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Across Gender. Work Situations of Rural Women in the South of Spain

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Abstract

Even though undeniable social changes such as gender discrimination have occurred, the forms of access to public education and employment, as well as the conditions under which these jobs are carried out, are often loaded with sexist biases. Using the biographical-narrative method and a combination of techniques and strategies for gathering and analysing information, the current paper presents an empirical longitudinal study examining the labour situation of rural women who participate in different employment -professional and guidance- training activities. The women's perceptions and interpretations of their training and professional situations were analysed, as well as their opportunities related to finding a job when they completed their education. Additionally, this study examined the extent to which the public services for employment training were adequate and functional for women regarding whether these services achieved their anticipated aims. We concluded gender inequalities on the employment situation of women, and the importance of implementing urgent measures to fight against the employment crisis from an equality way.

Keywords: gender equality, rural women, professional development, labour identity, employment training, professional guidance services

A capitalist industrial society generates economic, political, social and cultural systems in which work and labour relationships are characterized by features including unemployment, division of work spaces into formal and informal, labour regulations through contracts, social class differences (e.g., owners of means of production and proletariat) and a prevailing mentality characterized by individualism and production. This situation has been exacerbated since the years from 2007-2008 when Spain began an intense period of crisis that destroyed the labour rights of citizens, which particularly affected women (Le Feuvre & Roseneil, 2014).

The VII Report on exclusion and social development in Spain (Lorenzo Gilzanz, 2014) by the European Commission (2015) revealed that the highest percentage of poverty was evident for women and that this trend showed greater increases for this group. Gender differences between the sexes, particularly regarding employment, affect all aspects of women's lives. This Report also highlighted that these poverty trends were evident at the young and old age periods, where care is most needed (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). Thus, gender factors affect socioeconomic relationships, and the concentration of poverty in women indicates that discrimination among the principal groups of power promotes women's social exclusion.

Another effect of a globalized society is an increase in unemployment, primarily in underemployment. Unemployment is a social phenomenon that affects the general population, particularly during times of crisis such as the present. It is the most notable characteristic of the current labour market and it affects specific categories or social groups to a greater extent. Women have been identified as one group that is seriously affected by this situation, particularly when the interrelationships of gender, age and qualifications are considered (Susinos, Calvo & García, 2014). At the social level, these assertions are supported by Law 6/2014 from December 30th in which the Budget of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia 2015 clearly identified an inequality gap with a focus on gender with regard to people who maintained employment.

Women's employment is associated with specific factors, such as unemployment, job inactivity, job type, temporariness and instability, the underground economy and precariousness. Suárez-Ortega (2013), Torns, Carrasquer, Moreno, & Borrás (2013) and Le Feuvre & Roseneil (2014) posited that these characteristics generate a typical female job profile. All of

these characteristics of the labour market are present in a Welfare State. The concept of a Welfare State is a proposal or political model through which the State provides its citizens with certain resources or social guarantees. According to Clayton & Pontusson (1998), public services constitute one main factor within a Welfare State as they are created in response to social demands. For example, public services related to occupational training were created to achieve the objectives proposed at the Lisboa Summit 2000, which were conducted during the period from 2008-2011. Currently, the Cohesion Policy of the European Union is being conducted from 2014-2020, European Union, 2011-2012.

To examine social indicators, it is important to focus on the historical and contextual referents of the Spanish society. Spain is a country that has been whipped by a dictatorship (Torns et al., 2013), with consequences evident regarding the development of public services related to education, health, social services and professional training. During this dictatorship, a strong division of sexual roles that resulted in important gender inequalities dominated the Spanish society. Women were cast aside, and an emphasis was placed on their dependence on men, either their fathers or husbands. This lack of individual freedom was reflected in society, as women were deprived of any privilege. A married woman could not work, she was not allowed to manage goods, her partner could give her children through adoption without her consent and neither divorce nor abortion were allowed (Gijón Town Hall, Women's Foundation, 2009; Susinos, Calvo & García, 2014). Women were only intended for family care; therefore, educating them was useless, which increased the legal disparities between women and men.

By the mid-1970s, equality between men and women started to become evident when the discrimination that primarily affected women became visible. 1975 marked the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of a social democratic course, which included writing of the Spanish Constitution and the development of an equal opportunities policy. According to Salas & Comabella (1999), one remarkable aspect of this time period was the prioritizing of equal opportunities for women at the educational and work levels, which were emphasized as a prerequisite for women's autonomy to develop their economic independence from men. Yet, it was not until 1978 when a democratic regime was established in Spain that people's life conditions became of social relevance as a matter of

political importance. Institutions, public services, social measures and actions related to the quality of people's personal and labour lives began to be created, with a focus on those related to social equity and genre relationships.

