays an important role in assessing the gender equality situation in Finland, shedding light on the failures in achieving it, and contributing to the development of national gender equality policies and government measures. It is imperative for the barometer to keep up with the times. Each barometer has indeed involved an advance assessment of potential new topics to pursue, in the hopes of gaining further insight. This time, the barometer was given a more extensive overhaul than usual, with the addition of questions on school policies, belonging to minority groups, gender of the harasser and perceived gender of the respondent.

A slow change in attitudes towards gender equality has been taking place over the past 20 years. Women and men are believed to be slightly more equal than in past times. Overall,

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men felt that gender equality has already been achieved more often than women. On the other hand, the majority of women, felt that men are more privileged in society. The barometer also highlighted other issues.

Women, especially, continue to face sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour. They also experience gender-related disadvantages in the working environment more often than men, for example in terms of wages.

I. Introduction

1. The Gender Equality Barometer 2017¹ was published in June 2018. The first gender equality barometer was conducted in 1998 and has been repeated six times, at approximately three- or four-year intervals. The report was commissioned to Statistics Finland by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The project was coordinated by the Centre for Gender Equality Information at the National Institute of Health and Welfare. A steering group, chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, provided expertise in support of the preparation of the barometer.
2. The barometer provides information on opinions, attitudes and experiences relative to gender equality in various areas of life. It enables the monitoring of development of gender equality in different sectors of Finnish society. The barometer is an important tool in assessing the gender equality situation in Finland. The promotion of gender equality requires sustained effort, and as the findings of the barometer indicate, change in attitudes is fairly slow in the making.
3. As we can see from the time series, gender attitudes and experiences concerning gender equality have changed over time. For example, attitudes towards working women with families or mutual responsibilities of married or cohabiting spouses have changed towards greater equality in the past twenty years. Nowadays, only few believe that women with families should primarily stay at home, or that men should have the primary responsibility of providing for the family.

II. Methods and revisions

A. Survey method

4. Statistics Finland has conducted all six Gender Equality Barometers (1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012 and 2017). The 2017 barometer was conducted by means of telephone interviews in Finnish and Swedish, carried out between September and November 2017. The sample consisted of 3,000 randomly selected persons aged 15–74 who were residing in Finland. The sample was representative of the overall population in terms of age and gender, as well as geographical distribution.
5. The survey had a response rate of 56% (1,682 persons), which is slightly lower than in earlier barometers (77% in 1998) – development consistent with the trend of declining

¹The publication was published in English in March 2019: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161485>

survey response rates seen since the late 1990s. Half of the respondents were male and the other half, female. Only one person identified as other than male or female, which is why all charts and figures in the report feature only women and men.

6. Declining to participate or failure to reach the respondent (non-response) was not random. Men under the age of 30 with a low level of education are often overrepresented among non-responders. Hence a particular effort was made to reach young respondents, especially men. In addition, the data set bias arising from the non-response rate was ultimately addressed by assigning weights. However, in some analyses concerning smaller groups, the numbers of respondents remained fairly low. Consequently, in these cases, caution is warranted when making generalisations and conclusions. The impact of low respondent numbers should be borne in mind especially when examining a sub-group of respondents that is significantly lower in numbers than the entire respondent pool (for example respondents belonging to minority groups).
7. Random variation in the differences in opinions, attitudes and experiences of the various groups was analysed by testing the statistical significance of these differences. In many cases, there were clear and statistically significant differences between the responses given by women and men. Such findings are addressed in greater detail in the report. For some questions, no statistically significant difference between sexes could be observed. Findings of this kind have been included in the report when deemed interesting in terms of understanding the topic or other reported phenomena. However, the reservations concerning generalisation are always mentioned.

