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and Personnel Psychology (WOP-P)

# **Determinants of Decent Work: Sex differences in the Role of Individual and Organizational Factors**

Master Thesis

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## **Abstract**

The concept of decent work expresses human rights regarding contexts, conditions, and contents of work that meet people's aspirations for their working lives. The rapid and steady change in the social roles of women and men increased the awareness to mitigate gender inequalities at work. Gender equality remains one of the main challenges and current goals of societal development, recognized in the international political agenda by the United Nations as a Sustainable Development Goal. Therefore, research on individual and organizational determinants of decent work might be a complement to grasp the complexity of designing interventions. This study investigates whether, and to what extent, a broad set of individual and organizational variables are associated with workers' perception of decent work and whether these associations differ by sex. To analyze, both parametric (multivariate analysis of variance - MANOVA) and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis) were used, followed by post-hoc tests. Levene's test was performed to verify the equality of variances, and homogeneity of covariances was checked. Portuguese workers (N = 363; 62% female; mean age = 40 years) filled in the Decent Work Questionnaire and a set of items regarding individual (sex, age, educational level, and work length in the job position) and organizational variables (organizational size, management role, employment contract, work length in the organization, private or public sector, and income). Overall, the results indicate that workers' perspectives of decent work are associated with several individual and organizational variables, and that these associations are significantly different between men and women. Among women, age and work length in the organization are negatively associated with dimensions of decent work, while for men age is positively associated with decent work. There are also differences between men and women in decent work dimensions regarding educational level (only significant among women), management role (only significant among men), and professional bond (only significant among women). The association between private vs. public sector and decent work

is similar among men and women. Our results are important to bring awareness to decision-makers about the pattern of association between individual and organizational variables with decent work dimensions among men and women. By knowing those patterns and differences leaders can create appropriate actions aiming at promoting decent work for all.

**Keywords:** Decent work; Portugal; sociodemographic variables; gender inequalities; organizational variables.

## **Introduction**

Work is considered a central role in people's lives (Gonçalves & Coimbra, 2007; Overell, 2009). The work environment gives people context for their personal development and self-fulfillment (Duque, 2013), including knowledge and technical achievements (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016). At the same time, work is imperative for people's social integration, allowing them to contribute to society in a meaningful way (Gheaus & Herzog, 2016; Selenko et al., 2018). Moreover, aspects related to its monetary gains are well known and include the critical role that jobs play in determining living standards for workers and their families (World Bank, 2013).

Work organizations expose employees to a diverse set of conditions. For example, work arrangements and physical conditions impose an array of livelihood standards and risk exposure (e.g., work overload, emotional demands, physical demands, burnout, long working hours; Bakker et al., 2005; Nahrgang et al., 2011; Burgard & Lin, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). Similarly, psychosocial characteristics of work, such as job strain (e.g., high psychological demands and low decision authority; Mausner-Dorsch & Eaton, 2000) have been associated with the worsening of workers' mental health. However, inequalities in the labor market stretch these risks and affect those who are the most vulnerable (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2002). For instance, employment relations - legal regulation of work - has received growing acknowledgment as the flexibility in labor contracts (e.g., subcontracting, temporary, casual work, own-account workers) and the informal economy progressively increased (ILO, 2002). To illustrate the challenging effects of these changes, research showed negative consequences of job insecurity and precariousness to employee's mental health (Ferrie et al., 2008; Menéndez-Espina et al., 2019; Sverke et al., 2002; Vancea, & Utzet, 2016).

Despite effective advances in labor law in the European Union, such as the flexicurity model that fosters successful transitions in the labor market and upward mobility securing

worker's right to employment, there are still structural constraints vulnerable groups face in organizations (European Commission, EC, 2007). Particularly, the rapid and constant change in the social roles of women and men generated an increased awareness to mitigate gender inequalities at work (ILO, 2018). Gender equality remains one of the main challenges and current goals of societal development, having been recognized in the international political agenda by the United Nations (UN) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG5; UN, 2015). Across different cultures, gender inequality affects women's access to working conditions that enable their development (ILO, 2018; UN, 2015). To begin, the access to employment in Europe is still unequal between gender. Besides, commonly women are in charge of unpaid domestic work. When employed, women are predominant in low-paid sectors (e.g. education, health, and social work), and have less leadership positions. Indeed, in the second quarter of 2020 women occupied 7.8% of board chairs and 8.2% of CEOs in Europe. Moreover, women often work with different time schedules and long hours, with no social protection (EC, 2020; Milner et al., 2019).

In this context, the concept of decent work represents how sustainable development (Anker et al., 2003; Pouyaud, 2016) and fair globalization (ILO, 2008a) can be achieved. Decent work expresses human rights regarding its contexts, conditions, and contents of work that satisfy people's aspirations for their working lives (Pereira et al., 2019a). Decent work allows different professionals to accomplish a work that complies with several conditions: a) is both fulfilling and productive; b) allows professional and personal development; c) in which decisions are fair and promote equality; d) where there is acceptance, respect and freedom of speech; e) workers receive enough earnings to live with autonomy and dignity; f) provides social protection; g) workers have health and safe conditions; and h) there is adequate distribution of time and workload (Ferraro et al., 2018a; ILO, 1999). The inclusion of decent

work in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG8; UN, 2015) also highlights its significance, as this document plans to guide human development in many fields.

The complexity of cultural phenomena and the growing diversity in work contexts can present a challenge for decent work studies and interventions. This is because the concept of decent work is based on universal principles and it can be expressed in different ways in different contexts (Ferraro et al., 2015). Dos Santos (2019) comprehensively addressed the consequences of culture in decent work-related interventions. However, intersectionality within cultures makes organizational phenomena affect groups differently. Thus, research on individual and organizational variables as determinants of decent work might be a complement to grasp the complexity of designing decent work interventions.

The goal of this study is to investigate whether, and to what extent, a broad set of individual (age, educational level, and work length in the job position – tenure) and organizational (organizational size, management role, professional bond, work length in the organization, activity sector private or public, and income) variables are related with workers' perception of decent work and whether these associations differ by gender. Thereby, an expected contribution is in the nomological network (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) enrichment of the decent work concept. Furthermore, the psychological approach to decent work, particularly from the work, organizational, and personnel psychology (WOPP) perspective, can add value to support the development of planned interventions and change management practices (Roe, 2006). Finally, as suggested by Fine et al. (2020), research on the sociodemographic and organizational variables can help policy and decision-makers to create more appropriate, context-specific affirmative actions.

### **Conceptualization of decent work**

Decent work was first proposed by the ILO in 1999 and concerns all types of jobs and workers (Deranty & Macmillan, 2012; Ferraro et al., 2016; ILO, 1999) – formal sector



employees, self-employed, and unregulated wage workers (Ghai, 2003). A comprehensive overview of the main steps towards the evolution of the concept was conducted by Ferraro et al. (2016). A brief look at these historical landmarks is presented below.

In a time of intense globalization, post-cold war and competition among companies, the Director-General of the ILO raised awareness to matters of quality jobs and underlined the four core values that the concept of decent work is based upon: “The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (ILO, 1999, p. 3). These values were met through four strategic objectives, established as the decent work agenda: (1) the promotion of standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, which refers to worker’s rights of equality and dignity are being assured by legal frameworks, a necessary condition for decent work; (2) the promotion of employment creation and income opportunities that are productive (to society and the individual), is the content of decent work along with (3) access to social protection and social security, essential to the combat of poverty and inequalities; and (4) the promotion of social dialogue, engaging employee, employer and government in the process from which to attain decent work (Ferraro et al., 2016; Ferraro et al., 2018a; Pereira et al., 2019a). The expressed values and strategic goals illustrate the inclusive and universal approach of the concept, rooted in human rights and ethical claims, which placed work in a broader context, influenced by economic, political, and social context. Besides, it highlighted the interdependence among nations to commit to decent work (Ferraro et al., 2016). In the year 2000, the UN approved the United Nations Millennium Declaration in which political leaders signed in favor of eradicating extreme poverty. This Declaration portrayed a vital element of the decent work agenda, social dialogue, and the idea that decent work can only be achieved through an effort made by all stakeholders (government, employers, and workers). At the same time, poverty eradication is closely linked to employment, unemployment, and workers in

general, and though, of interest to WOPP professionals (Gloss & Thompson, 2013). Under these propositions, the ILO (2008d) developed a framework of indicators to enable the measurement and operationalization of the concept. The indicators are organized by 11 substantive elements: (1) employment opportunities; (2) adequate earnings and productive work; (3) decent working time; (4) combining work, family and personal life; (5) work that should be abolished; (6) stability and security of work; (7) equal opportunity and treatment in employment; (8) safe work environment; (9) social security; (10) social dialogue; and (11) economic and social context of decent work. The ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008c) emphasized the importance of the decent work agenda to sustainable development in a globalized world. In 2011 the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) declared in favor of helping firms, communities, and governments achieve decent work through research and practical interventions (EAWOP, 2011). In 2015, the UN included decent work for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, attesting once again the legitimacy of the concept in current times.

