

Gender Difference in Job Satisfaction Among Foreign Professionals in China

There has been a significant increase in the number of highly educated foreign workers in China. Data from the 2020 Chinese census shows that approximately 845,700 foreign nationals were registered in China, compared to 593,800 in 2010. Among them, about 333,600 were working in China, a notable increase from 134,900 in 2010. This represents a substantial rise of 42.42% in the overall number of foreigners and 147.29% in the number of foreign workers in China over the span of 10 years. This increase can be attributed to the supportive policies of the Chinese government and the abundance of job opportunities that arose from decades of economic reforms leading to a boom before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of these foreign highly educated workers come from Western developed countries. Despite this growing trend of migration, little is known about the group. In particular, the job satisfaction of these foreign professionals from developed economies working in a developing economy in the East remains largely unknown. Furthermore, there is little information available on gender differences in job satisfaction among these foreign highly educated workers.

This study is based on data collected through a Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) survey conducted from April to October 2023, focusing on foreign professionals in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, China, which are major destinations for highly educated foreign workers. The results reveal that, even after controlling for personal backgrounds and workplace characteristics, female foreign highly educated workers exhibit significantly lower job satisfaction and perceptions of fairness in promotions, as well as lower self-efficacy and smaller local social networks, compared to their male counterparts. Specifically, women's perceptions of opportunities being less fair, lower self-efficacy, and limited social support substantially diminish their job satisfaction in comparison to men. On the other hand, higher salary levels have a more positive impact on women's job satisfaction than on men's, partially offsetting the negative effects of resource deficiencies. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding the link between the labor market characteristics and the psychological well-being of foreign highly educated workers, particularly in terms of gender differences, in a developing economy in the East.