The new constitutional framework and the subsequent creation of the Woman's Institute (1983) initiated the Equal Opportunities Plans within the Spanish context, as they developed the objectives and the axis of important actions regarding employment and economic development. These improvements were associated with the development of equality policies in the European framework, in which Mainstreaming was a work strategy that included genre in a transverse way in all transnational policies to stress the necessity of coordination from the European sphere to the local one. These measures supported the development of public resources, for example, professional training and guidance service to aid in obtaining a job. Thus, Spanish women had greater access to resources to aid in their qualification and labour insertion than ever before.

Employment training activities were promoted by the Andalusian Autonomous Government, the Andalusian Service for Employment, the Andalusian Woman's Institute, county councils and local governments. These activities provided women with training for the performance of an occupation and access to the labour market. However, recently, these policies and resources have suffered a number of general setbacks some that have specifically affected gender.

Spanish and Andalusian Women's Employment Conditions: Inequalities in Numbers

Unemployment, Activity and Inactivity

Although numerous equal opportunity policies, measures and resources currently exist, women's employment and living conditions are still discriminatory when compared to those of men. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2005, 2015), the percentage of unemployment in Spanish 24.4% (National Statistics, 2015), with the rates of 23.6% for men and 25.4% for women. The National Institute of Statistics and the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and Equality (2015) state that the gender gap is at 10.6 points (population 16 years and older), and it becomes more evident

for the age group from 55-64 years (16.5 points) and 25-54 years (9.9 points). Data from 2012 reveal that the gender-gap in Spanish are 2 points higher than that of Europe. Spain has a female unemployment rate of 18.31% and 25.4%, respectively, and a male unemployment of 17.62% and 23.6%, respectively. These two percentages refer to as only one factor (female vs. male unemployment rates) is discussed. Moreover, the rate of female activity is 51.55%, where as the rate of male activity is 68.89%. Currently, the activity rate is approximately 50% across both cases, with greater employment losses due to the masculine labour crisis.

Data from the Autonomous Regions (2015) reveal that Andalusia has an unemployment rate of 34.8%, and, specifically, the province of Seville has an unemployment rate of 32.8%. According to the Andalusian Statistics Institute (2005, 2013-2014), the number of Andalusian women who participated in training activities for employment increased from 9,440 to 33,069 (miles). Although these figures have remained consistent in recent years, the gender gap with regard to the percentage of employed persons persists (43.9% of Andalusian women and 45.4% of Spanish women; data from 2014). This situation is exacerbated for certain professional sectors, such as construction, industry and agriculture, with respective data of 9.5%, 20.2% and 26.6% in Andalusia and 8.4%, 25.1% and 26.1% in Spain. Moreover, the rates for the formative or superior level begin to equalize or are equitable (54% female; 51% Spanish and Andalusian), whereas the gender gap is most pronounced among women without qualifications and those with only primary or high school level educations (keeping occupancy data between 35.5 to 45.9%). Currently, self-employment is an option for many people, yet this has a pronounced gender gap in the business world with only 30.8% of Andalusian women listed as entrepreneurs and 32.6% of Spanish women compared to their male peers¹.

Labour Precariousness, Low Remuneration and the Underground Economy

Many women are employed within the underground economy or in other conditions of precariousness. In our field, there are only a few studies centred on such processes, whereas research from the economy perspective reveals the importance the submerged work, unregulated, have especially in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. Schneider (1997) and Torns et

al. (2013) showed how the underground economy is a characteristic of the labour market that has expanded in recent years; therefore, it is evident in our study context. Research has examined the underground economy within the shoe sector, revealing that the effects of labour instability are clear. The general characteristics of the underground employment among women are as follows: a lack of stability, a lack of qualifications and professional promotion, a lack of legal regulations, discriminatory contracting, few possibilities for promotion and a lack of capacity for associations and claims.