Regarding the assessment of the concept, an important contribution to the operationalization of the decent work agenda was the creation of the Decent Work Questionnaire (DWQ), a 31-item self-reported questionnaire developed by Ferraro et al. (2018a), based on a large sample of knowledge workers from Brazil and Portugal ( $n = 1675$ ). This psychological measure allows an unprecedented analysis of workers' subjectivity on the dignity of his/her current work environment. Besides, it is a safe measure for workers because it is assessed outside of the organizational site (Standing, 2000). The DWQ allows the assessment of essential issues that permeate the work context from the perspective of decent work. Furthermore, this questionnaire was developed to be fitted to different work statuses: business owners, public or private employees, independent workers, temporary workers, researchers, trainees or apprentices. The DWQ encompasses seven dimensions capable of

attaining workers' perspective of decent work: (1) the first dimension, DW1 - *fundamental principles and values at work*, measures how values in the workplace takes into consideration procedural and interactional justice, dignity, participation, freedom, non-discrimination and trust, and relates to the core values of decent work as stated by the ILO; (2) the second dimension, named DW2 - *adequate working time and workload*, considers the balance in distribution of time between family, personal life and work, an overall work-life balance, as well as pace of work and schedules; (3) the third dimension, DW3 - *fulfilling and productive work*, measures the quality of the work capable of delivering value to society in addition to professional and personal development to the worker; (4) the fourth dimension, DW4 - *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*, address how work can provide enough earnings (perceived as fair) to access health, leisure, etc., be able to provide well-being to the family, and invest in one's professional development; (5) the fifth dimension, DW5 - *social protection*, refers to the perception of support given by the government within social protection mechanisms in cases of unemployment and illness, for instance; (6) the sixth dimension, DW6 - *opportunities*, measures workers' perception of alternative jobs, freedom of choice, and professional progression, all that represents employability; and lastly, (7) DW7 - *health and security* represents the perception of being safe at work and the comfort of work environment. Overall, the DWQ assesses the individual's perception of decent work according to their current professional experience, involving and putting those who are directly affected by it – workers – at the center of the question. So far, this questionnaire is a starting point in the concept's psychological measure, screening the full range of decent work as defined by the ILO.

The decent work concept is inserted in a diverse nomological network (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) of theory and research, from law studies, economics, and social science (Pereira et al., 2019a). However, the psychological approach to decent work is still relatively recent.

Authors have acknowledged the lack of studies regarding the subjective experience of decent work (dos Santos, 2019; Ghai, 2006). Others go further and questioned the lack of positioning from WOPP researchers and professionals for the issues surrounding decent work, such as workers in the informal sector and who are subject to various discriminations (Bergman & Jean, 2016; Gloss, Carr, Reichman, Abdul-Nasiru, & Oestereich, 2017; Lefkowitz, 2019; Olson-Buchanan & Allen, 2017). In line with this, over the past decades, several authors in the field of work and organizational psychology have revived a debate around the need to rethink the relationship between the employer (organizations) and the employee (e.g., Alzola, 2018; Brief, 2000; Casey, 2006; Standing, 2000). Brief (2000) in his provocative known article posed the question of for who is good the knowledge produced by scientists in the field of organizational psychology, and whether we act as mere servants of a managerialism perspective. Casey (2006) argued that is necessary a shift in how employers and managers perceive workers, to be more accurate to workers' current aspirations. As an example, the concept of 'smart work organizations' (Schmid, 2012) embodies this idea, that work must be shaped to fit the employees' yearnings and needs, and not just the opposite – fit employees into job requirements. A more recent step in this direction was driven by the changes in the world of work, such as the flexible working arrangements and the employees' autonomy over their careers (Paradnike et al., 2016). However, the instrumentalized approach, expressed in forms of control and precariousness in organizations (e.g., by restraining voicing, security and equality; Standing, 2000) does not convey to the changes in the world of work and human behavior (Weiss & Rupp, 2011), failing to develop workers' commitment and to address contemporary complexities (Casey, 2006). Research on the psychological dimensions of decent work has the potential to fill in this gap since it focuses on the affective elements that impact workers' choices and experiences of the labor market, which is not fully understood by the most objective measures (Worth, 2016). Besides, it embodies all forms of work, and building

knowledge of workers at their most diverse statuses is imperative to the creation and implementation of practices aimed at their well-being (Saxena et al., 2015).

An approach that rather relates to the goals portrayed in the decent work agenda is the one taken by the Humanitarian Work Psychology in their efforts to enhance human welfare (Gloss & Thompson, 2013) through the work of psychologists in organizations (Lefkowitz, 2012, 2014). This approach supports a wide range of principles under the decent work umbrella. For example, it advocates for the social dialogue in the work context by encouraging employee participation in decision-making (e.g., corporate social responsibility practices), and is committed to the global effort of poverty reduction in its research and practices (Berry et al., 2011).

It is worth noting that the dimensions of decent work overlaps with other constructs in WOPP, although they cannot be considered interchangeable. To name a few: organizational justice (Steiner, 2020) – DW1, occupational health and safety (Wong et al., 2019) – DW2 and DW7, meaningful work (Overell, 2009) – DW3, and quality of work-life and quality of employment (Steffgen et al., 2015; Johri, 2005) – DW2, DW5, and DW7. About the latter, quality of work-life is, according to the American Psychological Association dictionary of psychology, “the extent to which a person obtains satisfaction from his or her job and feels a sense of organizational commitment. Several factors are important for a good quality of worklife, including salary, benefits, safety, and efficiency, as well as variety and challenge, responsibility, contribution, and recognition” (VandenBos & American Psychological Association, 2007). Thus, it distinguishes from the concept of decent work although shows theoretical approximation with some of its dimensions. First, a distinctive feature of the concept of decent work is that it is rooted in fundamental ethical standards, such as equality of opportunity and treatment that are timely. Additionally, decent work must be sustained through social dialogue among different stakeholders. Therefore, decent work is a compound measure

of objective and subjective indicators, that joints together several research traditions from work-related sciences (dos Santos, 2019).

Studies integrating individual and organizational characteristics as antecedents are important to understand one's needs and expectations. For instance, it may be interesting to investigate perceived differences between men and women in organizational structures that disadvantage women (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2015; Starnski & Son Hing, 2015). Concerning the consequences, studies have discussed the relationship between different decent work dimensions and multiple variables in the realm of WOPP. More specifically, the impact of these psychological dimensions on human behavior, organizations, and organizational behavior (Graça et al., 2020). This relationship is reviewed below.

Recently, Ferraro et al. (2017) examined the associations between motivation and decent work in a sample of lawyers. They found that the dimensions of decent work *fulfilling and productive work, opportunities, fundamental principles and values at work, and meaningful retribution for the exercise of citizenship* were positively associated with intrinsic and identified work motivation and negatively associated with amotivation as described by the self-determination theory (Gagné et al., 2015). In a different study, Ferraro et al. (2018b) examined if the association between decent work and work motivation was mediated by the psychological capital in a sample of knowledge workers. Again, they found that a decent work context (measured by global decent work score) can foster employees to have more autonomous types of motivation (identified and intrinsic motivation). Ferraro et al. (2018c) showed a remarkable positive association between the decent work dimension *fulfilling and productive work* and intrinsic and identified work motivation. More recently, Ferraro et al. (2020) identified that the decent work dimensions were positively related to intrinsic work motivation, work engagement, and lower personal burnout. Moreover, Pereira et al. (2019b) examined how work environments supported by decent work principles and psychological

dimensions (from the DWQ) were consistent with new business models, particularly those under the framework of the economy for the common good. Lastly, a study about decent work and work engagement (vigor, absorption, and dedication) among higher education teachers/researchers showed significant and positive effect of decent work dimensions on engagement. Among decent work dimensions, *fulfilling and productive work*, and *opportunities* were the most predictive of work engagement (Graça et al., 2020).

### **Gender discrimination**

Although considerable efforts have been made to reduce the gender gap in the workplace, gender stereotype norms are still currently prevalent in many European countries. Gender norms are attached to stereotype beliefs regarding sex differences, expressing an obstacle for women to achieve labor in compliance with decent work principles (Fapohunda, 2012; Ghai, 2006; Jawando & Adenugba, 2017). Generally, women have less access to opportunities – In 2019 only 67% of all women were employed, as opposed to 79% of all men. In 2020 board members in corporate business were 29% women and 71% men. This evidence indicates that not only less woman is formally employed, but they are also a minority in most business boards. That being said, women often suffer sectoral segregation, where they are employed in lower-paid jobs; work-life balance issues that hamper their working hours, doing more unpaid work than men; with less job security – women are more likely to be in part-time jobs than men (EC, 2020; Eurostat, 2021). However, research has shown that problems associated with gender discrimination at work are context-specific, and different initiatives are needed to tackle this issue (Bergmann et al., 2018; Gaiaschi, 2019; Koskina, 2009; Mira et al., 2020; Stojmenovska, 2018).

