

Reading Notes on Gender Gaps in Performance: Evidence from Young Lawyers

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Based on the question that whether the gender gap in employment among high-skilled professionals is caused by the gender differences in job performance, researchers Ghazala Azmat and Rosa Ferrer (2017) study the reasons that lead to the difference in gender performance of young lawyers in the United States. They adopt the two common measures in the legal profession: the hours billed to clients, and the revenue generated from the new clients to examine the annual performance between males and females. Since they find male lawyers have better performance than female lawyers in these two aspects, they put forward three possible influential factors of this phenomenon: discrimination in the workplace, child rearing, and career concerns. Upon analyzing the data, they conclude that the aspiration of being a partner lawyer is the primary reason while raising young children is an important reason of gender gaps in performance.

Wood et al. (1993) claim that the problem of the significant gender earnings gap among lawyers after limiting the influence of confounding variables is unsolvable. Bertrand and Hallock (2011) also point out that other high-skilled professions have similar characteristics of gender wage difference like legal profession. In terms of reasons for gender wage difference. Altonji and Blank (1999) state that women's caregiving responsibilities of young children influence their performance and earnings. Since they have to spend time and energy taking care of their children, it is hard for them to focus on career advancement. Besides, people who have stronger career aspirations tend to achieve better performance in the work (Fama 1980; Holmstrom 1999). Compared with female lawyers, male lawyers prefer to work hard to become the partner of the firm and therefore outperform female lawyers. These theories provide the theoretical support for Ghazala Azmat and Rosa Ferrer to conduct the research which concentrates on the gender performance difference in lawyer profession.

Regarding the experiment data, the authors use data from After the JD, which is a nationally representative dataset that contains questions such as the job characteristics and family background of young lawyers in the United States. This dataset was first formed in 2002 and completed with more detailed data on the work situation of the lawyers in 2007. Based on these datasets, Ghazala Azmat and Rosa Ferrer have applied multiple linear regression analysis to analyze the possible influential factors of gender gaps in performance. They find the bill hours for male lawyers are 150 hours per year more than female lawyers and the new client revenue which comes from male lawyer is much higher than female lawyers. Then the authors make a specific analysis of effect of different independent variables on these two dependent variables: the hours billed to clients, and the revenue generated from the new clients.

At first, after controlling other variables such as the individual characteristics, region fixed effects, and education level, the authors conclude that discrimination from employers can not lead to the gender gap in performance, which can be seen from Table 6 and Table 7. Even though the authors have controlled the variable of the number of assignments and the hours billed to females, the coefficient didn't change significantly. However, they believe that raising pre-school children influences female lawyers' work performance since females shoulder more child-care responsibility than males, which can be seen from Table 9 that the variable of females with the child aged below 4 years old has a negative effect on female lawyers' hours billed. In the end, the authors claim that the aspiration of becoming a partner lawyer, as one of the career concerns, is the crucial factor that contributes to the gender gap in performance. Male lawyers have a higher level of aspirations of professional advancement, and this has a positive impact on hours billed and new client revenue. From Table 10, the authors show that the aspirations benefit males by creating more new client revenue and therefore have a better performance than female lawyers.

In summary, the authors prove that the wage gap between males and females resulted from the differences in job performance. They have made good use of the clear common standard of measurement of the legal profession in explaining the gender gap in performance among high-skilled occupations. They conclude that pre-school child-rearing is the important reason, and the career aspiration is the main reason for gender gaps in career outcomes, and this research has reference value for promoting workplace gender equality in high-skilled professions. However, this paper still has some limitations. For instance, since the data is composed of young lawyers and the time interval between two surveys is short, it is possible that some females have not yet had married or had children and the data might be inaccurate. Thus, the conclusion that pre-school child rearing influences female's work performance might need more data support.

References

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