

Gender, youth and immigration: obstacles to equality¹

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Abstract

Introduction

Social and feminist studies have done a great job of research by analysing women's situation through the application of the gender perspective, and by fleeing from a purely androcentric vision. However, the application of gender analysis is not enough for the interpretation of women's heterogeneity, sometimes disabling the visualization of double discriminations. This would be the case of immigrant women.

The theory of intersectionality claims to make visible the different situations of women as a diverse, heterogeneous group. La Barbera (2009) coins the term "intersectional gender" as an indispensable analytical category in the analysis of differences between women's groups. In this respect, intersectionality enables us to study how gender interacts with other variables such as race, age, social origin, religion or educational and occupational level. She affirms that "any dimension of discrimination is originated and interconnected by these variables of inextricable form and that the gender notion changes when interacting with other social conditions" (La Barbera, 2010, 55).

This trend contends that not all individuals are equal and also that the female collective is heterogeneous. Thus, we cannot generalize about the situation of women or in particular regarding work and the personal paths they follow. It is also important to analyse the gender perspective by considering the intersection and interaction of gender with different variables such as education, social background, nationality and age, among others in order to visualize all possible situations (Collins, 1989; Nash, 2008; Vázquez Laba, Buonaffina and Perazzolo, 2012; Corbeil and Marchand, 2006; Dorlin, 2012; Bilge, 2009).

The recession has hit youth particularly hard. The effect of the recession and downturn in the UE, and specifically in Spain, has been particularly felt by young people in the job market. The high rates of Spanish youth unemployment (46.4% as opposed to 22.9% for the EU according to data from the OECD, 2012) which more than doubled the 2011 Spanish unemployment rate (21.8%) represent the tip of the iceberg as regards difficulties in school-to-work transition of young people in Spain. The

¹ It is part of the project "Trajectories from secondary education into employment: a biographical perspective" (EDU2009-13312), funded under the national Plan R+D+i (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. Government of Spain).

situation deteriorates when focusing on the immigrant group, which supports an unemployment rate three times superior to that of natives.

This article focuses on the analysis of the educational, occupational and personal pathways of young, immigrant women with the aim of making visible their differentiated situations depending on the structural, cultural and personal factors that bear a direct influence on their life projects and which on some occasions bring about double discrimination.

Methods and sample

Owing to the characteristics of the object of study, we opted, in the first phase, for a qualitative or interpretive methodology based on the biographical method (Bertaux, 1997; Desmarais, 2009). In the second phase, using a quantitative approach, information was collected through a questionnaire. The field work was conducted in an urban setting (the city of Palma de Mallorca). The study was conducted based on a retrospective longitudinal methodology (Casal, Merino, García, 2011) analysing youth pathways as processes (Bidart 2006, 2008) and focusing on the pathways taken by young people aged between 26 and 28 years, during the approximately ten years elapsed between finishing compulsory education (2000 to 2001) and data collection (2010 to 2012).

The sample of the first phase is made up of a total of 42 young people and the second of 580 and is statistically representative of the population born between 1983 and 1984 according to the census of the Palma de Mallorca City Council. In relation to the corpus of biographical interviews, the number of young women is 23, representing 54.7% of the total. Of these, 6 (26%) are immigrants. In the second phase sample, the number of young women interviewed is 306 and represents 52.7% of the total sample; 92 of them (30%) are immigrants.

The combination of both sources of information enables us to analyse the factors that especially impede the development of their life projects in equality of conditions.

Main results and discussion

Among the main results of the research, the following stand out.

1. A descriptive analysis of the different educational and training levels, occupational history and situation, social status and uses of time of immigrant women compared to the other groups interviewed.
2. An analysis of the factors that determine their situation, with special emphasis on the additional difficulties that this group presents.
3. A description of the school-to-work transition pathways over a 10 year period, which captures the different impact of the economic crisis among this especially sensitive group.

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