A recent systematic review (Kirsch, 2018) showed that the process of board composition in organizations can be unfavorable to women because it relies on country-level gender equality, firm industry, and size, and social factors. Some industries showed a higher

level of women on board (i.e., retail) and in larger firms as well. However, social factors such as ingroup bias can hamper women's participation in corporate boards.

Additionally, not only do women have access to fewer opportunities, but their salary is also lower than men. A recent systematic review looked at 98 articles to identify factors that contributed to the gender pay gap comparing the private and public sectors (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017). The review identified that the gender pay gap was present in both sectors, although less predominant in the public sector. Besides, the study emphasized the glass ceiling phenomenon represented by the lack of equal opportunity in career advances to be one of the factors determinants for the existing gender pay gap. Furthermore, recently Gaiaschi (2019) concluded that in identical conditions (controlled for sociodemographic characteristics), among physicians in Italy, women still earned 18% less than men. One factor that explained this difference is that the male physicians had more time to work in private clinics than their female counterparts because of the double standards set upon women to work and do housework. Besides, being married was associated to a higher income for the male physicians, while it had a null effect for women. Bergmann et al. (2018) analyzed the gender pay gap in different sectors of activity – financial and health – from German and Austria, stressing the need to view the issue of gender inequality beyond differences in time devoted to work and task preferences. Koskina (2009) examined pay disparities in the Greek public sector, and her findings suggested that despite the regulations in the public sector, there was still vertical job segregation, due to gender-biased discriminations and politics. Together with all evidence, as gender disparities persist without further implication, the literature review on sex and gender discrimination supports the idea that women may face decent work deficits via various issues such as income disparities, career prospects, and job opportunities. In contrast, there is evidence suggesting that women in the workplace, particularly in managerial positions, can contribute to healthier work environments. To illustrate, Bloom et al. (2011) surveyed 450 firms in Europe



(Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) to investigate family-friendly workplace policy determinants and whether it was related to firm performance. Results showed an association between skilled workers, female managers, and better management practices to the offering of more family-friendly workplace practices.

To summarize, workplace discrimination affects women's socio-economic status. However, perceived injustice about workplace discrimination can also influence one's overall health. Harnois and Bastos (2018) analyzed self-reported data from the United States regarding the physical and mental health of men and women across three years (2006, 2010, and 2014). The study showed that, on average, women reported more days of poor mental health than men, and perceived significantly more sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and other forms of mistreatments in the workplace, which contributed to approximately 10% of the gender inequalities in self-reported health. Moreover, several studies confirmed that women are more vulnerable to workplace discrimination than men. Roscigno (2019) analyzed self-reported data regarding workplace discrimination every four years from 2002 to 2018 and found that women are three to four times more likely to experience discrimination and sexual harassment than their male peers. Also, a recent meta-analysis by McCord et al. (2018) confirmed that women perceived more sex-based mistreatment than men, while other types of mistreatments (e.g., bullying, incivility) were balanced between men and women. Furthermore, in a recent study, Bakken et al. (2021), based on a randomized sample of pharmacists explored the differences in discrimination and harassment in a female-dominated profession using the intersectionality of gender and race. The authors showed that 29% of discrimination was based on gender, 31.2% was based on age and 16.6% was based on race/ethnicity. Besides, black females rated being "very unsatisfied" with the consequences of reporting discrimination to their superiors.

Furthermore, studies demonstrated differences regarding voicing, in particular negotiation in the workplace showing that in general women initiate negotiations less than men

in fear of a backlash. An experiment conducted with North American university students about hiring decisions confirmed that women were less likely to initiate negotiations with male evaluators (Bowles et al., 2007). Furthermore, a meta-analysis showed that gender differences appear when there is structural ambiguity (e.g. negotiators are not experienced) favoring men in negotiations. Effect sizes changing from low structural ambiguity to high structural ambiguity were 0.66 (Mazei et al., 2015).

Although evidence suggests significant differences between men and women in the workplace, and countless research was done around gender discrimination, there are no studies that demonstrate this effect on worker's perceptions of decent work. Further investigation is needed to clarify the association between sex and the different dimensions of decent work.

### **Determinants of decent work**

An in-depth look at previous research suggestions on decent work allowed to better understand existing gaps in the literature. Although considerable research has been devoted to decent work, Pereira et al. (2019a) stated that research regarding the determinants of decent work is still scarce, particularly those that use the concept of decent work from the ILO's perspective. Ferraro et al. (2018a) outlined that decent work intervention proposals could contribute to the quality of life at work and quality of life in general. Dos Santos (2019) highlighted that the intervention in decent work must preferably include objective and subjective measures, considering its cultural sensitivity and complexity. As Ghai (2006) underlined, decent work can be measured at three levels: macro (national), meso (enterprise), and micro (individual). At the macro (national) level, it includes objective measures that help to standardize working conditions in all societies (e.g., minimum wages and safety provisions) and macroeconomics analysis. At the meso (enterprise) and micro (individual) level, the measures are the same, but differ in the sense that at the meso level, it is applied to the workplace context, and at the micro level, it is job (or profession)-specific. Both comprise

workplaces or jobs that secure fair treatment, offer employment opportunities, adequate income, and ensure security and health conditions to its employees (Bonnet et al. 2008). The present study contributes to reduce the research gap on the determinants of decent work from a psychological approach. Both individual (sociodemographic) and organizational variables are related to the characterization of the work context and therefore of relevance for the present study.

Age differences have been found concerning decent work conditions. The Joint Employment Report of the European Commission (European Commission, 2019) stated that young people are more susceptible to be employed in precarious types of contracts (e.g., temporary jobs, involuntary part-time work, and low-paid jobs). The report (European Commission, 2019) emphasized that despite the decrease in the unemployment rate, the creation of jobs does not always meet the decent work standards for young people.

Older workers (over 50 years old) are also affected by employment insecurity, since they are overrepresented in self-employment jobs (Bisom-Rapp et al., 2011). Kooij et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on age and work-related motives. The authors reviewed a total of 86 primarily peer-reviewed papers from 1970 to 2009 (51% after 2000). Intrinsic work motives included autonomy, achievement, development, challenging, or interesting work. While extrinsic work motives comprised salary, benefits, career advancement, recognition. They showed that age was positively related to intrinsic motives and negatively associated with extrinsic motives. Also, Raab (2019) assessed older workers perception of job satisfaction by using a self-report measure to assess which factors were most important to determine it. The results showed that job satisfaction stemmed from workers' perception of workplace attributes – particularly career and promotion prospects and recognition. These evidences might indicate that career prospects and opportunities are relevant to older workers as well. However, for workers closer to retirement period, decent work might mean the ability to plan and secure a

standard of living (Bisom-Rapp et al., 2011). Thus, *social protection* might play a significant role for those close to retirement. Overall, age differences may be found associated with perceptions of decent work dimensions (e.g., *opportunities* and *fundamental principles and values at work*), due to differences in career developmental needs as evidenced by Kooij et al. (2011).

Concerning work experience and educational level, according to the ILO (2015), both are basic characteristics that support employability. The lack of professional experience and a low educational level can jeopardize obtaining decent work, for both younger and older workers (Wanberg, Kanfer, Hamann, & Zhang, 2016). In contrast, the attainment of a higher education is associated with a higher sense of autonomy (Mirowsky & Ross, 2007). This might imply higher levels of perception of decency regarding one's work. Furthermore, research shows training on the company-level to be unequally distributed and concentrated mostly on the highly educated (Peraita, 2005). Still, there are few remarks as to how workers' educational attainment differences might be associated with the dimensions of decent work.

The ILO (2017) recognized that firm-level characteristics and enterprise dynamics might influence the achievement of decent work. Some studies evidenced an association between enterprise size and working conditions. Deijl et al. (2013) did a comprehensive review of small and medium-size companies' contributions to employment creation and quality of jobs. The concept of quality of jobs lacked a clear definition in the literature, which made the authors research for different factors involved both in the concept of job quality and decent work. The reviewed empirical studies showed that small firms paid less than larger firms, the same can be said about employment security. Likewise, De Kok et al. (2011) reported that small and medium enterprises paid less than larger companies. However, they argued there was a non-linear relationship between firm size and wages in developed countries when considering micro-enterprises (e.g., less than five employees; ILO, 2017), which in several European

countries paid higher wages than small enterprises. In contrast, Furthermore, Castany (2008) conducted a study concerning organizational size differences in training provisions in Spain and found that training offerings in small-size companies were lower than in larger companies. Since training is an important component of perceived opportunities, and a dimension of decent work, it may impact workers' perception. Given the limited studies about the organizational size and the dimensions of decent work further investigation is needed to examine this relationship.