Job insecurity increased in the past decade (2005-2015), which destroyed fixed and permanent contracts and labour rights. This situation strongly affected women (e.g., data published in 2012 show that in 2008 Andalusia ended contracts 110,214 men and 94,796 women were registered, which were drastically eliminated; data from 2012 recorded 62,922 permanent contracts for Andalusian men and 54,132 for women). These data reveal that flexibility, instability and temporariness are increasingly evident characteristics of the labour market in Andalusia (four of ten workers are temporarily employed, which is higher than national and international rates). It is important to note that these figures are official, yet Spanish, and specifically in Andalusia, there is evidence of undocumented work (Torns et al, 2013), which increases in periods of crisis such as the present. There are only a few studies examining this type of submerged work, but studies focusing on the rural context indicate that working conditions worsen in these areas. Duran & Paniagua (2000) stated that women in these rural contexts perform more jobs than in other contexts, yet it is difficult to measure their employment rates here. The employment conditions are also associated with the opportunities that are present in different contexts. For example, the rural labour market offers fewer possibilities for employment than the urban one, given that, as Langreo (2000) highlighted, rural women face certain conditions.

Although the social situation and women's lives in Spain have improved with the social democratic process, there are still numerous instances of social and gender discrimination to overcome. As, at an economic level, despite increases in female occupation levels, Spain has a low female participation rate in the labour market (i.e., "formal"). This low rate is associated with Spain having few members of the labour force working in the public sector. Spain also needs to generate an enterprise network to

create quality employment options (Law 11/2013 from July 26th, which included measures to support entrepreneurship and stimulate growth than job creation; Decree 219/2011 from June 28th, which approved the Plan for the Promotion of Entrepreneurial Culture in the Public Education System of Andalusia; and Law 14/2013 from September 27th, which supported entrepreneurs and internationalization²). In total, 65.5% of self-employed individuals are male, whereas only 34.4% are female. Finally, according to the National Statistics Institute (2015), the wage gap is 76.1%, with a significant difference in the wage for women (total reported 19,537.3 euros) compared to the wage for men (25,682.1 euros).

The Research Process

Purpose of the Current Study

This study analysed the labour processes and life changes experienced by adult women from the province of Seville. We focused on women who did not have many academic or professional opportunities during earlier stages of their lives and who currently wanted to attain employment in public services through occupational training activities.

The women who participated in this study were from rural contexts in the province. They were wives, housewives and mothers who did not have access to formal education or to formal jobs with professional transcendence. At the time of this study, they were between 35- to 45-years-old and were reflecting on the decisions that they made in the past, including the opportunities that they had or did not have. Many of the women had paid jobs but had difficulty establishing specific professional itineraries due to the conditions of their jobs and their own life courses.

The women in our study had employment profiles with characteristics such as long-term unemployment, extended lapses in and/or estrangement from training and experience in the so-called “formal” labour market. These women were registered as unemployed at the National Employment Institute; therefore, they were eligible to receive information, guidance and professional training. They intended to enter the labour market with the aid of different professional training activities.

One objective of the current study was to examine these women’s professional careers, including their work conditions. This was an initial

step in order to analyse the women's perceptions of the present labour market and the real opportunities with regard to finding a job given their occupational training. This study also examined the efficacy of this training in collaboration with the equal opportunity policies and measures.

Method

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to approach the subject from an internal perspective following a biographical narrative method (Stroobants, 2005; Suárez-Ortega, 2008, 2013). Our exploration was conducted from the perspective of the women and the way that they perceived and experienced our research process (Collins 1992; Cochran, 1997; Crossley, 2000; Bullough, 2008). Through this method, the word (voice(s)) and the experience (meaningfulness of the subjectivity) are given importance, including how the women shared with the research through a succession of reflective interviews, their own personal, academic and professional narratives, and their own meanings that emerged from their cultural and historical references (Denzin, 2003, 2014; Ellis, 2009).

This study was longitudinal³ and was conducted from 2002 until the end of 2006 and then conducted again from 2012 to the present (Suárez-Ortega, 2008, 2013). The general phases adopted in the current research are preparation, fieldwork, analysis and information. Although certain tasks excel in each one of these stages, the developed process is cyclical and progressive, and all of its elements are interrelated from the beginning to the end (Brinkman, 2011; Davies & Gannon, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Flick, 2011; Lieblich & Josselson, 1994; Ginette & Blanche, 2000).

The Informants and their Life Contexts

The sample selected for this study responded to structural criteria, such that participants were intentionally chosen to examine the specific social type. These women belonged to four different rural contexts in Seville, as follows: the Sierra Norte, the Campiña, the Aljarafe and the Metropolitan Area. In general, these contexts experience high employment demands among the young and adult populations with inemployment age ranges, which increase for women and in unqualified sectors. These increases are

directly related to the regulated educational levels of the context populations, which exceed the primary levels.