B. Revisions compared to the previous barometers

8. The questions have been revised occasionally to reflect topical issues and issues where additional data were required. The Gender Equality Barometer 2017 underwent a more profound revision than before to better cater for considerations such as the diversity of gender, relationships and families, the experiences of students and the inactive population and gender-related condescending and dismissive treatment and harassment online. Wholly new topics such as gender-related hate speech were also included in the barometer.
9. In previous barometers, respondents were not asked to state their gender themselves, instead, their gender was determined on the basis of recorded data (male/female), resulting in gender binarism. In the 2017 barometer, the interview form was amended to allow respondents to choose from the options of male, female, other, don't know and prefer not to say. In addition, the question on belonging to a minority group (e.g. people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and sexual or gender minorities) made its first appearance in the current barometer.
10. The questions directed at students and school pupils were revised and the section on gender equality and policies at schools was expanded. Besides wage-earners, entrepreneurs and students, also people who were unemployed, laid off, on family leave or informal caregivers were asked questions on topics such as perception of gender-based disadvantage in job-seeking. Wholly new questions relevant to the lives of men in particular were also added to the 17 barometer, such as the question on whether men are treated as fully empowered parents in public services, such as child health clinics or day care. Another new question involved the fairness of conscription only applying to men.
11. The questions on condescending or dismissive treatment and harassment were updated to take into account for the first time also same-sex harassment and allowing respondents to report the gender of their harasser as male, female or other, thus providing more detailed

data on the harassment experiences of men in particular. Other new topics introduced in this barometer involved the sharing of household expenses and the satisfaction of the spouses in how these expenses are shared.

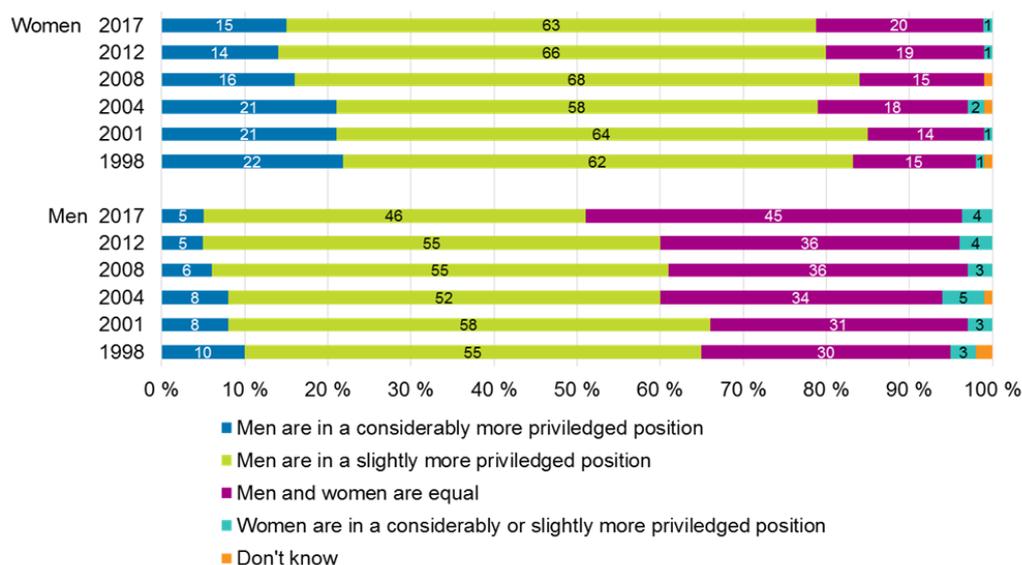
12. Themed articles by researchers supplying further and deeper analysis of the findings were published as an own publication in March 2019. Utilisation of the research data will be expanded, as the survey data will be deposited with the Finnish Social Science Data Archive. The data will be available to researchers on request.

