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**Hospitality Students' Expectations of Work/Life Balance in the Industry:
The Role of Gender**

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Abstract

Work/Life balance refers to maintaining a balance between roles at work and in personal life. Previous research has shown that the hospitality industry has high turnover rates, that more women than men leave the industry, and that work/life balance is one of the factors which influences employee satisfaction, performance, and overall intent to leave. This paper investigated gender differences in perceptions and expectations of hospitality students regarding the importance of work/life balance and compared them to the experience of hospitality professionals in the field. A questionnaire was distributed to 103 hospitality students and 64 hospitality employees. The questionnaire measured their importance and expectations/experience of various career factors. Results suggested that female students are slightly, but not completely aware of the potential problem of work/life imbalance and disappointment in the industry. Implications for colleges involve better preparation of students for the future and for employers more efficient workplace flexibility and organizational support.

Keywords: work/life balance, work/family conflict, the hospitality industry, career, expectations

Hospitality Students' Expectations of Work/Life Balance in the Industry:

The Role of Gender

Overview of the problem

The hospitality industry has long been known for the high rates of employee turnover (Narkhede, 2014). For example, Denvir & McMahon (1992) study of turnover in four large hotels in London revealed annual turnover rates between 58% and 112%. One of the important reasons that hospitality employees leave their jobs is long, irregular working hours and job-related stress. Employees can experience work-life imbalance, and particularly, work-family conflict, which has been shown to effect female employees in particular (Brown et al., 2015). While many hospitality organizations have initiated programs to mitigate this problem, it remains a lingering problem in terms of recruiting and retaining quality employees (Blomme et al., 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for the future of the industry to learn more about the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of younger generations of hospitality students regarding the importance of work-life balance, and to explore potential gender differences in these attitudes.

Work/Life balance

Work/life balance refers to maintaining a balance between roles at work and at home. Roles at home (non-work demands) can be both private and family life related, depending on the individual, but often involve childcare, elder care, and household duties. Additionally, when defining work/life balance it is mostly about dedicating equal time to both roles, as well as the employee being satisfied with the demands of each role (Kalliath, Brough, 2008).

Delecta (2011) identified work/life balance as “an individual’s ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities”. In the same research it is stated that in addition to the work and family domains, it also involves other roles in other areas in life.

While work-life balance is important to almost all employees, those who are in committed personal relationships or who have children, are more likely to experience work-family conflict. Thus, the possibility of work-life imbalance, specifically work-family conflict, often affects younger employees in their twenties and thirties, and is of particular importance when it comes to retaining and promoting entry level employees to leadership positions.

Work-family conflict

Work/family conflict refers to a form of conflict where two domains clash and cause stress (Carlson et al., 2000). Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) identified three types of conflicts: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. In their definition, time-based conflict occurs when too much time is devoted to one domain so that the other one suffers; behavior-based occurs when behaviors in one domain are not suitable and expected for the other; and strain-based conflict occurs when a strain in one domain intrudes the other domain (Carlson et al., 2000). For example, coming home from work and being emotionally exhausted can prevent an employee from effectively fulfilling roles at home (Rotondo et al., 2003). An example of the behavior-based conflict is when aggressive and logical behavior may be expected at work, but at home, family members expect emotions and warmth (Carlson et al., 2003). Also, Gutek et al. (1991) concluded that there are two directions to consider while analyzing work/family conflict: work interfering with family and family interfering with work; these directions and previously mentioned types of conflict are used while measuring work/family conflict. For example, how much work interferes with time spent with family and how much family interfere with work responsibilities (Carlson et al., 2000).

Role of gender in work-family conflict

Although men in recent decades have taken on a greater role in family life, the burden of housekeeping, childcare, and elder care still falls more heavily on women (Delina & Raya, 2013). At the same time, higher levels of education and increased levels of workplace equality

led to increasing number of women in management and leadership positions. Today women occupy all categories of positions and are being promoted to higher-level positions (Kumari & Devi, 2013). Those higher-level positions include more responsibility and higher demands. Therefore, women are more affected by work/family conflicts and work/life imbalance (Drew, Murtagh, 2005). Within their research, which included senior managers, they found that lack of work/life balance became an obstacle to career progression for women. Additionally, their survey showed that out of 36 male senior managers surveyed, 30 of them were married (86%) and only 2 were single (5%) as opposed to the 26 female senior managers, only 12 of them were married (46%) and 9 were single (35%). Ultimately, the findings show that women in senior management are more likely to be younger, single and without children (Drew, Murtagh, 2005). This finding implies that women with partners and children may be either overlooked for promotion or choose not to pursue promotion due to the experience or expectation of work-family conflict.