Frenkel (2006) wrote a theoretical paper on employment contracts from the perspective of service workers and their impacts on decent work. The content of workers under this type of contract might be either routine-service workers or knowledge-based, both varying a lot in its components. Nonetheless, they are often characterized by part-time contracts, shifting working hours, and a lack of collective work identity, which may aggravate towards a deficit in decent work. Empirical evidence is still needed to support this body of knowledge.

Differences between the private and the public sectors were found in the existing literature. At the organizational level, research has found differences in workload and pay systems, for instance, public employees perceived constrain related to pay and promotion. Whereas at the individual level research focused on employees' values and work motives, finding that public employees had a lower valuation of monetary gains, and higher altruistic motives (Rainey & Chun, 2005). Likewise, Willem et al. (2010) compared private and public sector employees to find if they gave the same importance to some work aspects (financial rewards, career development, job content, social atmosphere, work-life balance). The results of this study indicated that public sector employees gave less importance to expectations regarding financial rewards and career development.

Regarding income, Lewis et al. (2001) assessed whether extrinsic (e.g., salaries and benefits), intrinsic factors (e.g., skill discretion, challenge), or personal traits (gender,

employment status) predicted the quality of work-life in the health care sector. The study showed that workplace conditions such as salaries, benefits, autonomy, and supervisor style predicted the quality of work life. Similarly, Mejbél et al. (2013) conducted a review of the main drivers of the quality of working life. The paper pointed out reward, benefits, and compensation as the most frequent driver in literature. Thus, it is possible differences in income may be associated with workers' perception of decent work.

To our knowledge, the research on decent work has not received, until present days, a systematic focus on sociodemographic and organizational variables. Furthermore, most studies have been content to either sociodemographic or organizational variables alone, rather than considering both. Therefore, there is not enough consistent evidence about the relationship between these variables (with a few exceptions) and the dimensions of decent work to formulate a strong hypothesis.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

To answer the proposed goal of the research, a quantitative exploratory cross-sectional study was carried out. To be eligible to participate in this study the following criteria were adopted: 1) having at least three months of professional experience, 2) currently being employed, and 3) receiving monetary compensation for the work carried out. The sample was recruited by convenience, and it is composed of Portuguese workers from different professional backgrounds, including from the private and public sectors, employed in organizations of different dimensions (small, medium, or large), and having achieved different educational levels, considering the structure of the educational system in Portugal. There were  $N = 363$  participants, 37.7% males, and 62% females, the age distribution ranged from 16 to 68 years, with a mean age of 40.9 years ( $SD = 11.45$ ). Most participants held a secondary degree education (45.5%). Participants' work length in the organization varied from zero to 46 years,

with an average of 12.72 years ( $SD = 10.69$ ) for women and 11.42 years ( $SD = 11.04$ ) for men, and the majority had a job tenure of more than one year (79.3%), were in a management position (54.8%), employed in a small organization (40.8%), in the private sector (66.7%), under an open-ended contract (68.6%). The full outline of the data can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 363)*

Characteristics	Total <i>N</i> (%)	Male <i>n</i> (%)	Female <i>n</i> (%)
Educational level			
Basic education (up to nine years of study)	77 (21.2)	41 (29.9)	36 (16.0)
Secondary education (between 10 <sup>o</sup> and 12 <sup>o</sup> year of education)	165 (45.5)	65 (47.4)	99 (44.0)
University studies (bachelor and master's degree, post-graduation, Ph.D.)	121 (33.3)	31 (22.6)	90 (44.0)
Work length in the job position (tenure)			
Up to six months	16 (4.4)	5 (3.6)	11 (4.9)
Between six months and a year	45 (12.4)	16 (11.7)	29 (12.9)
More than one year	288 (79.3)	113 (82.5)	174 (77.3)
Missing	14 (3.9)	3 (2.2)	11 (4.9)
Management position			
With a management role	199 (54.8)	78 (56.9)	120 (53.3)
Without a management role	159 (43.8)	58 (42.3)	101 (44.9)
Missing	5 (1.4)	1 (0.7)	4 (1.8)
Activity sector			
Private sector	242 (66.7)	31 (22.6)	137 (60.9)
Public sector	117 (32.2)	104 (75.9)	86 (38.2)
Missing	4 (1.1)	2 (1.5)	2 (0.9)
Organizational size			
Small (< 10-49 employees)	148 (40.8)	56 (40.9)	92 (40.9)
Medium (50-249 employees)	104 (28.7)	38 (27.7)	65 (28.9)
Large (> 250 employees)	107 (29.5)	41 (29.9)	66 (29.3)
Missing	4 (1.1)	2 (1.5)	2 (0.9)
Employment contract			
Service provision	15 (4.1)	5 (3.6)	10 (4.4)
Fixed-term contract	94 (25.9)	36 (26.3)	58 (25.8)

Open-ended contract	249 (68.6)	93 (67.9)	155 (68.9)
Missing	5 (1.4)	3 (2.2)	2 (0.9)
Income			
Less than 500€	18 (5.0)	3 (2.2)	15 (6.7)
Between 501€ and 1.000€	215 (59.2)	78 (56.9)	136 (60.4)
Between 1.001 and 1.500€	74 (20.4)	34 (24.8)	40 (17.8)
More than 1.501€	33 (9.1)	16 (11.7)	17 (92.4)
Missing	23 (6.3)	6 (4.4)	17 (7.6)

## ***Instruments***

### *Decent Work Questionnaire (DWQ)*

The *DWQ* (Ferraro et al., 2018) is a 31-item questionnaire that was developed to measure workers' subjective experience regarding decent work in their current job, role, organization, and industry. The *DWQ* consists of seven dimensions (described in the section "Conceptualization of decent work") and one global decent work score: DW1 – *fundamental principles and values at work* (e.g., "I am free to think and express my opinions about my work"); DW2 – *adequate working time and workload* (e.g., "I consider the average number of hours I work per day to be adequate/ appropriate"); DW3 – *fulfilling and productive work* (e.g., "I consider the work I do to be decent"); DW4 – *meaningful retribution for the exercise of citizenship* (e.g., "What I earn through my work allows me to live my life with dignity and independence"); DW5 – *social protection* [e.g., "I feel that I am protected if I become unemployed (unemployment insurance, government/social benefits, social programs, etc.)"]; DW6 – *opportunities* (e.g., "Currently, I think there are work/job opportunities for an individual like me"); DW7 – *health and safety* [e.g., "Overall, the environmental conditions in my work are safe and acceptable (temperature, noise, humidity, etc.)"]. Items are answered on a 5-point response scale that ranges from 1 - *I do not agree* to 5 - *I completely agree*. The internal consistency of each subdimension was verified by Cronbach's alpha, in which values



above 0.70 were considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2014). In this sample, the internal consistency of each subscale ranged between .73 (DW6: *Opportunities*) and .88 (DW4: *Meaningful Retribution for the Exercise of Citizenship*).

#### *Sociodemographic and organizational questionnaire*

Sociodemographic and organizational variables were collected using a self-reported questionnaire developed by the authors consisting of 12 questions. The responses to the questions were organized categorically. The sociodemographic variables assessed were: sex, age, educational level and work length in the job position (tenure). Regarding organizational variables, the questionnaire included questions about organizational characteristics (organizational size, activity sector – public or private, management role, type of employment contract, work length in the organization, and income).

#### *Procedures*

Data were collected by Psychology students within the scope of the course unit of research methods between 2017 and 2019. The ethical and technical procedures of data collection are part of the students training in research skills. Each student was instructed to collect three to five questionnaires in his/her network of relationships. The low number of participants given to each student was aimed at strengthening the quality of data since the students could resort to people from their relations that are available to cooperate in the task.

Participants were informed about the general objectives of the investigation and an informed consent was signed by both the researcher and the participant. Each student wrote a report describing the data collection process in detail, containing information about the context of the application of the set of questionnaires, the previous relationship between the student and the participant, and about questions or doubts placed by the respondent and the answer given by the students. Each student signed a term of responsibility, ensuring the authenticity of the collected data.

## ***Data Analysis***

Data were analyzed in the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* software program (IBM SPSS 22.0). Data were split so that results could be analyzed by group (male and female). To provide the sample description, descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviation) were used. Pearson correlations were used to assess the association between the continuous variables (age and work length in the organization) and the subscales of decent work. To analyze the categorical determinants (both individual and organizational) of decent work we used both parametric (multivariate analysis of variance - MANOVA) and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis). Before testing for MANOVA, Levene's test was performed to verify the equality of variances, and homogeneity of covariances were checked. Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc tests were performed to compare significant differences between all pairs of existing groups. Kruskal-Wallis (to compare three or more independent groups) analysis was performed, followed by a post hoc test with Mann Whitney U analysis Bonferroni-adjusted. Results with a significance level below .05 were considered statistically significant.