III. Results: Attitudes in many ways positive but experiences reflecting inequalities persist

C. Attitudes regarding gender equality

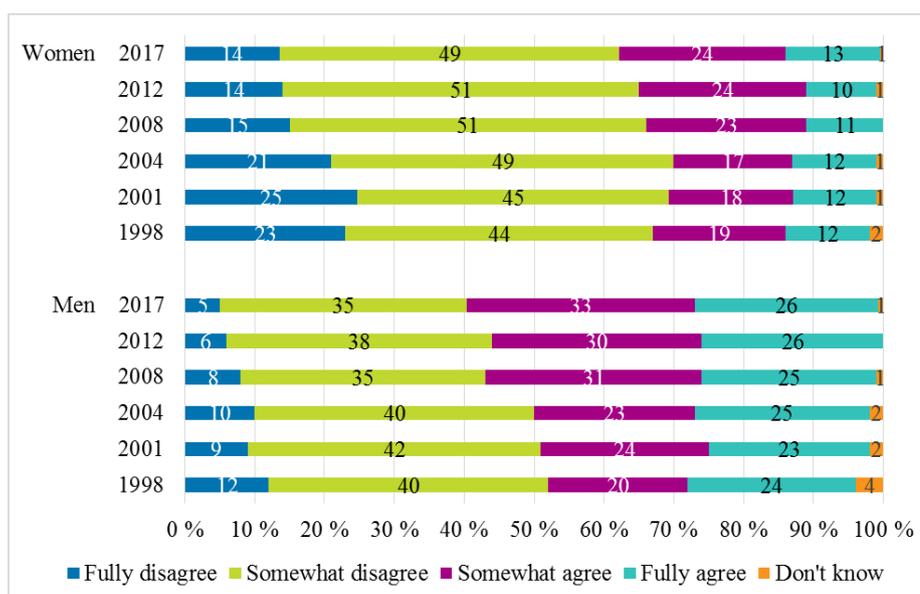
13. Two thirds of the respondents considered men to be in a more privileged position in society than women. As in earlier barometers, men and younger age groups in the 2017 barometer were more likely than others to consider that gender equality had already been achieved. When comparing rural and urban residents, there appears to be little difference between the opinions of men and women. When examined according to level of education, the groups most likely to consider men and women to be equal were men (51%) and women (33%) whose highest educational qualification was the matriculation examination certificate.
14. The proportion of men who believe that women and men are equal has increased by 15 percentage points over the course of 20 years, while the equivalent change among women is five percentage points. Roughly half of both women and men believed that gender equality would increase in the future. Nine in ten women and men believed that also men would benefit from greater equality.
15. One fifth of the respondents believed that the man has primary responsibility in providing for the family. Four in five respondents wanted men to be more involved in the care and parenting of their children.

Figure 1. Views on position of women and men today in Finland 1998-2017, %



16. Nearly 60% of men but only just over 30% of women believed that the opportunities of women in working life were equal to those of men. There were also clear differences in views depending on age of respondent: the older the respondent, the more likely the respondent was to believe the opportunities of women in working life to be inferior to those of men. This holds true for women and men alike.
17. Overall, the respondents' views as to the equal opportunities for women in working life have grown slightly more positive over the 20 years during which the survey has been conducted, yet men have consistently expressed considerably more positive views on this topic than women.

Figure 2. The opportunities of women in working life are as good as those of men 1998-2017, %



18. In all Gender Equality Barometers, men have reported more frequently having asked for a pay rise than women: in the 2017 barometer, 44 per cent of men compared to only slightly over one third of women had asked for a rise. One in four female full-time wage-earners reported having experienced some gender-based disadvantage in the area of pay. Nine in ten respondents called for more active measures on the part of social partners and employers to eliminate unjustified differences in pay.
19. Nine in ten respondents believed that the increasingly active participation of women in politics is necessary to broaden the expertise base in politics. Nonetheless, only 44% of men and 52% of women believe women and men to be equally suited to positions of responsibility in all sectors of politics. The sector with the most gender-segregated views was defence policy. In addition, over 40% of both women and men considered it unfair that conscription only applies to men. Women considered conscription for men only to be unfair more often than men.

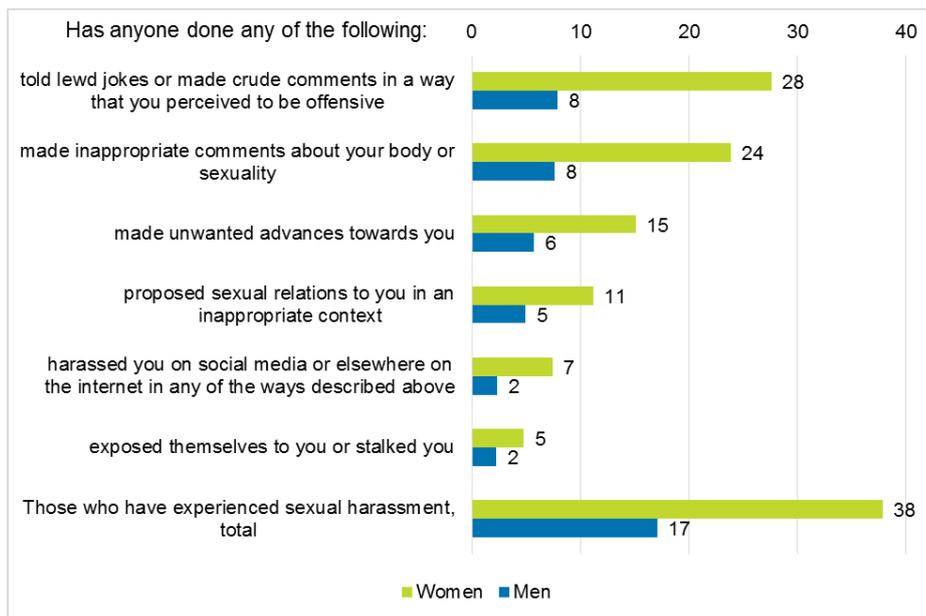
D. Sexual harassment and gender-related hate speech