Previous studies (Blomme et al., 2010) show that within the hospitality industry more women leave the industry than men, and one of the main reasons is the work-family conflict which women experience more. Because of irregular and demanding working days and hours which come with the hospitality industry, women have more difficulty managing to complete work and family obligations, especially if they are in higher positions. Women are also more likely to have their family roles affect their work life than the other way around, meaning that they put family roles first, which sometimes causes them to refuse or not seek promotions. Another study (Blomme et al, 2008) shows that from age 32 to 44, when family obligations tend to increase, undoubtedly more women than men leave the industry (61% of female employees and 47% of male employees).

Considering the career progression of women, the glass ceiling effect describes the interruptions in their careers. It is an invisible barrier which stops women from progressing

their careers to top management and executive. This barrier refers directly to work/life balance and work/life conflict with which women are affected more than men. Sharma & Kaur (2019) explained glass ceiling through artificial barriers such as personal and societal, as well as the barriers with career breaks (a period of time when an employee chooses not to work as an agreed absence, usually because of childcaring) which have an impact on career progression of women. Aside from the glass ceiling effect, some of the other disruptions and barriers in the career progression for women include discrimination, lack of opportunities and management attitudes, gender stereotype, harassment and cultural barriers. (Kumara, 2018)

Consequences of work/life imbalance

Aside from the consequences of turnover, stress variables like work/life imbalance can interfere with employee loyalty and participation which can cause dissatisfaction at work and lower productivity and job performance. Soomro et al., (2018) found that work/life balance is significantly positively correlated with employee performance, meaning that employees who have a healthy work life balance are more productive and perform work roles better.

A healthy balance can also attract talented and skilled employees into the industry (Yun et al., 2018).

Previous research (Park and Min, 2020) suggests that in order to determine what influences turnover and dissatisfaction in the workplace we have to look at elements that are closely related with work/life balance, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, work/family conflict and family/work conflict. Additionally, this research found a relationship between job strains like emotional exhaustion and job stress and lower levels of productivity and job performance.

In addition to lowering employee performance and satisfaction, lack of work life balance can influence potential employees' perception of and intent to join the hospitality industry. For example, when undergraduate hospitality students decide whether to pursue a

career in the hospitality industry, they do consider work/family conflict to some extent. That is mentioned in the previous study (Richardson, 2009) which researched important career factors and the extent to which undergraduate students believe a career in the hospitality industry will offer them. Three hundred students were surveyed, and the results show that 76,8% of students claimed that a job which can be combined with parenthood is important to them, however only 11,6% expected that the hospitality industry would offer it.

Generation Y attitudes towards work/life balance

Regarding the attitudes and expectations of the career in the hospitality industry we can look at the generation Y (millennials), people born between 1981 and 1996, after generation X and before generation Z. Maxwell et al., (2010) describe generation Y in general as very determined to succeed, very career focused but also focused on personal goals and high salary expectations which makes them very demanding employees. Some of the highest career expectation factors which this research yielded were determination to succeed, meet personal goals and receive good pay. In the previous study (Maxwell et al., 2010) 122 respondents with experience within hospitality industry were analyzed, with an emphasis on their work engagement. They concluded that there are two factors which had a significant gender difference with answers; work/life balance, supportive managers and positive organizational culture were significantly more important to females. In addition, seeing a clear advancement/promotion path with employer and having opportunities for training and development were also more important to females. Therefore, females were more interested in equality in career progression and having a fair employer.

Brown et al., (2015) examined why Generation Y hospitality employees consider leaving the industry and why some of them left the industry. Their web-based survey research showed the importance of looking long term for Generation Y. Out of 107 respondents 17.2% said that they would leave their career because of the work/family imbalance, which was the

highest ranked answer followed by unsatisfactory compensation (13.2%), working conditions (13.2%) and long hours (12.6%). Additionally, out of 39 respondents who left their career in hospitality 21.3% said they left because of long hours and 18% said because of work/life imbalance which were the top two answers followed by compensation (14.8%) and promotion (6.6%).

