

Does Integration Change Gender Attitudes? The Effect of Randomly Assigning Women to Traditionally Male Teams (Dahl et al., 2018)

Norway, a progressive country by American standards, has a segregated labor market. Women tend to work as kindergarten teachers, nurses, and social workers, while men tend to work as firefighters, pilots, and programmers. Stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles could play a role in this segregation by deterring women from working in a men-dominated occupation (like STEM fields or military). Can gender attitudes change when women join men-dominated occupations?

One Sentence Summary

Men soldiers are more likely to agree that “mixed-gender teams perform as well or better than same-gender teams” when they have a female teammate. Nevertheless, this effect is not persistent and men soldiers quickly revert to their original gender attitudes. Female teammates also led to a reduction of segregation within military occupations.

Main Findings

Only 13% of Norwegian soldiers are female. Each year the drafted candidates, both men and women have mandatory drafting since 2015, participate in a boot camp in which they live, train, and work with five other teammates. Due to the gender composition, all members are usually male.

Dahl et al., (2018) randomly assigned only male squads and gender-mixed squads in the 2014 bootcamp. The authors then administered 3 surveys to elicit gender attitudes of male soldiers before and after the bootcamp¹. Male soldiers who were in a mix-gendered squad had more egalitarian attitudes right after the bootcamp. For instance, male soldiers in mix-gendered squads are 14% more likely to agree that mixed-gendered squads perform as well or better than same-gender squads. However, male soldiers that were in a mixed-gendered squad reverted to their gender attitudes prior to the bootcamp in just 6 months.

Female exposure also translated into less segregated occupations within the military. Male soldiers who were in a mixed-gendered squad chose occupations dominated by women, such as medical assistant or administrative assistant.

¹ The authors administered two surveys. One right after the boot camp and another six months after the bootcamp.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has interesting public policy implications, especially regarding gender quotas². Even though Bertrand et al. (2019) showed how inefficient are female board members quotas, I believe that quotas could be more efficient in working teams, like this paper suggest, rather than imposing quotas on leadership.

References

- Dahl, G., Kotsadam, A., Rooth, D.-O., 2018. Does Integration Change Gender Attitudes? The Effect of Randomly Assigning Women to Traditionally Male Teams. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24351>.
- Bertrand, M., Black, S.E., Jensen, S., Lleras-Muney, A., 2019. Breaking the Glass Ceiling? The Effect of Board Quotas on Female Labour Market Outcomes in Norway. Rev. Econ. Stud. 86, 191–239. <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdy032>.

² Gendered quotas state that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a group.