



# Predictors and outcomes of job search behavior: The moderating effects of gender and family situation <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

This study explored differences in the antecedents and consequences of job search behavior depending on gender and family situation in a large, nationwide sample of the Dutch population. Using Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB), we found no gender differences in the antecedents of job seeking. However, family situation did affect the relations in the TPB, such that personal attitude was a slightly weaker, and perceived social pressure a stronger predictor of job seeking for individuals with families than for singles. Concerning the consequences, job search behavior significantly predicted the chances of finding (new) employment, but not job satisfaction in the new job and the level of agreement between the obtained and wanted job.

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## 1. Introduction

In many Western countries persistent gender differences exist in the context of employment. Labor force participation among women is substantially lower than among men in both Europe (Eurostat, 2002) and the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). Moreover, in most European countries the unemployment levels among women continue to be higher than among men (Eurostat, 2002). Furthermore, research has often found that women are employed in a narrow range of female-dominated jobs that are generally worse in terms of pay and opportunities for training and advancement than non-female-dominated jobs (Drentea, 1998; Mau & Kopischke, 2001; Mencken & Winfield, 2000). Also in The Netherlands some evident employment-related differences exist between men and women. Unemployment levels among women, for example, are about twice as high as among men (4.7% compared to 2.5%), and the labor force participation is lower among women than among men (53.4% compared to 77.1%; Statistics Netherlands, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of employed women in The Netherlands have part-time jobs, compared to only a small minority of the employed men (Portegijs, Boelens, & Keuzenkamp, 2002).

One factor that may affect these employment-related differences between men and women is individual job search behavior. Previous research has indicated that job search behavior is an important predictor of finding employment (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001) and employment quality (Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Werbel, 2000). With regard to the gender differences in employment patterns, the question arises whether the relation of job search behavior with finding employment and employment quality is similar for men and women.

Most studies on gender and job seeking have focused on gender differences in the use of formal versus informal job seeking strategies (Huffman & Torres, 2001; Straits, 1998), and on the effects of using formal versus informal search strategies on employment outcomes such as earnings in the obtained job and gender typicality of the obtained job (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001; Leicht & Marx, 1997; Mencken & Winfield, 2000). The first purpose of the current study was to investigate gender differences in the relation of job search behavior in a more general form with a broader range of employment outcomes, including job attainment and job satisfaction.

The second purpose related to gender differences in the predictors of job search behavior. Several studies have investigated the predictors of job search behavior in general. Kanfer et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis showed that gender has only a small direct effect on job search behavior ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .05$ ), indicating that men were more likely to engage in job seeking than women. A question that remains, relates to the extent to which the relations of the various predictors with job seeking are similar for men and women.

Gender differences not only exist in the context of paid employment but also in relation to household tasks and care. According to traditional gender roles, men have paid jobs while women engage in domestic activities (Eagly, 1987). These roles still

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