Mitigation strategies

As mentioned, lack of work/life balance is one of the reasons why employees leave their jobs, particularly in the hospitality industry. Working hours are long and unpredictable, there is low job security and a high need for coordination with others (Blomme et al., 2010). Within this study some of the main mitigation methods human resource departments are implementing to restore work/life imbalance are organizational support (employees' perception of how much an organization values their work and well-being) and workplace flexibility (organizations willingness to adapt to changes such as how and when employee gets work done, for example reduced hours and remote work). Blomme uses measures like workplace flexibility, organizational support, work/family conflict and turnover intention. This study then hypothesizes that if we look at work/family conflict as a mediator, there is a negative relation between workplace flexibility and turnover intention. Additionally, that there is also a negative relation between organizational support and the turnover intentions. The results showed that the less organizational support and workplace flexibility employees received, the more they were prone to leave the organization.

Aside from those two mitigation methods some of the other organizational policies which are focused on reducing the impact of work/life balance of employees are role reduction and role sharing (Thrivent Kumari, Devi, 2013). Regarding role reduction, for some women those strategies are implemented by reducing the family role, and for some who choose to stay at home by reducing the work role. Regarding role sharing strategies, an example would be

to delegate family role by hiring assistance with childcare for example (Shelton, 2006). Implementing initiatives regarding work/life balance of their employees has become a necessity for many employers today (Thriventi Kumari, Devi, 2013).

Even though mitigation strategies are being implemented, there is still a problem with the work/life balance among employees. This brings the need to research more about entrants' perception before they start careers and additionally what can be done to prepare them better for the potential future conflict of work and life in the career within hospitality industry.

This paper examines the role of gender in perceptions and expectations of hospitality students regarding work/life balance, and its importance to them compared to other factors. Comparing students' perceptions and expectations to perceptions and experience of work/life balance among professionals working in the hospitality industry, will provide insight into whether students are aware of the work/life balance challenges that may await them.

Method

Purpose

The main goal of this primary research was to measure hospitality students' expectations regarding work-life balance in the industry. This research compared their expectations with hospitality employees' experience. The objective was to measure how important students found some future career factors and how likely they think they'll get those same factors in the hospitality industry. For the employees, the comparison was between the importance of career factors and how much they experienced those same factors. Both groups were used to infer how realistic the students' expectations of work-life balance are when compared to the actual employee experience. An additional goal was to look at the gaps between the importance and experience to see what the perceived attractors and detractors of

the industry are and if the work-life balance is a part of those. Finally, an additional goal was to investigate potential differences between genders, for both students and employees.

Participants

The participants were 103 hospitality students (63 female, 40 male) enrolled in hospitality studies at a private undergraduate college in Dubrovnik, and 64 hospitality employees (35 female, 29 male) in the region. Student participants ranged in age from 19 to 30 ($M = 21,14$, $SD = 1,72$). Among the students, 21,78% were freshman, 22,77% were Sophomores, 24,75% were juniors and 31,7% were Seniors. Employee participants range in 4 age categories: 18 - 25 (18,75%), 26 - 35 (29,69%), 36 - 45 (50%) and 46 - 55 (1,5%). Additionally, they ranged in five categories regarding the number of years in the hospitality industry: less than 1 year (4,69%), 1 – 3 years (28,12%), 3 – 5 years (21,88%), 5 – 10 years (20,31%) and more than 10 years (25%). Targeted nonprobability and snowball sampling were used. A digital survey was distributed through email to the employees, while a face-to-face digital survey was distributed to students.

Instrument

Both questionnaires used in this research are adapted from (Richardson, 2009) and (Maxwell et al, 2010). Both surveys, student and employee, had four parts and included 5-point Likert scale questions. The original survey used by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) had 20 career factors, it was slightly modified and reused by Richardson (2009). For this research, additional work/life balance items were added. The first part consisted of a set of 18 career factors and all of the participants were asked to rank each from least to most important (from 1 being not important to 5 being very important). In the second part, participants ranked the same set of 18 career factors in terms of how strongly they expect the job in the hospitality industry to offer that factor.