These contexts were selected because they correspond to changes in the training and employment of adult women. Women between the ages of 30 to 35 years with low qualifications who devoted most of their lives to childcare and their homes have started demanding information and professional orientations to enrol in different training activities that are offered for job insertion. This is the situation that satisfies the contexts needed to examine our previously stated objective.

Given the study design, the number of women interviewed (i.e., groups and individuals) was not delimited a priori, as it is changed with the research progression. The final number considered the criterion for saturation of information. Forty women participated in the current study. A series of general criteria shaped the women's profiles and managed their selection. Participants were adult women (older than 25-years-old) who participated in occupational training activities while living in any rural context in the province of Seville. In general, women participate in these activities to qualify themselves for labour insertion through public services provided by the local authorities, the County Council of Seville, the National Employment Institute, the Local Centres for Information for Women and Women's Associations.

Techniques and Strategies for Data Collection

Data were collected through focus groups, exploratory interviews, life stories and field notes (Ellis, 2007, 2009). Specifically, four focus group sessions (Suárez-Ortega, 2005) (i.e., one for each rural context) forty exploratory interviews (i.e., one for each woman) and eight life stories (i.e., two cases chosen from each context) were conducted. We used triangulation as a strategy for methodological integration (Flick, 2011; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006) given the diversity of the techniques applied.

Techniques for Data Analysis

Data were analysed according to the common procedure of qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2005; Denzin, 2003, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Pierre, 2007). We used the N Vivo Program for methodological support.

The following tasks were conducted in accordance with Miles & Huberman (1994, p.12): data collection, transcription and reduction of data, disposition, organization and interpretation of the information, prior codification (“indexation system”) and elaboration of a hierarchical system of categories and conclusions.

Through a mixed procedure (i.e., deductive and inductive), a system of categories was generated in which a series of previous categories were taken as a first step, which was guided by the objectives of the current research, and another series became evident through analysis. In addition to this system of categories, other analysis techniques, including the registration of critical incidents, frequency tables and category counts, were utilized.

Results

Conditions of Women’s Employment

The information that women provided during their interviews revealed that they typically had paid jobs during previous stages of their lives. Similarly, data (frequency) were obtained regarding the diversity of professional spheres that these women worked in, including the activities they engaged in, the types of contracts that they has and the job durations.

Professional sector, duration and type of contracts, and tasks related to work experiences

- Domestic service (15) Three years, one year, four years, thirteen months, four and a half hours a week... Contrats: Six sometimes had contracts, nine had no contract. Tasks: Housework, childcare, elder care.
- Cleaning (7) (Town Halls). Between two weeks and six months. The contract: All had contracts. The experience: Monitors in libraries, on school buses, on fieldtrips, for activities at recess.
- Rural Employment Plan (6). Two weeks every three years. All had contracts. Tasks: General cleaning, maintenance, street sweeping, hotel maid.
- Temporary workers (4). Approximately one and a half month. Three women had contracts. One had no contract. Tasks:

Agricultural work (olive, strawberry harvest, canning, temporary work).

- Hairdresser (1). Duration of contracts: Seventeen years. No contract. Tasks: Related to the job (cutting, washing styling hair...).
- Masseuse (1). Four months. Apprentice contract. Tasks: Course (contents). Basic, specific programs.
- Food services (bakery, supermarkets) (7). From four to six years. Three had contracts, two sometimes had no contracts, and two had no contract. Tasks: Kitchen assistant, baking, packaging, taking phone orders, cashier, stocker.
- Health (11). Eleven years. Three years. Five had contracts. Six did not have contracts. Tasks: Laboratory for analysis in private clinics, nursing assistant, patient care, medicine control, patient records.
- Administration (4). Duration of contracts: From four and a half years to seventeen years. All with contracts. Tasks related to accounting, planning economic management.
- Textiles (industrial sewing cooperative) (3). Three years each. All without contract. Using industrial machinery, dressmaking and tailoring.
- Employment measures (job workshops) (4). From four months to two and a half years. All had apprentice contracts. Related to theoretical and practical contents of workshops.
- Self-employed (sales, shop assistants) (2). From two to fifteen years. No contract. Sales delegate, shop assistant in family business.
- Cooperatives (olive) (4). For six seasons. No contract. Basic knowledge (family business).
- Livestock farming (3). From two to ten years. No contract. Slaughtering animals, helping in work with livestock.

