

Survey on the Work Environment in Economics*

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Abstract

In October 2023, the Spanish Economic Association implemented the first professional climate survey, which was sent by email to all (ever) members of the Association. The questionnaire included 20 questions, most of them extracted from the American Economic Association survey, allowing for a direct comparison of the answers. These questions focused on the experiences and perceptions of discrimination of individuals while studying, as well as in academia. This article presents the first analysis of the results from the responses in the Spanish survey vis-a-vis the ones implemented by the American Economic Association as well as the European Economic Association. The main takeaways are the following. First, men feel more valued in the profession and in their institutions than women, and this gap is particularly large in the US and Europe. While 54% (47% and 36%) of male Spanish (American and European) respondents feel valued in the profession, the numbers stand at 50% (25% and 21%) for Spanish (American and European) women. Second, while caregiving responsibilities exacerbate the reported experiences of discrimination, avoidance behavior, and the burden of non-promotable tasks for men, women consistently face significant challenges in these dimensions, regardless of caregiving status, with women caregivers encountering the highest levels of discrimination, non-promotable tasks as well as the largest rates of avoidance behaviors. This highlights the dual impact of gender and caregiving on professional experiences within the field. Third, experiences of discrimination and exclusion are more prevalent among women than among men in all three contexts. Importantly, in the Spanish survey, the reported gender gap has widened in the last 5 years. These findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic interventions to foster a safer and more inclusive work environment in economics.

Keywords: unfair treatment, discrimination, exclusion, avoidance, gender gaps

JEL codes: A10, A11, J16

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1 Introduction

Following the experience of the American Economic Association and its professional climate survey described in Allgood et al. (2019), we present the results of the first survey on the work environment in economics among members of the Spanish Economic Association. The initiative in the United States was implemented for the first time in December 2018 after the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Professional Climate in Economics. The purpose was to assess the status of the profession with respect to inclusiveness, harassment, and toxic work environments and to monitor changes over time through a repetition of the survey in regular intervals. Because of that, there has been a follow-up survey in 2023 with results that have not been made public yet. The two online surveys were sent by email to all current members and those who were members at any point in the prior 9 years. In 2018, 45,435 invitations were sent and the response rate was 23%.

As many of the members of the Spanish Economic Association had similar concerns, under the umbrella of the Association, we designed the first survey of the Work Environment in Economics in Spain. After obtaining the approval of an external ethics committee, the survey was sent by email to all (ever) members of the Spanish Economic Association. That is, 1,800 invitations were sent and 292 responded, leading to a response rate of 16%. The fieldwork spanned from October 16 to November 2, 2023. The questionnaire included 20 questions, most of them extracted from the one of the American Economic Association. This allows for a direct comparison of the answers to both surveys. The median duration to complete the survey was 8.3 minutes; 7.6 minutes for men and 9.1 for women.

More recently, the Minorities in Economics Committee (MinE), supported by the European Economic Association (EEA) Executive Committee and in cooperation with the German Economic Association, also implemented a professional climate survey (Lee et al., 2024). The survey was sent to all current members of the EEA (as of January 2024), as well as all individuals who had been a member in the preceding ten years and still signed up for EEA newsletters. The total number of respondents to the survey was 861. When possible, we also add comparisons to the responses of this survey.

This report proceeds as follows. Section 2 briefly describes our sample and the ones of the other two Associations' surveys. Section 3 documents the general climate in the economics academic profession in Spain and compares it to the one in the American and European contexts. Section 4 covers several facets of the phenomenon of discrimination happening in the three environments. Finally, section 5 concludes.

2 Sample of the Economics Academic Profession in Spain

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' characteristics in the three surveys. In the AEE Survey women represent 40% of the sample. Overall, the average age of respondents is 48, 78% are married, and 6.5% are students.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

	2023 AEE Survey on the Work Environment in Economics (Spanish)	2019 AEA Survey on the Professional Climate in Economics (American)	2024 EEA Survey on the Professional Climate in Economics (European)
% Women	40	30	46.5
% Students	6.5	6.0	7.4
% LGTB	2.5	6.0	17.3
% Married	78	80	72.5
% White		79	76.5
% Living in Spain	85		
Average age	48	47	39.4

Figure 1 describes the tenure status and career stages in academic research in our sample.

In the upper panel, under tenure status, we can see that in the sample both men and women display the same distribution. Specifically, 40% of both men and women have been in the profession for less than 20 years, while 60% of each group have been in the field for 20 years or more.

In the bottom panel, the graph illustrates career stage by type of tenure. For men, the majority (69%) are in tenured, research-oriented positions, with much smaller percentages in other tracks: 14% of men are in tenure track positions without teaching, 8% in tenure track positions with teaching, and 8% in tenured policy-oriented roles. For women, the distribution is slightly different, although research-oriented roles still dominate. About 61% of women are in tenured, research-oriented positions, while smaller percentages of women are in other tracks: 15% are in tenure track positions with teaching, 13% are in tenured policy-oriented roles, and 10% are in tenure track positions without teaching. While women are also concentrated in research-oriented positions, compared to men, they are over-represented in teaching-related and policy-oriented roles.