The employee participants were asked to rank those same factors according to how much they experienced them in the hospitality industry (from 1 being never to 5 being always). The 18 career factors were organized into 4 categories: work/life balance (question example: 'A job which can easily be combined with parenthood'), salary (question example: 'high earnings over the length of career'), the job in general (question example: 'a job which gives me responsibility) and enjoyment of work (question example; 'a job that I will find enjoyable').

The third section, based on (Maxwell, 2010) asked participants about their personal values in three categories: work/life balance (statement example: 'My career is as important as my family life'), fairness and equality (statement example: 'I want to work with employers who are fair to all their employees') and enjoyment of work (statement example: 'I want to enjoy my work'). In the fourth part, student participants were asked about their intent to join the hospitality industry, and employee participants were asked about their intent to stay in the hospitality industry. Finally, all participants were asked an open-ended question reflecting on their intent to join or stay in the hospitality industry.

Results

The following results were gathered to investigate students' importance and expectations regarding work/life balance in their future careers. Other results including employees' importance and experience regarding the same factors were gathered to compare students' expectations to hospitality employees' experience. Additionally, the results were used to analyze differences between genders regarding work/life balance.

Hospitality Students

The first interesting result is that female students ranked almost every career factor in every category as more important than males, however females also had lower expectations for every factor. Looking at the results from the work/life balance category, female students ranked nearly all factors as more important than male students did. For example, female students found

‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’ important ($M = 3,98$, $SD = 1,48$) while males found it slightly unimportant ($M = 2,88$, $SD = 1,46$). An aggregate of the entire category regarding the **importance** of work/life balance for females ($M = 4,19$) and males ($M = 3,62$), there is still a clear difference in importance between genders.

There is also a difference between genders in expectations of work/life balance in general, particularly in the area of parenthood. Female students expect their jobs to be less accommodating than males do.

If we look at their **expectations** of ‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’ for female students ($M = 3,04$, $SD = 1,1$) and male students ($M = 3,45$, $SD = 1,06$) which female students find it more important but less likely to think they’ll get it in the hospitality industry. The same pattern follows their expectations for all the work/life balance category questions (for female students $M = 3,06$ and for male students $M = 3,3$). If we compare the importance and the experience for ‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’, for female students there is a gap between importance and expectations means (0,25). However, for male students, there is no gap (-0,57). (Appendix, Figure 1)

For the entire work/life balance category, the difference between gaps is much more visible, for female students, the gap is 1,13 and for male students it is 0,32, indicating that female students find the overall category of work/life balance more important, but they are less likely to think they’ll get those factors in the hospitality industry than male students. Overall, female students had the biggest gap between importance and expectations in the work/life balance category. (Appendix, Figure 2)

In the next part of the survey, about personal values, among three categories: work/life balance, fairness and equality, and enjoyment of work, for both genders, work/life balance had the lowest level of agreement, nearly equal for both males and females (female $M = 3,59$ and male $M = 3,55$). The next ranked category differed between males and females; for male

students it was fairness and equality ($M = 3,97$) and for female students, it was the enjoyment of work ($M = 4,14$). The highest-ranked category with personal statements for male students was the enjoyment of work ($M = 4,06$) and for female students was fairness and equality ($M = 4,49$). Overall, females, unlike males showed a clear ranking between these three categories. (Appendix, Figure 3)

Lastly, with the intent to join the industry, female students indicated more interest to join ($M = 4,03$) than male students ($M = 3,73$). Female students have lower expectations of career factors in the industry and more room for disappointment than male students but despite that they have a higher intent to join the industry. (Appendix, Figure 4)

Hospitality Employees

In general, hospitality employees report similar results as the hospitality students. Like the students, female employees ranked each work/life balance factor as more important than male employees did. For example, if we again look at the same question ‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’ for female employees it was very important ($M = 4,24$, $SD = 1,38$) and for male employees, it was much lower, almost completely not important ($M = 1,68$, $SD = 1,57$). If we look at the entire work/life balance category for female employees ($M = 4,14$) and for male employees ($M = 2,95$) there is still a significant difference. (Appendix, Figure 1 and Figure 2)