Dates show that there are prolonged periods of women's employment without contracts. There are also women who have contracts but this situation is not permanent throughout their job trajectories. Specifically, nine of the forty women have worked with contracts at some point in their lives, seven women have always worked in the underground economy without a contract, and twenty-four women have had jobs with and without contracts. The working situation for these women is characterized by

constant entries into and exits from the labour market, as well as instability, insecurity and/or a lack of professional definition with contracts having only minimum durations. Only two women had permanent contracts throughout their professional lives. These women frequently worked in areas such as domestic service, public cleaning services, food services, small businesses, personal image, farming and dependent care. With regard to contracts, most of these occupations involve under-employment or underground work, which seem to be more frequent or more likely for women.

Currently, all of the women who participated in this study are looking for a job. Only seven women have paid jobs. Thus, there is special meaning given to the employment measures and/or occupational training activities that these women participate in, as well as from the part-time work that they perform in combination with family care. We found that women's current training-labour occupation and the following main characteristics:

Type of contract, type of occupational sector and length of the training-labour occupation

- Occupations: Measures for promoting employment, occupational training activities (40); Supermarkets (2), Elder care (1) and Domestic Service (1).
- The situations: New learning contract (11); Without contract (33), with temporary contract (2).
- Length: In general, between the categories (1) A year, months, punctual; (2) A long time ago, until they find something better, temporary; (3) Two hours a day, temporary; and (4) Until they find something better, temporary.

Women generally expressed a desire to find new professional alternatives that were of greater quality. The women were either unemployed, had temporary paid jobs, had jobs within the underground economy or had apprentice contracts.

Towards the Employment of Women: Difficulties and Possibilities

Women were asked to respond to the following questions during the interviews: What does working mean to you? And how do you prioritize work with regard to your other roles, for example, maternity? One woman responded with the following: *“For me, to work is to have a paid job with certain conditions that are constant. This corresponds to a professional profile in which you feel useful...”* (Marta). Women perceived work as regulated employment, similar to a paid job that provides social status and certain conditions, like security and stability.

This concept of work, according to these women, may be associated with the process of genre socialization and with traditional female roles. For women, access to employment has an important position in their lives, although they also feel the necessity of combining work with their role as mothers.

I don't see housework as a job.

For me, in this moment of my life, work comes first. Since I got divorced from my husband, I've had to run my home alone and raise my son. It's clear I have to do housework too and it's a daily routine that absorbs you, but I wouldn't give it as much importance as my role as a mother. I need to work to survive, but I try to develop too (Eva).

The focus groups, life stories and field notes revealed that women negatively perceived the labour market, as there are few opportunities and these opportunities are not good for them. Women discussed the labour conditions and opportunities that they perceived in their locations, including the professional contexts that they felt would provide opportunities for employment, such as domestic service and farming.

One example of a professional context is the agricultural sector, which tends to be a key sector in rural contexts due primarily to the olive harvest. Agricultural tasks are performed in specific manners throughout the year that coincide with harvest periods. Women obtain agricultural jobs through the public service employment agencies in their town halls. These jobs are typically rotational, meaning that women do not have access to these jobs every year. Therefore, their job insertion is intermittent and discontinuous.

Women have been aware of the discrimination evident in these jobs for a long time, given that these jobs are scarce and women's labour is less sought after than men's labour in these conditions.

Women are being discriminated against and now they can't even pick olives. What is going on? Well, if the price of olives is low, then they prefer to hire men instead of women, because there are more than enough workers... So, what kind of job can you get? (Milagros).

Women proposed a number of job opportunities they were adequate for, which were primarily in cleaning and domestic services in the aforesaid conditions. They discussed how hard the work was, how low the payment they received for it was and their job schedules. In general, their labour situations were not formalized, with the best case being that they had limited contracts that do not provide labour stability.

Women? Here?

Cleaning, and that's it, because there are no stores here that need anybody. Here, there are family businesses, in which each family has its own business (Maria). (...) There are few options (Gertrudis).

Women stated that it was difficult to improve their labour conditions. Although they perceived possible new employment sectors or demands for work, it was hard for them to access other employment alternatives, such as self-employment or employment outside of their contexts, due to the working hours required.

The women who had school-aged children, family members to take care of or tasks to attend to did not have time to work. The time required for training and professional qualifications only contributed to their difficulty.

I can't leave my children from seven in the morning till four in the afternoon. I can't leave the children alone for that long and I can't leave them with anyone either, because I had to leave them with my mother-in-law for over a year and now she says that enough is enough (it's a lot of hours). I have a four-year-old girl and a nine-year-old boy (Margarita).