## **Results**

### ***The dimensions of decent work and individual variables***

The results indicated a significant and positive correlation between age and the dimension *fulfilling and productive work* for male participants ( $r = .19, p = .021$ ). Specifically, older age was associated with higher perceptions of work that is meaningful and productive. For female participants, the results indicated significant and negative correlations between age and the dimensions *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship* and *opportunities* ( $r = -.15, p = .024$ ;  $r = -.17, p = .008$ ). Among females, older age was associated with lower perceptions of remuneration able to fulfill basic and developmental needs, as well as the lower perception of opportunities.

Regarding work length in the organization, significant associations were found only for women. Specifically, it was found a negative correlation between length in the organization and the dimensions *fundamental principles and values at work* and *opportunities* ( $r = -.14, p = .029$ ;  $r = -.21; p < .001$ ). A longer time working in the company was associated with a lower perception of fairness, dignity, and freedom associated with *fundamental principles and values at work*, and a lower perception of *opportunities*.

**Table 2**

*Correlation between age and length in the organization, by gender*

	Age	Length in the Organization
<b>Male</b>		
Fundamental principles and values at work	.09	.08
Adequate working time and workload	.14	.10
Fulfilling and productive work	<b>.19*</b>	.13
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	.13	.16
Social protection	.12	.12
Opportunities	.05	-.24
Health and safety	.03	.06
<b>Female</b>		
Fundamental principles and values at work	-.12	<b>-.14*</b>
Adequate working time and workload	.05	-.13
Fulfilling and productive work	.02	-.13
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	<b>-.15*</b>	-.11
Social protection	-.07	-.06
Opportunities	<b>-.17**</b>	<b>-.21***</b>
Health and safety	-.11	-.12

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Regarding the education level, there were significant differences only for women in the dimensions *fulfilling and productive work*, *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*, and *health and safety*. Particularly, those who reported having higher education levels scored higher on the levels of *fulfilling and productive work* than those with secondary education ( $p = .019$ ) and basic schooling ( $p < .001$ ). Similarly, those with higher education

scored higher on *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship* than those with basic schooling ( $p = .048$ ). Finally, women with higher education scored higher on *health and safety* at their current job than women with basic schooling ( $p = .018$ ).

**Table 3**  
*Comparison between the DWQ dimensions in relation to education, by gender*

	Basic			<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	education	Secondary	University		
	(up to nine years)	education	studies		
	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>		
<b>Male (<i>n</i> = 41; 65; 31)</b>					
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.71 (0.81)	3.65 (0.74)	3.76 (0.70)	0.25	.774
Adequate working time and workload	3.44 (1.04)	3.36 (0.95)	3.23 (0.95)	0.41	.664
Fulfilling and productive work	3.76 (0.77)	3.80 (0.82)	3.90 (0.67)	0.30	.738
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	2.97 (0.90)	3.10 (0.88)	3.16 (1.03)	0.42	.652
Social protection	2.92 (1.04)	3.04 (0.94)	2.93 (1.04)	0.21	.807
Opportunities	3.64 (0.78)	3.63 (0.83)	3.60 (0.82)	0.24	.977
Health and safety	3.54 (0.77)	3.55 (1.06)	3.75 (0.92)	0.56	.572
<b>Female (<i>n</i> = 36; 99; 90)</b>					
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.29 (0.83)	3.48 (0.70)	3.66 (0.85)	2.92	.056
Adequate working time and workload	3.30 (0.94)	3.16 (0.80)	3.29 (0.91)	0.69	.498
Fulfilling and productive work	3.40 (0.77)	3.65 (0.65)	3.94 (0.72)	<b>8.49</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	2.55 (0.98)	2.69 (0.94)	3.03 (1.04)	<b>4.05</b>	<b>.019</b>
Social protection	2.55 (0.92)	2.72 (0.93)	2.93 (0.99)	2.39	.093
Opportunities	3.11 (0.86)	3.19 (0.85)	3.33 (0.90)	1.05	.349
Health and safety	3.12 (0.89)	3.44 (0.79)	3.60 (0.95)	<b>3.85</b>	<b>.023</b>

### *The dimensions of decent work and organizational variables*

For both men and women, the results indicated that there were significant differences between professionals working in the public and private sectors. Regarding men, there were differences in the following dimensions of decent work: *adequate working time and workload*,

*fulfilling and productive work*, and *social protection*. Those who worked in the public sector scored higher than those in the private sector. Similarly, women who reported working in the public sector scored higher than women working in the private sector in the dimensions *adequate working time and workload* and *fulfilling and productive work*. In contrast, regarding the dimension *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*, women working in the private sector scored higher than women working in the public sector.

**Table 4**

*Comparison between the DWQ dimensions in relation to activity sector, by gender*

	<b>Public sector</b>	<b>Private sector</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
	<b>(n = 117)</b>	<b>(n = 242)</b>		
	<b>M (DP)</b>	<b>M (DP)</b>		
<b>Male (n = 31; 104)</b>				
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.86 (0.70)	3.64 (0.76)	2.00	.159
Adequate working time and workload	3.86 (0.95)	3.19 (0.94)	<b>11.87</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Fulfilling and productive work	4.16 (0.58)	3.70 (0.79)	<b>8.73</b>	<b>.004</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	3.13 (1.05)	3.06 (0.88)	0.16	.685
Social Protection	3.32 (1.01)	2.89 (0.96)	<b>4.61</b>	<b>.034</b>
Opportunities	3.65 (0.68)	3.62 (0.85)	0.02	.878
Health and Safety	3.80 (0.98)	3.53 (0.94)	1.95	.165
<b>Female (n = 86; 137)</b>				
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.47 (0.83)	3.56 (0.77)	0.63	.426
Adequate working time and workload	3.41 (0.82)	3.12 (0.89)	<b>5.68</b>	<b>.018</b>
Fulfilling and productive work	3.86 (0.66)	3.66 (0.73)	<b>4.20</b>	<b>.042</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	2.61 (1.03)	2.93 (0.95)	<b>5.73</b>	<b>.017</b>
Social protection	2.78 (0.92)	2.79 (0.99)	0.01	.896
Opportunities	3.11 (0.88)	3.32 (0.87)	3.10	.080
Health and safety	3.42 (0.84)	3.49 (0.89)	0.34	.557

Regarding management role, significant differences were found only for men in the decent work dimensions *fulfilling and productive work* and *opportunities*. In both dimensions,

men who were not in a management role scored higher than those who were in a managerial position.

**Table 5**  
*Comparison between the DWQ dimensions in relation to management role, by gender*

	With management role	Without management role	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>		
<b>Male (<i>n</i> = 78; 58)</b>				
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.59 (0.69)	3.82 (0.81)	3.22	.075
Adequate working time and workload	3.25 (0.93)	3.48 (1.02)	1.91	.169
Fulfilling and productive work	3.63 (0.73)	4.05 (0.77)	<b>10.32</b>	<b>.002</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	2.96 (0.86)	3.22 (0.97)	2.75	.100
Social Protection	2.85 (0.95)	3.15 (1.02)	3.12	.079
Opportunities	3.48 (0.72)	3.82 (0.88)	<b>6.15</b>	<b>.014</b>
Health and Safety	3.50 (0.94)	3.72 (0.96)	1.68	.197
<b>Female (<i>n</i> = 120, 101)</b>				
Fundamental principles and values at work	3.47 (.82)	3.59 (0.75)	1.24	.266
Adequate working time and workload	3.14 (.90)	3.36 (0.80)	3.71	.055
Fulfilling and productive work	3.69 (.73)	3.80 (0.69)	1.27	.260
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	2.75 (.99)	2.89 (1.02)	1.08	.300
Social protection	2.72 (.89)	2.87 (1.04)	1.37	.242
Opportunities	3.24 (.87)	3.22 (0.89)	0.01	.902
Health and safety	3.41 (.91)	3.53 (0.83)	1.07	.300

Pertaining income, significant differences were found in both men and women. Among men, Kruskal-Wallis analysis followed up by post hoc Mann Whitney tests, with Bonferroni adjustment confirmed differences in three dimensions of decent work: (1) *fundamental principles and values at work*, (2) *fulfilling and productive work*, and (3) *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*. (1) Regarding *fundamental principles and values at work*, men who earned the most scored higher than those who earn the lowest salaries – below 500€ ( $p = .007$ ). (2) regarding *fulfilling and productive work*, men who earned more than

501€ – between 501€ and 1.00€; between 1.001€ and 1.500€; and more than 1.501€ – scored higher than those who earned the least – below 500€ ( $p = .010$ ;  $p = .002$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, those whose income were higher than 1.501€ perceived higher *fulfilling and productive work* than those that earned between 501€ and 1000€ ( $p < .001$ ). No differences were found between those in the top 2 income categories. Finally, (3) men who earned the highest salaries – more than 1.501€ and the second highest, between 1.001€ and 1.500€, scored higher in the dimension *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship* than those whose income are between 501€ and 1.00€ ( $p < .001$ ;  $p = .006$ ). Lastly, also those that had the highest salaries (more than 1.501€) scored higher than those whose income was the lowest – below 500€ ( $p < .001$ ).

