



# The role of educational choice in occupational gender segregation: Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago

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## ABSTRACT

We analyse the role of educational choice on the degree of occupational segregation in Trinidad and Tobago during a period in which educational policies intent on equating gender opportunities in education were implemented. To this end we utilize waves of the Trinidad and Tobago labour force survey over the period 1991–2004. Our results show that while educational segregation has fallen substantially over our sample period, this has not translated into less occupational segregation. This suggests that the educational policy has not been sufficient to combat occupational segregation. However, results at a more disaggregated level show that experiences have been heterogeneous across educational and occupational groups.

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## 1. Introduction

The segregation of men and women into different occupations continues to be one of the most enduring aspects of labour markets in both developed and developing countries alike. Importantly such occupational segregation has substantial consequences for gender discrimination since ‘female type’ jobs are generally characterized by lower pay and worse working conditions.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then that attempts to address segregation in employment have also had a long history in policymaking; see, for example, the International Labor Organization (ILO) convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation, 1958, No. 111). However, certainly while legislation directly prohibit-

ing discrimination in employment is a pertinent element in its elimination, it is important to also realize that pre- and post-labour market entry decisions and opportunities regarding the level and type of education of individuals will themselves have an impact on the potential job opportunities available.<sup>2</sup> Thus, addressing gender inequalities in education may constitute another potentially important policy measure; see, for instance, Dolado, Felgueroso, and Jimeno (2004).

In this paper, we explicitly examine the role of educational choices on occupational gender segregation in the context of such a supply-side policy using the case study of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). More specifically, while the T&T Constitution forbids discrimination based on gender, but without defining it,<sup>3</sup> there had been no explicit legislation

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably, effective policies in this regard are particularly important for developing countries, where the female labour force is now being viewed as a key component to economic development strategies, as portrayed, for instance, by the third Millennium Development Goal by the World Bank (see World Bank, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Educational choices may of course themselves be a consequence of discrimination in terms of family and societal gender preferences.

<sup>3</sup> This would protect women from discrimination with respect to legal statutes and public authorities.

prohibiting discrimination in employment prior to 2000.<sup>4,5</sup> In terms of gender education, in contrast, explicit policy steps towards gender equality were taken much earlier. That is, while the law that guides the course of education in Trinidad and Tobago, the Education Act of 1966, did not refer to gender-based discrimination, the Education Policy Paper, which prescribed educational policy during the period 1993–2003, explicitly attempted to guide the educational system towards gender equality (see *National Report on the Development of Education in Trinidad and Tobago*, 2004). For instance, part of the initiative formed by this policy involved the development of a gender neutral curriculum by ensuring that males and females do not partake in only gender traditional subjects and training. For example, prior to this policy initiative, there would be time-tabled classes during the week where a class in a co-educational school would be divided into males and females, where the former would take Industrial Arts classes (woodworking, metal work, technical drawing, etc.) and the latter would do Home Economics (cooking, sewing, home management, etc.). Under the new policy directive the curriculum and timetable were restructured so that all students would be doing both Home Economics and Industrial Arts. Furthermore, from a more general perspective one should note that Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory of the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action and thus has committed itself to attaining certain goals, two of which in particular are the need for equitable access to education for females and the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education. Given that other studies have shown that gender discrimination in the labour market in T&T is considerable,<sup>6</sup> the education policy changes implemented provide a good case study with which to assess whether such policies coincide with changes in occupational segregation.

While there are a number of studies examining occupational gender segregation in various labour markets,<sup>7</sup> only a few have addressed the issue of the role of educational choices in motivating such sorting. Deutsch, Morrison, Piras, and Nopo (2001) calculate a segregation index for different educational categories for three Latin American countries and find that occupational segregation is much more severe among the less educated. In a seminal paper Borghans and Groot (1999) [henceforth BG] developed a decomposition of an occupational segregation index which

allows one to explicitly investigate the link between educational and occupational sorting. More precisely, they decompose occupational segregation into its pre- and post-sorting components, where the former refers to the extent to which different educational distributions across gender cause different occupational distributions and the latter refers to sorting into occupations conditional on this, and how these are linked in the sense that the latter may or may not re-enforce segregation. Using Dutch data they discover that educational pre-sorting is a major cause of occupational segregation.

Here we employ the BG decomposition, which as to date has not been used in a developing country context, to waves of the Trinidad and Tobago labour force survey over the years 1991–2004, i.e., a time period encompassing the implementation of the aforementioned educational policy change. Our data set is arguably particularly suited to the task at hand since it allows for the classification of educational qualifications beyond the typical grouping, such as level and/or number of years of schooling completed. More precisely, we have detailed information on the field of the highest level of schooling and training completed, which allows for a much more meaningful categorization of educational qualification in terms of its relevance for occupational segregation. We use this information in conjunction with detailed occupation codes to calculate the occupational and educational segregation indices proposed by BG. Another contribution of our paper is that we propose a simple method to calculate standard errors on the BG indices, thus allowing one to evaluate their statistical significance rather than just their size, as has been done in the past.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the following section we describe our data set. Section 3 outlines the segregation index decomposition methodology. The results derived from employing this methodology on our data are described in Section 4. Concluding remarks are provided in the final section.

## 2. Data set

Our data source is the Continuous Sample Survey of Population (CSSP) for T&T. The CSSP was designed as a multi-purpose household survey in 1963 with its primary objective being to provide up-to-date data on the labour force characteristics of the population of Trinidad and Tobago on a continuing basis. As such it has served as the primary source for aggregate statistics on the labour market, collecting a wide array of labour market relevant information on members of the households surveyed. With regard to the current paper we use information from the 15 years available to us, namely 1991–2004, although we excluded 1997 since the size of the sample taken in that year was only a fraction of that in all other years.

In assembling a representative sample for each year and comparing segregation for these there are several factors to consider. A primary issue is that one would not want results to be driven by a specific choice of quarter and hence any seasonal factors in consideration; therefore, a selection of observations across all four quarters is desirable. Moreover, since the CSSP is a rotating panel where house-

<sup>4</sup> The relevant legislation was the Equal Opportunity Act, 2000 (No. 69). Preceding this legislation, Trinidad and Tobago ratified two acts, in 1970 the ILO Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (No. 111) and in 1997 the ILO Convention (No. 100), which calls for equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value, but did not introduce any national legislation to ensure the implementation of the guidelines of these.

<sup>5</sup> While the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution did forbid discrimination based on gender, it contained no explicit definition.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the study on wage discrimination by Olsen and Coppin (2001) showed that in 1993 the male–female income differential was 19%. Also, a cross-country study of occupational segregation in Latin America and the Caribbean over three decades, 1970–1990, Gammage (1998) found that there was a slight decrease in segregation in all countries except Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Anker and Hein (1986) and Blau and Ferber (1992) for studies explicitly on developing countries.

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