

How to attract men into jobs performed predominantly by women

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Across OECD countries, historically female-dominated occupations in healthcare, education and social services have been growing and are expected to grow even more in the future. In the US, nurse practitioners, occupational therapy assistants and home health care aides are among the

ten occupations with the highest expected percent change of employment between 2019 and 2029.

Yet, the share of men in these occupations has barely changed since 1970s, despite a decline in manufacturing's share of employment and of participation of men in the labor force. The share of employment in manufacturing in the US fell from 29.7 to 12.7 percent between 1968 and 2008, and the labor force participation of men declined from 80 percent to 70 percent over the same period.

Why don't men enter into female-dominated occupations? Understanding the barriers to men's entry in these fields is important to help workers in declining industries move towards new opportunities.

To answer this question, I designed and ran a large-scale field experiment to bring into a controlled-setting a real-world policy that aims at increasing [gender diversity](#) in female-dominated jobs. I embed the experiment within the UK-wide recruitment program for social workers, where I observe applications as well as hiring and on-the-job outcomes over two years for candidates of both genders. This allows me to say whether—and how—bringing more men into female-dominated jobs is good for employers and whether this has spillovers on women's choices.

The design manipulates the content of recruitment messages to potential applicants for the job along two dimensions: perceived gender share and expected returns to ability. The former manipulation shows a photograph of a current worker, who could be (in a randomized way) a man or a woman. The latter discloses information of past performance among workers in the job.

I find that increasing expected returns to ability attracts 15 percent more applications by men. The incoming pool of applicants is better on

observable characteristics and gets more job offers. When followed on the job for over two years, men attracted to apply by higher expected returns to ability consistently perform better and are not more likely to leave vis-à-vis men with lower expected returns to ability.

Increasing the perceived share of men in the job does not have an impact on men's applications, which is a surprising null result. Adverts portraying people of the same gender are a key ingredient of most policy proposals trying to attract men to teaching or nursing. For instance, in 2002 the Oregon Center for Nursing tried to appeal to young men by launching the notorious "Are you man enough to be a nurse?" recruitment campaign, which portray a line-up of masculine men engaged in a variety of extreme sports. A more realistic representation of male nurses is also one of the pillars of the biggest recruitment drive in the history of the UK National Health System. My results suggest that the gender composition of portrayed actors might not matter as much as was thought.

What about spillovers on women? I find that women are insensitive to information provision on average, but they are less likely to apply and are more likely to quit the job when they believe that there are more male social workers in the job (i.e. when they received a male photograph). However, the drop-out is concentrated among the least talented women, and thus it has a positive impact on the average quality of the pool of female workers.

Taken together, these findings suggest that breaking informational barriers to men's entry in female-dominated jobs might increase gender diversity and improve overall workforce quality in a gender-neutral way. This yields an optimistic message for policy. Both the stigma associated with working in a female occupation and men's perceptions of their returns to ability have been central in the debate around the conversion of unemployed men into service [jobs](#). The two have different policy

implications. The femaleness associated with some occupations may be difficult to modify and changes in [gender](#) composition take time. While people can be monetarily compensated or compositional changes can be accelerated through quotas, uncertain or incorrect expectations can be more cheaply tackled through information provision and incentives, for example through low-cost organizational practices that recognize good performance.

Provided by Bocconi University

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