20. Women had experienced inappropriate conduct clearly more frequently than men. Sexual harassment in the past two years had been experienced by 38% of women and 17% of men. Young women were much more likely to face this type of conduct as 56% of women under

35 had experienced sexual harassment in the past two years. In comparison, the corresponding percentage for men under 35 was 21%. The most common forms of harassment were offensive lewd jokes, crude comments and inappropriate remarks about a person’s body or sexuality. Women were mainly harassed sexually by men, while men were harassed sexually by both women and men.

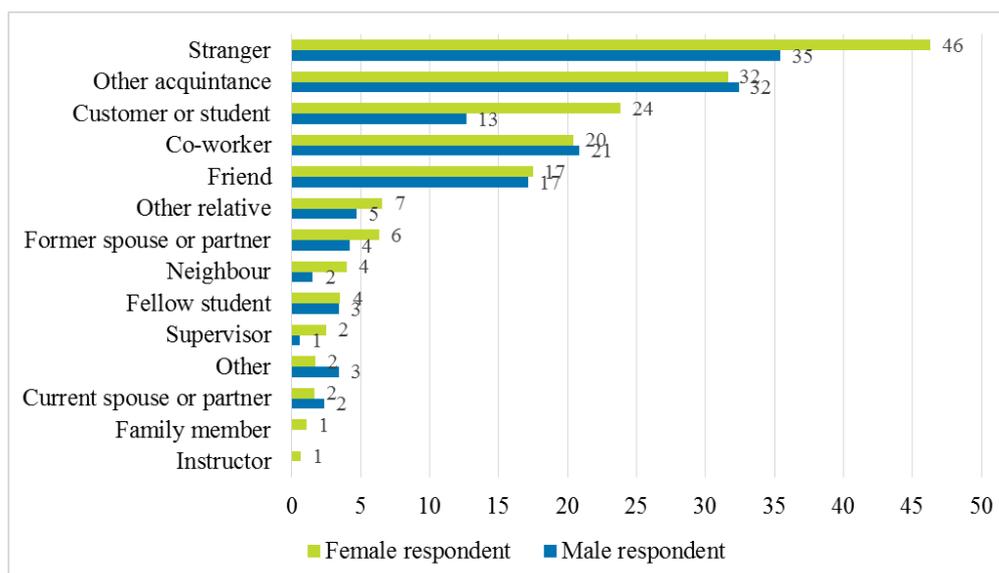
21. Majority of women who had experienced harassment reported that the harasser was a man. This was irrespective of the form of harassment. Men, on the other hand, reported having been harassed both by women and by men. In these cases, the harassment was more often verbal.

Figure 3. Respondents who have experienced various kinds of sexual harassment in the past two years, %



22. Women under 35 and aged 35–54 reported sexual harassment slightly more frequently in the Gender Equality Barometer 2017 than in previous barometers, whereas the proportion of women aged 55 and older had remained relatively unchanged. Men under 35 and aged 35–54 reported somewhat fewer experiences of sexual harassment in 2017 than in previous reporting years. The slight increase in reported experiences of harassment may mean that more people have encountered harassment. However, the increase could also be due to the better recognition of harassment owing to e.g. increased public discussion on the topic.
23. Both women and men reported that the harasser was most frequently a stranger (reported by 46% of women experiencing harassment and 35% of men experiencing harassment). One in four women experiencing harassment mentioned their harasser having been a customer or a student, while one in five named the harasser as a co-worker. One fifth of the men experiencing harassment also reported the harasser to have been a co-worker. 17% of women and men who had experienced harassment, reported that the harasser was a friend. 6% of women and 4% of men reported the harasser to have been a former spouse or partner. Current spouse or partner was reported by 2% of the women and men who had experienced harassment. This option was now included for the first time in the Gender Equality Barometer.