The women hoped that their labour situations would improve when their children got older. Now, they considered the possibility of having a person take care of their families and homes, but their low family incomes prevented this possibility.

But you don't earn enough here to pay a woman to take care of the children.

-The thing is, how can I pay a woman for so many hours?

-You can't.

-The thing is, if they were a little older... but that's the problem, they're still really small and they need me (Lola & Maria's discussion).

Women noted that family and dependent care entails a great deal of responsibility, effort, work, constancy, commitment and involvement, which affected their professional development. In this sense, women emphasized the labour incompatibility with their family care. Family care was associated, in the women's opinion, with less independence and a greater loss of free time.

"To look after all of the family members (e.g., husband, children, parents and so on)" (Milagros); "To maintain family stability" (Maria); "Less independence and free time" (Cati); "Limits on the ability to do what I want since my expectations are not compatible with my situation" (Rosa); "To run the family economy alone" (Vanessa); "Tiredness, nerves and stress: Everything you do costs more effort and time" (Carmen).

The women never discussed sharing the housework with their husbands and this did not change when they obtained a job or mentioned the possibility of participating in training activities. Women were the only ones who had to change their schedules to fulfil different roles. They proposed changes regarding family organization to support co-responsibility in childcare and housework. However, for them, family organization remained the same when they had a job or were involved in an occupational training activity.

Of course, I don't get any help from my husband regardless of whether I work outside of my home or not. During the olive harvest, for example, when both of us are working, he gets home, has a shower and sits down... and the girl is the one who works, always works, until it's time to go to bed (Rosa).

Women also mentioned the lack of relevant local resources for job insertion. They noted the lack of nursery schools, school lunch rooms and leisure and free time activities for children, which would allow them to participate in training activities and professional work. The main problem that women discussed was the economic cost of these resources and the impossibility of being able to pay for them.

If you pay half, you'd better stay home and take care of your children, as they will receive better care from you instead of paying another salary from your income?

In order for women like us to be able to go out to work, the local authorities would have to propose a lunchroom, a play space or a centre for children to go to once they got out of school. That way, we wouldn't have to spend most of the low income that we earn from our wages, and the effort, on the economic level, would be worthwhile. Even if we had to pay something, it wouldn't matter, but it would have to be a reasonable amount that takes into account our economic level (Teresa & Sonia's discussion).

Aware of the absence of these resources, women proposed access to formal part-time jobs as a solution. Flexible work hours would mean that they could devote time to paid work while their children were at school.

I would like to work, but just a few hours, not all day. For example, the hours that the children are at school. That way you don't have to leave them with anyone or pay someone to take care of them (Margarita).

Women also discussed their experiences looking for local jobs and the work opportunities that they had. They were listed on a job vacancies list that provides access to temporary jobs with contracts. These jobs last a few months, days or even hours, and the list establishes a system in which people are constantly entering into and leaving the offered jobs.

There aren't many opportunities in the town so we always get the same jobs in the same conditions, and you can't seem to go beyond that (Maria & the group in agreement).

Therefore, the women faced two forms of employment, which were to work for another person or to be self-employed. These forms amounted to the women's perceived possibilities for insertion. The women preferred to obtain a job within the public sector, but the small private enterprises caused job opportunities to be difficult and temporary. If the women were self-employed, they would be able to combine work with family and home care, which were the women's concrete requests.

Yes, to set up your own business is riskier but it is what there is to make it get better for you, no? At least for me, it allows me to organize in another way since it isn't eight hours of working and leaving the children with one person or another. Thus, to be self-employed is easier (Manoli).

An Overview of the Public Services for Employment Training

Women hoped that the training activities would promote employment in their local areas. They perceived these activities as the only alternatives to escaping from their current working situations and hoped to be integrated into the labour market with other conditions. Thus, professional training was viewed as an opportunity to gain an essential learning resource to obtain a job.

Well, here, there are only workshop schools. When they are held, there's nothing else here if you want to get a better job (Marta & the group in agreement).

Women positively valued these training experiences. The training lasted a specific time and provided women with basic professional qualifications with regard to certain work sectors. Women who participated in the current study were being trained for the service sector, specifically, in eldercare and house cleaning. These women were notably dissatisfied at the end of the

training because they had expectations of entering the labour market immediately after the training activities were completed.