Regarding women, Kruskal-Wallis analysis indicated significant differences regarding two dimensions of decent work, however post-hoc tests found only one significant difference in the dimension *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*. Women with salaries higher than 1.500€ scored higher than those with the lowest income, below 500€ ( $p < .001$ ). Likewise, those who earn more than 1.500€ and the ones that earn between 1.001€ and 1.500€ had a higher score than those who earn between 501€ and 1.00€ ( $p < .001$ ;  $p = .008$ ).

**Table 6**  
*Comparison between the DWQ dimensions in relation to income, by gender*

	Below 500€	Between 501€ and 1.000€	Between 1.001€ and 1.500€	Higher than 1.501€	Kruskal-Wallis H	<i>p</i>
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank		
<b>Male (<i>n</i> = 3; 78; 34; 16)</b>						
Fundamental principles and values at work	17.67	60.19	75.51	83.16	12.16	<b>.007</b>
Adequate working time and workload	49.50	65.63	66.99	68.78	0.68	.876
Fulfilling and productive work	7.17	58.68	75.16	93.25	20.47	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	41.17	56.28	76.91	94.84	18.60	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Social protection	31.50	62.29	72.25	77.25	5.58	.133

Opportunities	13.17	64.29	67.62	80.78	8.54	.036
Health and safety	38.17	61.28	64.46	97.53	14.04	<b>.003</b>
<b>Female (n = 15; 136; 40; 17)</b>						
Fundamental principles and values at work	106.70	103.89	100.19	117.56	1.04	.791
Adequate working time and workload	119.00	107.38	92.91	96.00	3.02	.388
Fulfilling and productive work	100.30	98.90	120.03	116.44	4.61	.203
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	99.33	94.58	122.66	145.71	15.53	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Social protection	113.73	100.69	108.13	118.32	1.95	.582
Opportunities	112.87	102.88	105.68	107.29	.443	.931
Health and safety	121.63	100.31	97.18	140.15	8.51	<b>.037</b>

The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference for both men and women. However, considering men, the follow up Mann Whitney tests revealed no significant differences. For women, after post hoc analysis, differences were found in the dimension *social protection* considering the different types of professional bond. Higher scores of *social protection* for professionals with a “open-ended contract” and “fixed-term contract” in relation to those with “services provision” type of professional bond ( $p = .005$ ;  $p = .002$ ).

Finally, no significant associations were found between organizational size, and work length in the job position with the dimensions of decent work.

**Table 7**  
*Comparison between the DWQ dimensions in relation to professional bond, by gender*

	<b>Services provision (n = 15)</b>	<b>Fixed-term contract (n = 94)</b>	<b>Open-ended contract (n = 249)</b>	<b>Kruskal-Wallis H</b>	<b>p</b>
	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>		
<b>Male (n = 5; 36; 93)</b>					
Fundamental principles and values at work	63.50	61.50	70.05	1.33	.513
Adequate working time and	69.60	56.13	71.79	4.27	.118



workload					
Fulfilling and productive work	82.40	54.18	71.85	6.18	<b>.045</b>
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	73.60	58.24	70.76	2.85	.240
Social protection	59.20	64.11	69.26	0.69	.705
Opportunities	77.30	63.89	68.37	0.68	.710
Health and safety	88.40	61.21	68.81	2.52	.283
<b>Female (n = 10; 58; 155)</b>					
Fundamental principles and values at work	102.45	105.06	115.21	1.28	.527
Adequate working time and workload	99.10	104.54	115.62	1.67	.433
Fulfilling and productive work	101.85	101.55	116.56	2.56	.277
Meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship	114.15	111.97	111.87	.012	.994
Social protection	48.85	110.61	116.59	10.46	<b>.005</b>
Opportunities	102.45	114.09	111.84	.283	.868
Health and safety	74.05	112.11	114.41	3.71	.156

## Discussion

This study is the first to explore if individual and organizational factors are related to the workers' perspectives of the seven dimensions of decent work and if there are differences by gender. The main findings of this study indicate that workers' perspectives regarding the psychological dimensions of decent work differ by gender and are associated to both individual and organizational factors. Specifically, age, educational level, activity sector, management role, professional bond, work length in the organization and income. The observed association among the key factors described in the study and the workers' perspectives is in agreement with authors whose research indicated that the perception of decent work might change culturally, regarding people's professional and personal development perspectives (dos Santos & Pais, 2019; Ferraro et al., 2018a; ILO, 1999). Only job tenure and organizational size were not significantly related to decent work.

Regarding the dimensions of decent work, *fulfilling and productive work* is one that appeared the most, followed by both *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*

and *opportunities*. Differences regarding, age, work length in the organization, educational level (only significant among women), management role (significant among men), professional bond (only significant among women), and income showed contrasting results inside those groups. Among women, workers with university studies, with open-ended contracts, with the highest income reported higher levels of decent work. Among men, those that were not in a managerial role and with the highest income reported higher levels of decent work. The association between private vs. public sector and decent work is similar among men and women – workers in the public sector reported higher levels of decent work than those in the private sector, with one exception: between women, those in the private sector scored higher in *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*.

The correlation between work length in the organization and the dimensions of decent work (Table 2) indicate that for women, the longer the time working in the same organization, the lower is their perception of *fundamental principles and values at work* and *opportunities*. In contrast, for men, there was no significant association. On the other side, work length in the job position (tenure) was not significantly associated with any dimension of decent work, for both genders, indicating that the experience in the organization is more relevant. Firstly, regarding *fundamental principles and values at work*, this dimension expresses decent work most fundamental values that reflect justice, dignity, freedom of speech, non-discrimination, and trust (dos Santos, 2019). Current research shows that women struggle in finding a fair environment at their workplace because of gender discrimination and this result points out that this challenge is not reduced by the time spent in the organization. Research found that women negotiated less in their workplace because of fear of backlash (Bowles et al., 2007; Mazei et al., 2015), which may negatively impact their ability to voice their concerns limiting their freedom of speech. Second, *Opportunities* express employability, workers' perceptions regarding their professional development and prospects of promotability in their current

experience. A couple of explanations can be drawn from this negative association. Foremost, it is worth noting that in our sample, among the female population, the average period of employment in the organization is approximately 13 years, a large proportion is working on small firms (40.9%), and most of the respondents is composed of managers (53.3%). First, the results may reflect a *plateau* state, a phase in which those workers perceive no apparent vertical mobility in the organization (Song et al., 2019), which can occur to those in higher hierarchic positions, particularly in small firms, where job prospects and mobility is scarcer. Second, as there is an increased responsibility on the individual to manage his career (Graça et al., 2020; Paradnike et al. 2016), the human resources divestment in training and career development can affect the workers who have been in the organization for a longer time. Workers who stay in the same organization for longer may experience too much specialization (or less variety) in a given set of tasks. Thus, they stop acquiring new skills that may boost their employability, which is known to be a key element to follow the changes in the world of work. Another assumption is that the glass ceiling effect that many women still face in the workplace (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017) may have negatively impacted the association between length in the organization and the dimension *opportunities* of decent work, which would explain the significant association for women but not for man. The glass ceiling phenomenon refers to both invisible barriers due to discrimination that hampers women and other minorities from progressing their careers in an organization, as well as having equal employment opportunities.

Different ages have been found to represent distinct career and personal needs (Kooij et al., 2011). In our findings, age was positively associated with one dimension of decent work for men (*fulfilling and productive work*), and negatively associated with two dimensions of decent work for women (*meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship* and *opportunities*). Even though the mean age between the two was similar (41 for women, 41 for men). This result may indicate that women face double standards having to juggle between

housework and workplace responsibilities that impair their careers by reducing the time they can spend on professional development, impacting their earnings and employability. There are consistent findings in research about gender discrimination that pointed out the existing disparities in wage (Bergmann et al., 2018; Koskina, 2009), namely the gender wage gap, even when there are similar conditions for men and women (Gaiaschi, 2019). At the same time, the impediments to their careers women face in organizations, such as the glass ceiling phenomenon (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017), and gender discrimination goes even further damaging their employability.

In this study, women with higher educational level were associated with a greater perception of *fulfilling and productive work, meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship and health and safety*. Graça et al. (2020) suggested that high scores in *fulfilling and productive work* indicate an appreciation for work beyond the job role, able to enrich one's life. A possible explanation for this result can be found in the association seen in previous studies between highly educated workers and an increased sense of autonomy, variety, and challenges (Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Parker & Ohly, 2010). Therefore, high-skilled workers are more prone to experience *fulfilling and productive work*. The same can be implied by the other dimensions of decent work, in the sense that women with higher education have more bargaining power and can choose where to work and are better paid. Another assumption is that educational level can buffer some of the negative impact of gender inequalities by reducing gender wage gap and empowering women in the workplace to take measures against unhealthy work environments.