Their experiences also differed, both for ‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’ (female $M = 2,7$, $SD = 1,07$ and male $M = 2,9$, $SD = 1,1$), and for the entire work/life balance category (female $M = 2,82$ and male $M = 3,12$). Looking at the difference between expectations and experience for ‘a job that can easily be combined with parenthood’, for female employees there is a 1,54 gap and for male employees, there is no gap at all (-1,21). Additionally, if we look at the entire work/life balance category, the gap for females is 1,32 and for males, there is still no gap (-0,17). The important thing to notice from their overall

experience of all of the career factors from all categories is that female employees experienced almost every career factor less than male employees did. (Appendix, Figure 1 and Figure 2)

For the third part of the survey, personal values, for both genders work/life balance was the least important (female $M = 3,82$, male $M = 3,51$), then the enjoyment of work (female $M = 4,37$, male $M = 3,75$), then the highest-ranked category was fairness and equality (female $M = 4,53$, male $M = 4,43$), which follows a similar pattern to the students' respondents' results. (Appendix, Figure 3)

Female employees expressed lower intent to stay in the industry ($M = 2,37$) than male employees ($M = 3,37$), which differs from the students' responses regarding the intent to join the industry, where females showed a higher intent than males. (Appendix, Figure 4)

Lastly, for all employee respondents 'a job that can easily be combined with parenthood' was the least experienced career factor out of all factors from all categories. It was also the least important factor for just male respondents, both students and employees.

Results show a clear room for disappointment for female students because of their higher importance and lower expectations. If we compare that to female employees, there is a similar pattern which shows the disappointment in the industry. If we look at male students, they don't find career factors as important, but they do think they'll get them. There is also a similar pattern with male employees, who find work/balance related factors even less important than male students, leaving less gaps and detractors. For 'a job that can easily be combined with parenthood' there is a significantly bigger gender difference regarding importance in employee group. Interestingly, what male students and employees found more important than females were salary related questions. Lastly, if we compare the intent to join / stay in the industry, female students want to join more, but female employees have a low intent to stay. For male students and employees, there is a similar agreement. (Appendix, Figure 4)

Discussion

The results indicate that on average, both female students and employees find work/life balance factors more important than male respondents. Also, they indicate that female respondents either expect or experience less those same factors. If we look at students only, with their expectations of what the hospitality industry will offer them and with the gaps between the importance and expectations, there is a higher probability of dissatisfaction for female students. The data also shows that female respondents ranked almost every career factor (with the exception of salary) as more important than the male respondents did. Females overall have higher demands which leaves more room for the gap between the importance and expectations. Additionally, the data shows that female respondents don't expect to experience each factor from every category (including work/life balance) as much as male respondents do. These results from the student survey demonstrate how female respondents are somewhat aware of the fact that they might be more dissatisfied in their future careers as the previous study suggests that women are more affected by the work/life imbalance (Drew, Murtagh, 2005). Also, given that female students are somewhat aware of their potential disappointment, the study also showed how female respondents find fairness and equality very important in their future careers, which can be a consequence of the awareness of potential dissatisfaction. This study connects to this data regarding personal values where females also found it more important. (Appendix, Figure 3) On the other side, when looking at employees in the industry, this study suggests an even a bigger difference between genders and between the importance and experience of career factors. The biggest gap and biggest detractor of the industry for female employees were the work/life balance factors. If we look at what the students expect and what the employees experienced, there is still a difference. Overall, female students are slightly aware of the potential problem of work/life imbalance, but not completely given that

female employees' experience was even lower than the female students' expectations of work/life balance factors.