This, however, was not what occurred. When the training concluded, the women had to begin searching for a job with everything they had learned and the work experience they had obtained during the training. Yet, at this point, women had few personal resources for starting an active job search. During the training, they did not receive information about creating their own professional projects or about the current labour market situation. No one helped the women analyse the costs of reinitiating a new professional trajectory given their present life conditions (e.g., family responsibilities, husbands with stay-at-home wife mentalities who expected their wives to take care of all of the housework and undefined professional trajectories).

During the training process, women felt comfortable in their job roles as the jobs fulfilled their interests and professional aspirations. They expressed the following: "*We were happiest when we had to leave the job because the contract ended or wasn't renewed*" (Eva & the group in agreement).

Additionally, the flexibility factor was incorporated into the training activities, as the jobs were flexible and adapted to the women's life conditions. Thus, through these training activities the women were able to experience the opportunities that were available for self-employment.

Look at those people who are going to come out again, the ones who are going to come out of the workshop school that exists here right now. They left a cooperative, an industry, prepared, the women who were in class with us, but I can tell you right now that I can't go to work there now. They're working from 7 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon, and I can't go to work for that time (Carmen).

That's what I meant before: we need a job that will let us do other things, take care of our homes and families, because there are no nursery schools, centres or help for us (Milagros & some women in the group in relative agreement).

The women only participated in a few activities to help them obtain a job. The orientation provided in the workshop encouraged them to make their own curricula, which is a basic step to help them to look for a job later. However, the women noted that learning a few techniques was inadequate for preparing them to face other situations, such as work

disorientation, a lack of viable labour options and uncertainty in their decisions.

While we've been in the employment workshop, we haven't received information about what we should do later. For example, I was interested in learning about the existing enterprises in the place where I live, specifically how I can apply for a job vacancy and where I can find the job vacancies... (Ana).

I've felt the same way, because now that we're about to finish the course, we all feel very good because we have apprentice contracts, but what about later? We return to the same situation that we were in when we began the course. They should change this because this is useless (Aurora & the group in agreement).

Conclusions and Discussion

Women generally experienced negative employment conditions that fostered the continuous situation of under-employment or instability that lasted years. Some women first entered the labour market at 12 or 15 years of age and were still currently working (Le Feuvre & Roseneil, 2014). This highlights the importance of the urgent measures that have been approved to fight against the employment crisis; for example, the bonuses for part-time contracting should not be viewed as alternatives to maintaining employment. Women who participate in this research relieved that the partial work and professional trajectory has to including a negative effect on job satisfaction and well-being. These data are inconsistent with the results of Montero & Rau (2015) that show that this negative effect is evidenced by men and not by women. Women are the first to experience harm due to the lack of flexibility in the labour market, as they are obligated to combine their work and family lives given the lack of structures and public services that guarantee life quality, development and social equity. Thus, public services supporting employment are relevant for providing development opportunities. However, the data are consistent with Magidimisha & Gordon (2015) who show an increase in unemployment and informal and unstable employment for women.

The women who participated in this research should by now have obtained jobs in the places where they lived or in neighbouring areas, which would allow them to take care of their families. The work options that these

women had access offered extremely low wages for the places where they lived (e.g., shop assistants, cleaning and dependent care). These jobs are generally characterized by insecurity, a lack of social recognition and temporariness. These conditions are a consequence of the gender distinction that is evident in the labour market, which feels like a “vicious cycle” for women. Similarly, these conditions are influenced by other exclusion factors, such as age, race, qualifications (Susinos, Calvo & García, 2014; Magidimisha & Gordon, 2015), economic possibilities and gender cultures of the women’s partners or husbands (Yomtoob, 2015). The women’s specific conditions with regard to maternity and family responsibilities influenced their opportunities during the training activities and when they were applying for jobs. The number of children and the ages of the children were important factors that affected the women’s responsibilities and occupations, as children could limit the women’s possibilities with regard to combining their home lives with other facets, such as work. In sum, the results indicated that children were the most influential factor determining the women’s wages and working conditions, related to maternity. This is, according to Guerrina (2001), equality is more formal than real.

When women excel in their work, they are not provided with opportunities for family reorganization, distribution of housework or shared family responsibilities with other family members (Daly, 2011). The new roles are added to their many occupations, which has a multiplying effect. It is as if the women are experiencing double and triple working days (the multiple roles conflict), as the women accept roles that are associated with aspects of paid workers and students. This gender distinction at work and in life makes women unavailable for employment, as they must “reconcile” their family responsibilities (Ruberly & Urwin, 2011), which continue to fall almost entirely on them in both the personal and labour environments.