Figure 4. Harassers of those reported having experienced sexual harassment, %



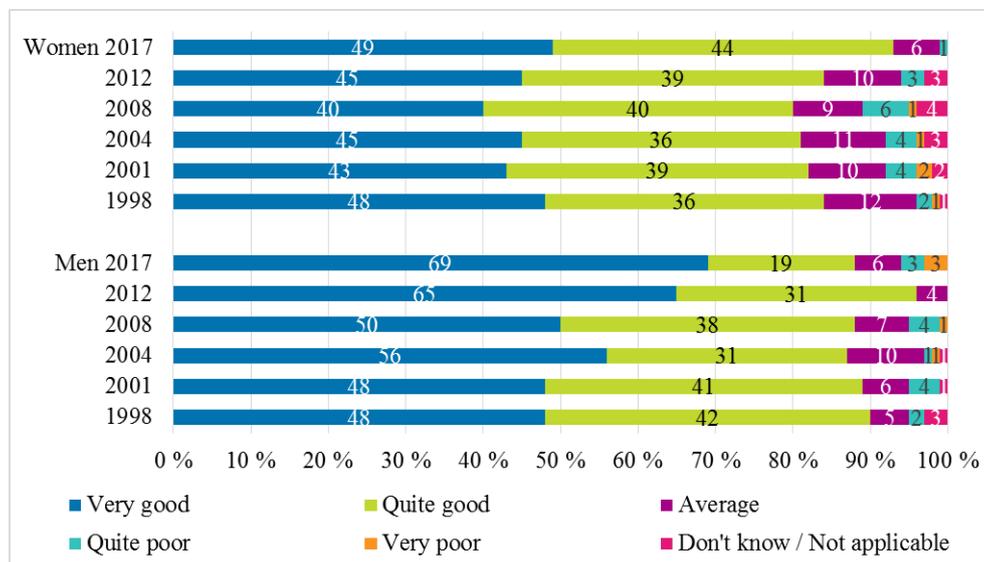
24. At least one incidence of gender-related hate speech in the past two years was reported by 15% of women and 8% of men. Furthermore, most of women and more than 1/3 of men had sometimes feared becoming a victim of violence or had been on guard when out alone in the evening or at night. The barometer shows that both fear of violence as well as hate speech changes the way people act: respondents, who were afraid of becoming victims of violence or hate speech, reported significantly more often than others that they had changed the way they act because of the fear, for example at work or on social media. Based on the findings, women in particular are more exposed to hate speech if they belong to a minority (respondents who reported that they belonged to a minority group).
25. In addition to sexual harassment, half of women had experienced otherwise dismissive or condescending treatment because of their gender, as had nearly 1/3 of men. According to the respondents, women were most likely to face this kind of treatment in the workplace and in their leisure time when among relatives, while for men, the most common occurrences were in the workplace and when among friends.

E. Gender equality in schools

26. Students and school pupils considered that gender equality was well achieved at their own school. Men more likely than women considered the achievement to be very good. More than nine in ten women estimated the achievement of gender equality at their school to be very good or quite good, while among men this view was held by nearly nine in ten. However, there is a difference in the opinions of men and women concerning the degree of gender equality achievement. Men were more likely than women to consider the achievement of gender equality in schools to be very good.
27. Compared to the findings of the earlier Gender Equality Barometers, women were somewhat more likely than before to consider the achievement of gender equality at their school to be very good or quite good, while men were more likely to consider the achievement of gender equality to be very good. The proportion of men who chose the option 'quite good' was in decline in this survey as well. Generally speaking, the views of men are nonetheless in line with those indicated in previous surveys, the only exception being the 2012 survey in which

as many as 96 per cent of men estimated the achievement of gender equality at their school to be very good or quite good.