Regarding activity sector, our results suggest similar results for both men and women, with workers in the public sector experiencing higher levels of decent work. Snir and Harpaz (2002) stated that because public employees put less emphasis on economic rewards, they also are less likely to work longer hours. Besides, public sector employees perceive their work to

have a social impact and to be useful to societies' demands. Bullock et al. (2015) also found evidence to support this line of thought. These authors found evidence to support the idea that monetary gains are less prominent to public sector workers than their private sector counterparts. All of it is encapsulated in the psychological dimensions in which public employees scored higher: *fulfilling and productive work*, and *adequate working time and workload*, the latter represents the management of time and balance between work and family time. In contrast, between women, those in the private sector scored higher in *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship* and *opportunities*. In the private sector, remuneration and promotion practices are linked to performance, which can increase the perception of fairness about their wages, and have more bonuses related to their performance. However, findings are still inconsistent in this regard, with studies pointing to gender wage gap in both the public and private sector (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017; Koskina, 2009). Therefore, overall, the results found can be explained by the difference in work environments, such as rewards system, structure, and organizational goals in different sectors.

Regarding management positions, no significant results were found between women, only between men. This is surprising since studies related most of the women's struggle in the workplace at the higher career level due to the glass ceiling effect, which mainly affects minorities trying to advance in these higher managerial positions. However, results showed that male workers without a managerial position had a higher score than those with a management role in two dimensions of decent work, namely *fulfilling and productive work* and *opportunities*. The differences found regarding *fulfilling and productive work* suggest that rather than a higher occupational status, other job characteristics might have a stronger influence on workers' perceptions of fulfillment. At the same time, those male workers that are not in management roles can perceive their employability much more positively than women or workers that are already more established in their careers.

However, when looking at results concerning professional bond, we see the opposite, with a significant association for women and none for man, which can indicate that rather than the status inside an organization, the type of employment contract plays a central role in women's perceptions of decent work, particularly *social protection*. As argued by the ILO (2007, 2020), and evidenced by our results, those with open-ended contracts perceived higher *social protection* than those under a services provision contract. This might indicate that this dimension of decent work is more affected by the workers' current employment status. Due to the increasing rate of workers' employment by flexible types of contracts, this is important because it shows how employment issues are affected by the broader social context, macro-economic environment, and work trends (Burgard & Lin, 2013). Besides, it confirms what was also expected from Frenkel (2006) theoretical paper, in which the author argued that service workers might experience decent work deficits. Since this dimension refers to the support given by the government in case of vulnerability is utterly important to those commonly most vulnerable in this matter of employment, such as women.

A higher income was associated with increased scores for both male and female workers' perception of decent work. While for women this difference was solely in the dimension *meaningful remuneration for the exercise of citizenship*, for man it was also in *fundamental principles and values at work*, and *fulfilling and productive work*. Previous studies have relatable results that could indicate this association between wages and the dimensions of decent work. Particularly, evidence show that higher earnings were associated with quality of working life (Ellah et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2001), enabling participation in society apart from subsistence and determining overall well-being and living standards (World Bank, 2013). Therefore, those who earned more feel that they can provide decent living standards for themselves and their families, which might enrich one's life beyond their work experience. Surprisingly, however, results may evidence that a higher earning affects male and female

workers perception of decent work in different ways. For men a higher income was associated with perceptions of fairness, participation, and work is recognized by its value to the self and others. While for women, these associations were not found, which may indicate that having higher earnings is not enough to constitute being in a decent work environment.

On this matter, much can be accomplished by having an inclusive workplace. There is research evaluating the instrumental benefits of a gendered diverse workplace in an organization performance, but also in the creation of female-friendly social policies (e.g., mentoring tailored for women, work-family balance practices for both men and women; Coleman, 2020) which can help reduce gender discrimination in the workplace. For instance, Fine et al. (2020) presented a comprehensive review of workplace gender diversity and its impacts on the creation of social policies and organizational outcomes (e.g., innovation, occupational well-being). The authors argued that workplace gender diversity might help to reduce sex discrimination. Specifically, women in leadership positions challenge the norm of what is considered a good career model (continuous, full-time work), and might encourage change by the creation of more family-friendly practices in the workplace. Although it is still not possible to state clear causal relationships between workplace gender diversity and organizational outcomes, evidence of its benefits to the creation of inclusive organizational practices exists (Bloom, Kretschmer, & Van Reenen, 2011). Furthermore, the impact on the organization's innovative performance was assessed by Ruiz-Jimenez et al. (2016). The study investigated small and medium technology-based organizations in Spain. Results showed that gender diversity has a significant moderating role effect on the relationship between knowledge combination capability and innovation performance. This evidence is particularly opportune at a time of increased intangible resources value, notably knowledge transfer and intellectual capital. Thus, the empirical evidence points to greater benefits than harm in creating practices aimed at reducing sex discrimination. From practices aimed at improving the general well-

being of employees, to even delivering better products and services to society. Human resource managers as an aggregator of the different stakeholders' interests should benefit from this. Workplaces alone are not responsible for solving gender discrimination, however, not tackling this issue compromise governments and globalized institutions efforts to achieve this goal (Fine et al., 2020).

In the present study, we classify organizational size varying from small to large. Although previous research has attributed to firm-size differences in wages, employment security, and training provisions (Castany, 2008; Deijl et al., 2013; De Kok et al., 2011), in the present study, organizational size was not significantly associated with any dimension of decent work. Working conditions might influence the differences in outcomes found in different-sized firms. For example, García-Serrano (2011) investigated the role of firm size in workers' satisfaction and intention to quit. Results showed workers in larger firms had worse working conditions and decreased job satisfaction, however once working conditions (workers' perceptions of their labor conditions and relations) were controlled, differences in enterprise size were not significant. Therefore, it may be correct to suppose that neither decent work standards nor deficits can be attributed to different sized enterprises, since working conditions may vary substantially.

## **Conclusion and contributions**

The interest in investigating decent work is justified by the concept's relevance in a complex and globalized world of work. The framework provided by the ILO promotes more humanistic working conditions and is particularly important in times of greater uncertainty among employment relations. This concept bridges the gap between theory and practice to achieve the common good (Pereira et al., 2019b). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the labor market rapidly – an unprecedented decrease in working hours globally; many jobs moved entirely to the home office; also, employees in the informal economy had a



financial decline of approximately 60% in earnings by the health crisis first month (ILO, 2020). Besides, the pandemic exacerbated vulnerabilities in some groups. Women are among those groups most vulnerable to economic and health fallout (Ramos, 2020; UN, 2020). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020), women are frontline workers of this pandemic and face high levels of exposure to COVID-19 due to gender segregation in the labor market. The health response to the crisis is highly dependent on women since their employment share in this sector is 76% in Europe and approximately 70% worldwide (Linde & González Laya, 2020). In care occupations, such as childcare and teaching, personal care, and domestic cleaners and helpers, women are up to 76% of workers. Still, they are underpaid professions, as expressed when referred to the gender wage gap. Besides, women carry most of the responsibility from unpaid domestic work, which is likely to increase during social isolation measures (Ramos, 2020; UNDP, 2020). Moreover, according to the ILO's (2020) third report on the COVID-19 and the world of work, women are affected differently in this crisis since they are overrepresented in the informal sector, which has worse working conditions and lower social protection, and suffered an immense financial fallout. Considering the hazards caused by the pandemic, economists have argued in favor of an augmented dialogue between governments and businesses to ensure sustainable economic and employment recovery policies (UN, 2020). The ILO's fourth report on COVID-19 and the world of work argued the need to channel efforts to decent and productive employment creation. Thus, in adverse moments, the decent work concept provides a steer foundation to tackle fundamental issues. In this context, the interdependence between events in the environment and their different impacts on worker's daily lives was once more evidenced.

Research on the psychological dimensions of decent work encourages WOPP practitioners to commit to decent work standards while providing relevant practical implications. This study attempts to fill the existing gap in the literature about the determinants

of decent work, enriching the concept's nomological network (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). This study examined the link between worker's own perspectives of decent work in their current job and both individual and organizational variables and the difference by gender. Therefore, the main theoretical contribution of this study is related to its novelty, in which the factors studied did not yet, and to the best of our knowledge, received attention in the academic research in association with the concept of decent work. So far, we just started to grasp an understanding of the several structural inequalities' women face. Our results suggest greater vulnerability among women to attain decent work. While among men age was positively associated with decent work, among women there was a negative association. Similarly, the longer the time in the organization, the lower were women's perception of decent work. It would be beneficial to introduce additional variables, such as marital status to further investigate the differences between genders in association with decent work. Furthermore, we draw practical implication to both practitioners and researchers.