Additionally, there is a lack of resources in rural areas, especially during crisis times, which negatively influence women’s resources and cultural patterns (i.e., there is a return to traditional roles). Women emphasized that there was a lack of family support services, such as nursery schools and centres for the youngest children, but they also noted the high economic cost and the distance of some of the centres that they were aware of. Again, personal and economic situations were determining factors for women’s professional careers, leading them to question the necessity of working given the economic and personal efforts that they had to engage in to

improve their professional development. The lack of resources was also associated with the training activities that were offered to them and with their opportunities to access to these activities in order to improve their professional opportunities. In general, neither the area where these women lived nor their present situations prior to employment influenced their lives.

The women in this study lived in small towns, some further than others from the capital, and some more or less developed. The women stayed in these towns where a sexist consciousness about women's life roles is deeply rooted. In our opinion, this is what currently defines their idiosyncrasy, as it is associated with the scarce development of some of these rural contexts. Thus, the initiative of some of these women from these contexts to acquire qualifications for insertion is relevant, as it shows that they are becoming aware of their particular situations. However, this interest still resides in the family sphere, which requires to some extent the women's partners' consent and the possibility of changing family customs. Spain has an important structural problem in that women have been in charge of daily life, the elders and the family. Generally, the women in this study positively perceived the training that they were offered, as it provided knowledge and offered the possibility to be with other women and enter new social spaces. However, the women viewed the functional qualities for labour insertion and for continuity as the most negative aspects of the training. Thus, some resources are reaching the local context, which results in political and legislative developments that women benefit from. However, to what extent do these developments respond to women's demands? The women had the following specific demands regarding the different training activities: flexible scheduling, the inclusion of information and professional orientations during the training process, greater continuity in this process and the possibility to prepare a coherent, viable work itinerary.

Despite the undeniable progress, women continue to experience difficulty when entering the labour market, and these difficulties are associated with the type of training activities that they have access to. Regardless of how functional the training activities may be for women, the main problems are its temporary nature and the abandonment of these activities once the women have completed the training without offering more complete training that would aid in the preparation of their professional projects. Equality policies are key words but their needs to be a

way to evaluate them. Affirmative action allows us to compensate for inequalities, but it is not the solution to this problem nor is it the best thing for women's professional development. Specific actions are needed to integrate broader measures that encourage women to initiate or reorient their professional and life trajectories so that they can become more autonomous and respond to their own desires.

We posit that the public services for employment and the occupational training that the women in this study participated in to acquire qualifications to obtain a job are necessary. These services create employment niches that allow contract conditions to be more permanent and uninterrupted, which provides people with security, for example, to allow them to acquire a home. Therefore, the apprentice contracts given to women who engage in the occupational training measures, such as the employment workshops, should be paid for by unemployment and have a more permanent nature. This would provide real forms of continuity for labour insertion after the achieving a qualification. Our final conclusion is regarding the public services for employment and professional training, which should support the construction of personalized itineraries for labour insertion, be more effective instruments for the employment search and aid in people's professional development in general and adult women from rural contexts in particular. Ayala-Mira, Guerrero and Franco (2015) stated that it is not adequate today attention to the number of resources available in rural areas; rather, the resources should adapt to local needs and employment opportunities, as well as raise awareness to support cultural changes. The current research indicates that rural adult women are important drivers of change when they promote models and break gender gaps that may not have all of the desired effects that generation of women demand. These women are contributing to providing more opportunities for the next generation of women, their daughters.

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Notes

¹ We are currently developing a I+D Project entitled Career design and management of entrepreneurship talent, financed by the Spanish Ministry for the Economy and Competitiveness, 2013-2016, State Plan on Excellence, with Reference EDU2013-45704-P. Coord. by Suárez-Ortega, M., Universidad de Sevilla. In this Project we deepen the existing gender gap between Spanish women and men entrepreneurs.

² According to the Ministry of Employment and Social Security (2014) with regard to the enterprise structure and demography, the profile of the Spanish autonomous is developed by workers in the service sector with out responsible employees, with one activity sector, primarily male and between the ages of 40 and 54 years. It requires approximately five years or more to build a business and listed by the minimum contribution base (about 800-1000 euros). In total, 65.5% of self-employed individuals are male, where as only 34.4% are female.

³ It is part of my Ph.D. research on “The construction of the life-work project of adult women: a challenge for the guidance process.” This research was carried out at the end of 2006, developed as a biographical-narrative process, developed from 2012 to present (Suarez-Ortega, 2013).

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