Figure 5. Gender equality achievement at own school 1998-2017, % (full-time students)

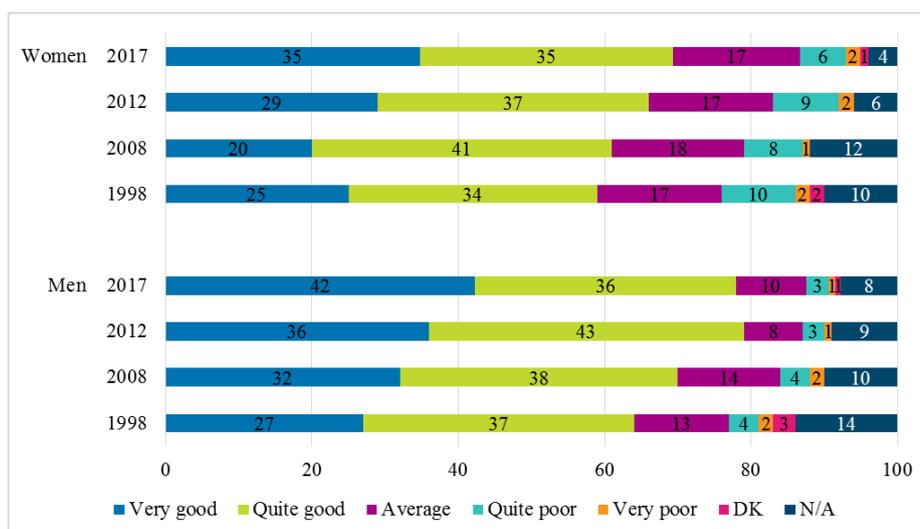


28. The majority of students felt that gender had no effect on how teachers treated or graded them. However, one third of students considered that their learning materials included gender stereotypes.
29. Half of the men and one third of the women who were full-time students reported that gender and sexual minorities are little addressed in their instruction. Students perceived that their friends supported them in choosing also a field or profession where their gender is in a minority. According to the students, harassment and bullying related to gender and sexuality continues to occur in schools and had been observed by around one in ten of both women and men.

F. Gender equality in the workplace

30. An increasing number of wage-earners felt that gender equality in their workplace was achieved very well (36% women, 42% men). In the view of full-time wage-earners, gender equality was best achieved in gender-balanced workplaces. Women aged 25–34 and 55 or older were most likely than others to consider gender equality achievement in their workplace to be poor. The proportion of those who considered gender equality to have been achieved very well has increased among both women and men in the past five years.
31. Respondents living in urban areas considered that gender equality has been achieved better in their workplace than did respondents living in rural areas and the difference in views between those living in urban and rural areas was greater among women than men. Women living in urban areas considered gender equality to have been achieved at their workplace to clearly better extent than women living in rural areas. Among men, the disparity between urban and rural areas was smaller.