These results seem consistent with existing research in the field. According to the previous research (Blomme et al., 2008), which indicated that more women than men leave the hospitality industry, these results showed that female employees actually do have a lot lower intent to stay in the industry. Surprisingly, looking at female students' responses, they have a higher intent to join the industry than male students which shows the lack of awareness for potential work/life imbalance and potential dissatisfaction altogether. However, female students expect to be disappointed to some degree, but they still want to join the industry. Male students expect to get what they find important, and even what they don't find important, but they are not as keen to join the industry as female students. We can connect this to their ranking of personal values, where both groups ranked work/life balance as least important, after enjoyment of work and fairness and equality (Appendix, Figure 3). If female students find these two categories of personal values more important than work/life balance personal values, it can influence their higher intent to join. They have lower expectations regarding work/life balance career factors, but they don't find it as important as other two categories of personal values. The student survey results somewhat relate to the research by Richardson (2009) where the same career factors were used for the importance and expectations of hospitality students, more than three-quarters of respondents answered that 'a job that can easily be combined with parenthood' is important to them, however, a very few respondents claimed that the hospitality industry will offer this to them. The results regarding personal values also confirm findings by Maxwell et al. (2010) where overall enjoyment of work was ranked as most important, and fairness and equality were more important to female respondents.

Lower expectations of female student respondents are a visible pattern across all categories, not just for the work/life balance. This shows how they think that everything is

important, and they want a lot, but they don't think they'll get it. The data shows that once they are in the industry, the experiences are even lower. Even though today women are seen more in management positions (Kumari & Devi, 2013), it is hard to escape the reality of dissatisfaction and glass ceiling. Knowing all of that while growing up, female college students are somewhat aware that work/life imbalance will disrupt their careers, and the gathered data shows that. However, this does not discourage them from seeking employment in the industry. The reason might be that work/life balance is less important to them than fairness and equality and enjoyment of work.

Given that these findings indicate that female students are slightly aware of the fact that the hospitality industry will probably not offer them the career factors they find important, especially the ones associated with work/life balance, should be a concern for future employers regarding their employees' job performance. Additionally, because female students have a higher intent to join, but once they are in the industry, results show that they don't have an intent to stay in it, which can cause turnover for employers.

The question is what can be done to prepare them better for the real world. During education, especially college, future career paths in the hospitality industry perhaps are presented as much brighter than they actually are. How colleges might go about it is to show the actual alumni experience, for example, to have guest speakers talk about not just advantages of the industry as usual, but disadvantages as well, what are the things they found important but didn't get. This might show a clearer picture of the hospitality industry career.

On the other hand, with female dissatisfaction and intent to leave the industry more, productivity potentially drops, because dissatisfaction has a negative effect on productivity (Soomro et al., 2018), this could be a worry for employers, not just employees. As mentioned in previous research (Blomme et al., 2010) human resource strategies to mitigate this are being implemented in some companies, but ultimately, they are not enough to keep women in the

industry. When it comes to the hospitality industry, they should be implemented in every company, while putting more emphasis on flexibility of working hours and organizational support. When employees feel secure and supported by the organization, they might be less likely to have an intent to leave and be dissatisfied altogether.

Above all, female employees are dissatisfied, and female students are slightly aware of what awaits them. Luckily, female students still have the urge to join the industry regardless of their expectations. However, female employees do not show that attitude to stay in the industry, so the focus of minimizing work/life imbalance in the hospitality industry remains a concern for employers.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are the small sample size of both participant groups, slightly more participants from the group of students than employees, within each group slightly more female than male participants, and a bit lower response rate of employee respondents. Finally, regarding employee answers, with the situation with Covid-19, there is a possible dissatisfaction because of the virus which highly affected the hospitality industry which might have influenced their overall level of career satisfaction while answering. Covid-19 has made the hospitality industry much less desirable for both students and current employees. Also, Covid related working from home is another factor which might be causing employees' dissatisfaction and intent to leave.

Recommendations for further research

In order to further investigate this topic, it would be interesting to see how employers perceive this problem and are they aware of it as much as employees and even students are. This could ultimately raise awareness about something which we all know is present. Finally, the possible extent to this research would be to look at the different positions like low, middle,

and high management to investigate the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding work/life balance.

This research can be seen as one of the steps to understanding how genders perceive career factors and have different expectations and experiences, regarding work/life balance. The reasons behind it are not easily changed, but there are always ways to emphasize what should be changed. This study provided clear consistency with the previous results, meaning that the potential for female employees' dissatisfaction is still present, and needs attention.

