

Winners and Losers: The Consequences of Welfare State Policies for Gender Wage Inequality

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Cross-national studies of the impact of welfare states on gender inequality tend to overlook socio-economic divisions among women. This article challenges the implicit assumption that welfare states have uniform effects on the economic attainments of women, arguing that the impact of state intervention is necessarily conditioned by women's relative advantage or disadvantage in the labour market. Based on Luxembourg Income Study microdata for 21 advanced countries, the paper analyses gender wage gaps among highly skilled and low skilled men and women. The findings suggest that welfare state policies interact with socio-economic positions: they limit the economic rewards of highly skilled women, but do not adversely affect, and by some measures actually benefit, those who are less skilled. Highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of social policies for different groups of women, the article concludes that more research is needed to explore differentiated approaches to reconciling work and family, rather than addressing universal work-family tensions.

Key words: Welfare state, Gender inequality, Gender pay gaps, Family policy, Class inequality

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