Figure 6. Achievement of gender equality at own workplace 1998-2017, %

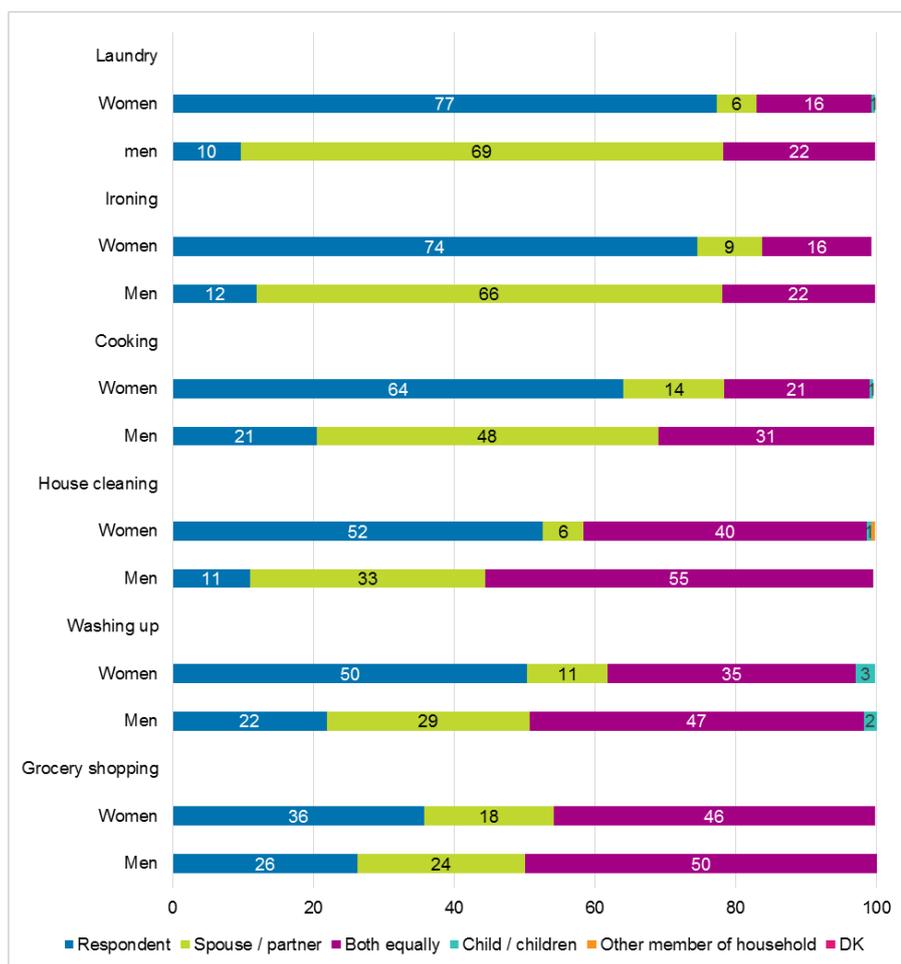


32. Women (more than half) had encountered gender-based disadvantage in their work clearly more often than men (a quarter). One fourth of female full-time wage-earners encountered at least some gender-based disadvantage in pay, professional recognition, division of work load and career advancement.
33. Men had asked for a pay rise more frequently than women. Among full-time wage-earners, 44% had been encouraged to pursue more challenging roles (slightly more for women than for men). Sexual or gender-based harassment or name-calling in the workplace had been observed by 14% of women and around 10% of men who were full-time wage-earners. Approximately one third of full-time wage-earners estimated that transgender or intergender people would be likely to face discrimination in their workplace.

G. Reconciliation of work and family life

34. The estimations of how easy taking family leave is have largely become more positive since 2001, with the proportions of those considering it easy for men to take parental leave and child care leave increasing the most. Taking family leave was still considered easier for women than for men in the workplace (particularly wage-earners in the private sector). Women estimated taking long family leave to be easy more frequently than men. Respondents working in the public sector were more likely to consider taking various kinds of family leave to be easy at their workplace than those working in the private sector.
35. The majority of respondents considered that it would not be difficult to take time off work to care for a sick child. However, men estimate the opportunities of women to stay at home to care for a sick child as clearly better than women do.
36. Responsibility for housework continues to be divided along traditional lines in two-spouse families: women are more frequently responsible for household work and men for various kinds of repairs and maintenance. In two-parent families women reported being most often solely responsible for communication with the school or day care, caring for a sick child, child care and making sure children do their homework.

Figure 7. Division of housework responsibilities in married and cohabiting families 2017, who is most often responsible (%)



37. More frequently than men, women felt they shouldered too much of the housework (1/10 often, almost 1/4 sometimes). Men tended to report of shared responsibility in those housework activities in which women felt they were responsible alone.
38. Arguments between the spouses most frequently have to do with division of family responsibilities, money, and child care and transportation. Women were more likely than men to consider that they had enough to say within the family in decision-making. Joint expenses are most frequently shared equally in households even though men were estimated to have a higher income than women. However, the majority of the respondents were satisfied with the way expenses were shared and believed that their partner was also satisfied with it.

IV. Conclusions

39. The Gender Equality Barometer 2017 gives fascinating insights into the attitudes and experiences of women and men in different life circumstances and positions in Finland. The

time series meanwhile demonstrate that some of the key findings have remained relatively unchanged from one barometer to the next. For example, experiences of sexual harassment reported by women of different ages, despite being slightly on the increase, have nonetheless remained similar.

40. The conflict between positive views regarding the gender equality situation on the one hand and the personal experiences demonstrating gender equality failures on the other is indeed a feature that unites the Gender Equality Barometers of all years.
 41. The barometer also shows that other variables such as age and ethnical background, alongside with gender, make a difference in attitudes and experiences concerning the themes of the barometer. New findings of the barometer show, for example, that women belonging to a minority encounter hate speech more frequently than others and that men encounter also sexual harassment by other men.
 42. The barometers provide valuable information about the development of gender equality in the various sectors of society, as well as the remaining challenges ahead. The barometer also demonstrates the importance of examining gender across factors such as age, education, area of residence and minority group membership. The Gender Equality Barometers are invaluable tools for assessing the gender equality situation in society, working towards equality, as well as the drafting of gender equality policies.
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