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Appendix

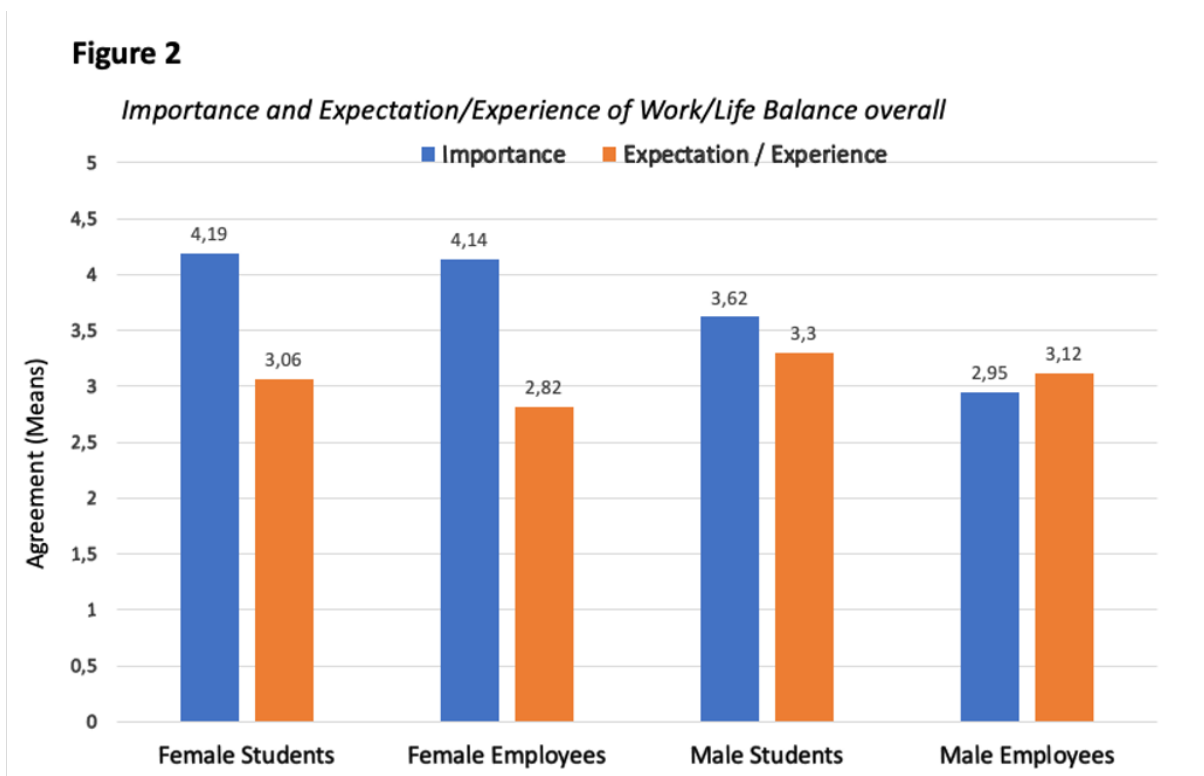
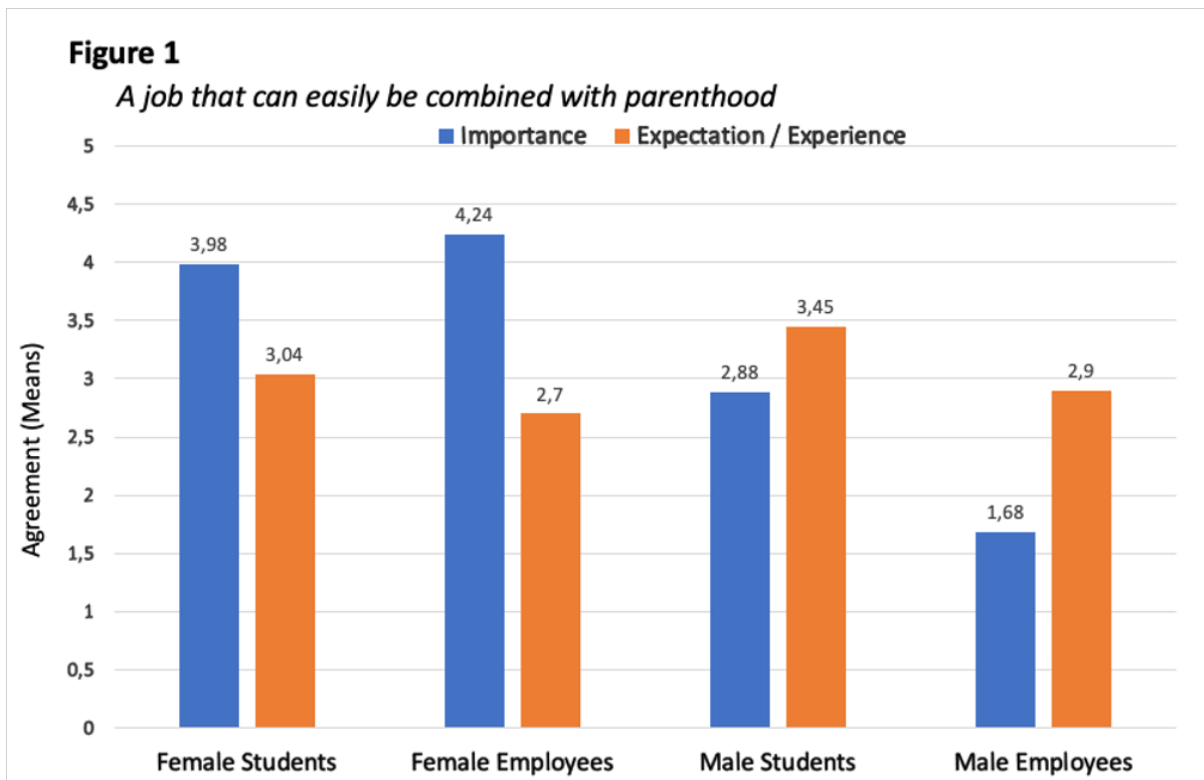