First, our results indicate that sociodemographic variables and work characteristics are relevant factors for decision-makers to be aware when elaborating practices that aim to promote more dignified work environments. Beyond that, the creation of policies targeting specific groups in the organization might be necessary to overcome structural vulnerabilities. Thus, the dimensions of decent work might be a north star in the support of development of appropriate policies or interventions. Second, researchers might be interested in developing this yet novel field of study inside the WOP field. Investment in grasping weather and what different variables could be important for workers to attain decent work could benefit workers worldwide.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

Some limitations must be considered for future research. One limitation is that the study used a non-probability sampling method (by convenience), therefore results cannot be

generalized. Although the research had a good sample size, we did not reach an equal distribution among all the studied categories, which made unviable to use only parametric tests for all our analysis. Besides, even though the collection of data followed all the ethical procedures, self-reported data may still imply some limitations to the study due to response bias, such as participants responding to what they believe was expected of them. Apart from that, the cross-sectional design imposes limitations to the interpretation of results, in which causality cannot be determined. For future research, a longitudinal design could be helpful to understand the impact of these variables on workers' perceptions of decent work overtime. Besides, it would enable better generalization and causal inferences of the results (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Studies that can be representative of a specific professional occupation would also help to make more precise generalizations to a given population.

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## Annex A – The Decent Work Questionnaire

The Decent Work Questionnaire (DWQ, Ferraro et al., 2018a)

Este questionário refere-se ao seu trabalho atual e ao contexto profissional no qual o realiza. Por ‘contexto profissional’ entenda o mercado de trabalho em geral (para alguém com as suas características profissionais), a(s) empresa(s)/organização(ões) onde eventualmente trabalhe, bem como a sua eventual atividade de prestador(a) de serviço (profissionais liberais).

Não há respostas certas nem erradas. O importante é que avalie se concorda mais ou menos com as afirmações apresentadas. Utilize a seguinte escala de respostas:

- 1=Não concordo nada
- 2=Concordo pouco
- 3=Concordo moderadamente
- 4=Concordo muito
- 5=Concordo completamente

Marque com um (X) a sua opção de resposta para cada afirmação. Responda a todas as afirmações. Relembramos que elas se referem ao seu trabalho atual e ao contexto profissional no qual o realiza.

1. No meu trabalho estou protegido(a) de riscos para a minha saúde física.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Tenho perspectivas de ter uma aposentadoria/aposentação/reforma tranquila (pensão, previdência pública ou privada).	1	2	3	4	5
3. Considero adequada a quantidade média de horas que trabalho por dia.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Disponho de tudo o que preciso para manter a minha integridade física no meu trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sinto que estou protegido(a) caso fique sem trabalho (subsídios sociais, programas sociais, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
6. Sinto a minha família protegida através do meu sistema de proteção social (público ou privado).	1	2	3	4	5
7. O que ganho com o meu trabalho permite-me viver com dignidade e autonomia.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Sinto que estarei protegido(a) no caso de ficar doente (segurança social, seguros de saúde, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
9. O que recebo pelo meu trabalho permite-me oferecer bem-estar aos que dependem de mim.	1	2	3	4	5
10. O que ganho com o meu trabalho permite-me viver com um sentimento de bem-estar pessoal.	1	2	3	4	5
11. No meu trabalho existe confiança entre as pessoas.	1	2	3	4	5
12. O meu trabalho contribui para assegurar o futuro das novas gerações.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Através do meu trabalho desenvolvo-me profissionalmente.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Um(a) profissional como eu pode criar o seu próprio emprego.	1	2	3	4	5
15. O meu horário de trabalho permite-me gerir/administrar bem a minha vida.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Em geral, os processos de tomada de decisão relativos ao meu trabalho são	1	2	3	4	5

justos.					
17. Penso que tenho perspectivas de melhorar a minha remuneração/salário/benefícios.	1	2	3	4	5
18. O meu trabalho permite-me ter tempo para a minha família/vida pessoal.	1	2	3	4	5
19. O meu trabalho contribui para a minha realização (pessoal e profissional).	1	2	3	4	5
20. Disponho do que preciso para trabalhar com segurança.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Sou tratado(a) com dignidade no meu trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Sou livre para pensar e expressar o que penso sobre o meu trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Em geral, tenho condições ambientais seguras no meu trabalho (condições de temperatura, ruído, umidade, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
24. No meu trabalho sou aceito(a)/aceite tal como sou (independentemente de gênero, idade, etnia, religião, orientação política, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
25. Atualmente, penso que há oportunidades de trabalho para um profissional como eu.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Acho que tenho possibilidades de progredir profissionalmente (promoções, desenvolvimento de competências, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
27. Considero adequado o ritmo que o meu trabalho exige.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Na minha atividade profissional existe a possibilidade de participação equilibrada nas decisões por parte de todos os envolvidos/implicados.	1	2	3	4	5
29. O trabalho que realizo contribui para criar valor (para minha empresa/organização/clientes/sociedade, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
30. Considero digno o trabalho que realizo.	1	2	3	4	5
31. O que ganho financeiramente com o meu trabalho é justo.	1	2	3	4	5

## Annex B – Sociodemographic and organizational characterization questionnaire

Por último, pedimos-lhe que complete, por favor, respondendo às seguintes questões - assinale um X na opção(ões) correta(s) [dados para fins exclusivamente estatísticos]

<b>1 Sexo</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Feminino	<b>2 Idade:</b> _____ anos	<b>3 Há quantos anos trabalha na empresa/organização?</b> _____ anos
<b>4 Situação(ões) profissional(ais)</b> (pode assinalar mais do que 1 situação) <input type="checkbox"/> Trabalhador do Estado <input type="checkbox"/> Trabalhador no setor privado	<b>5 Qual o vínculo que mantém com a organização?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Prestador de serviços (recibos verdes) <input type="checkbox"/> Contrato a termo (certo ou incerto) <input type="checkbox"/> Contrato sem termo /efetivo(a)	<b>6 No seu local de trabalho desempenha alguma função de chefia?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Sim <input type="checkbox"/> Não
<b>7 Grau de Escolaridade</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Sabe ler e escrever sem possuir a 4ª classe <input type="checkbox"/> 1º ciclo do ensino básico (ensino primário) <input type="checkbox"/> 2º ciclo do ensino básico (6º ano) <input type="checkbox"/> 3º ciclo do ensino básico (9º ano) <input type="checkbox"/> Ensino Secundário (12º ano) <input type="checkbox"/> Bacharelato <input type="checkbox"/> Licenciatura em curso <input type="checkbox"/> Pós-Graduação/Mestrado (pós Bolonha)/Licenciatura Pré Bolonha <input type="checkbox"/> Licenciatura concluída (pós-Bolonha) <input type="checkbox"/> Mestrado Pré-Bolonha <input type="checkbox"/> Doutoramento	<b>8 Setor de atividade da organização onde trabalha</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Indústria Transformadora <input type="checkbox"/> Indústria Extrativa <input type="checkbox"/> Comércio por grosso e a retalho <input type="checkbox"/> Alojamento e restauração <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultura, pecuária, pescas <input type="checkbox"/> Construção <input type="checkbox"/> Produção e distribuição de eletricidade, gás e água <input type="checkbox"/> Transportes e armazenagem <input type="checkbox"/> Educação e ciência <input type="checkbox"/> Saúde humana e apoio social <input type="checkbox"/> Atividades imobiliárias, alugueres e serviços prestados às empresas <input type="checkbox"/> Artes e indústrias criativas <input type="checkbox"/> Tecnologia de informação e comunicações <input type="checkbox"/> Outra. Qual? _____	<b>9 Dimensão da organização onde trabalha</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Tem até 9 colaboradores <input type="checkbox"/> Tem entre 10 e 50 colaboradores <input type="checkbox"/> Tem entre 51 e 250 colaboradores <input type="checkbox"/> Tem entre 251 e 500 colaboradores <input type="checkbox"/> Tem entre 501 e 1000 colaboradores <input type="checkbox"/> Tem mais de 1001colaboradores  <b>10 Tempo de trabalho na função atual</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 meses <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de 3 e até 6 meses <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de 6 meses e até 1 ano <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de um ano
<b>11 Indique, por favor, o seu vencimento líquido mensal (aquilo que recebe em média por mês)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Até 500 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 501 e 1000 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 1001 e 1500 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 1501 e 2000 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 2001 e 2500 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 2501 e 3000 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 3001 e 3500 € <input type="checkbox"/> Entre 3501 e 4000 € <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de 4000 €		<b>12 Há quanto tempo trabalha com o superior hierárquico a quem se referiu nos questionários?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 meses <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de 3 e até 6 meses <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de 6 meses e até 1 ano <input type="checkbox"/> Mais de um ano

Muito obrigado(a) pela sua colaboração