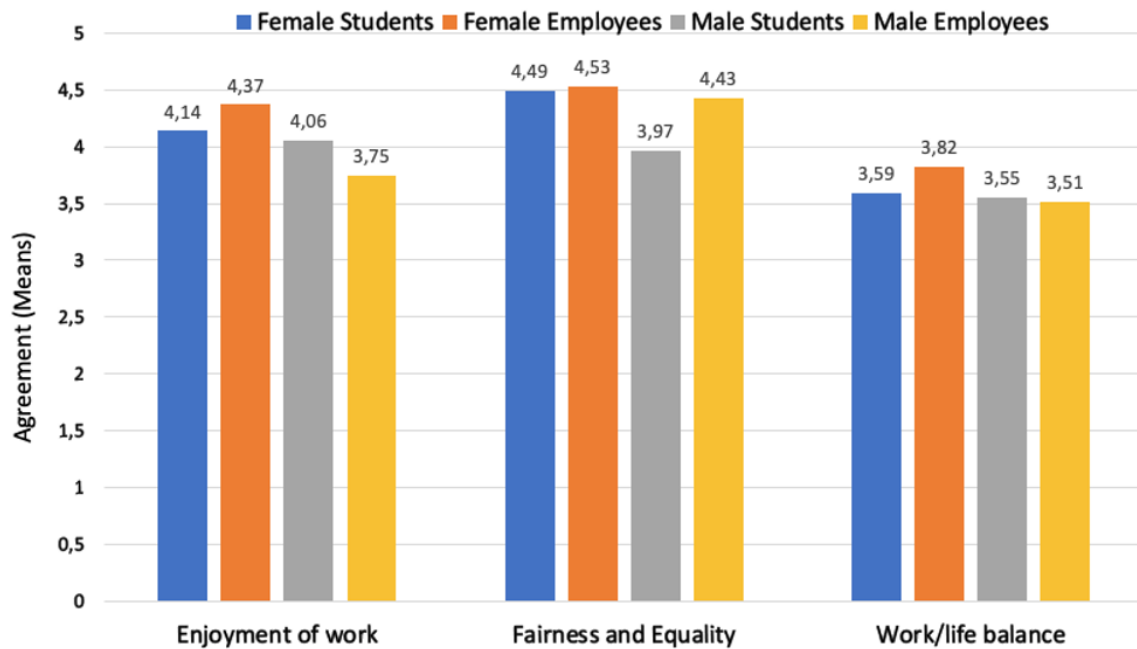


Figure 3*Personal values***Figure 4***Intent to join / stay in the industry*