In summary, the figure highlights that in our sample, both men and women tend to occupy long-term tenure positions at similar rates. However, there are slight differences in career focus, with men more likely to be in research-oriented positions, while women are slightly more represented in teaching and policy-oriented tracks.

3 General climate in the Economics Academic Profession in Spain

We now turn our attention to the broader academic climate in Spain, drawing comparisons with both the American and wider European contexts.

For that we compare the percentage of respondents who first *feel valued* in the economics profession and second in their own institutions. In Figure 2, we report the shares of respondents by gender and by survey (Spanish, American, and European). The figure highlights significant differences in perceived value among the three surveys. For men, 54% of Spanish respondents feel valued in the Economics profession, compared to 47% of American men and 36% of European men. In contrast, when asked whether they feel valued at their institution, both Spanish and American men report higher and identical rates, with 68% feeling valued in their institutions, indicating that men in both countries feel similarly valued in their institutional settings, but less so in the profession of economics as a whole. For European men, 62% feel valued at their institution. For women, the differences are more pronounced. In Spain, 50% of women feel valued in the economics profession, while only 25% of American women and 21% of European women feel the same, showing a significant gap in how valued women feel in economics. However, like among men, in the three surveys, women report higher levels of feeling valued within their institutions. Specifically, 66% of Spanish women feel valued at their institution, compared to 55% of American women and 47% of European women. Comparing men and women, women feel less valued than men across the three samples at both the economics profession and their own institutions. However, this gender difference is negligible in the Spanish case (4 and 2 points, respectively) while it is much larger in the European (15 points) and American sample (22 and 13 points, respectively).

We have seen in Table 1 that respondents in the Spanish survey are on average older than in the other two surveys. Figure 3 shows that, among respondents who have been in the profession for less than 20 years, only 36% of men and 28% of women feel valued in the profession. The figures notably increase for individuals with longer tenure (66% for men and 65% for women). It is essential to acknowledge that the observed differences might stem from factors we cannot observe in the survey. Potential influences include selection bias (where only those who persist in the profession end up feeling valued), evolving expectations with career progression, or systemic challenges in valuing young researchers compared to their more tenured counterparts, among other possible explanations. Nevertheless, this finding is disheartening and prompts collective reflection on how we, as a community, can improve. On the contrary, when asked whether they

feel valued in their own institution, the figures are much larger and similar for respondents with more and less tenure. Thus, respondents perceive that institutions, rather than the profession as a whole, are doing a better job at making individuals feel valued in their jobs.

4 Experiences of discrimination

This section presents the findings on discrimination. The survey investigated various forms of discrimination, including age-based and sex-based discrimination, as well as discrimination in access to funding, promotions, publications, and professional development. We begin by providing an overall assessment of the prevalence of discrimination related to sex and age. We then explore the main dimensions of discrimination, first as students and later in academic careers.

4.1 Global assessment of discrimination

We first analyze the rates of discrimination occurrence among men and women along the dimensions of sex and age. Specifically, in Figure 4, we illustrate the proportion of respondents, from each of the surveys, who have either been personally discriminated against or have witnessed discrimination based on sex.

As reported in the upper panel of Figure 4, while only 4% of men in Spain and the US and 12% among European men reported being personally discriminated based on sex, a significantly higher proportion of women have experienced this type of discrimination — 41% in the Spanish sample, 48% in the American sample, and 49% in the European sample. In the lower panel, we observe higher percentages for men who have witnessed sex-based discrimination (25% for Spanish men, 33% for American men, and 38% for European men), while women report slightly lower rates in Spain and Europe (27%) but higher in the US (44%). The difference, for women, between personally experiencing and witnessing discrimination led us to two conclusions: (i) women (mostly) do not include their own personal experience of sex discrimination on the witnessing category, and/or (ii) sex discrimination is something that (mostly) happens in the private sphere, as own experiences for women are larger than what both men and women are able to witness.

As depicted in Figure 5, the patterns of experiencing and witnessing discrimination by age align with those of sex discrimination, although the overall numbers are generally lower and the differences between men and women are also smaller.

4.2 Experiences of discrimination while student

Now, we shift our attention more specifically to the discriminatory experiences faced by respondents during their time as students.

In this regard, Figure 6 shows the experiences of discrimination faced as a student in the following four dimensions: (i) access to advisors, (ii) quality of advising, (iii) research assistantships or funding, and (iv) the job market.

When looking at access to advisors, the data reveals low levels of discrimination among men, with 7% of Spanish men and 6% (9%) of American (European) men reporting this type of discrimination. However, women, especially in the US, report higher rates, with 20% of American and 15% of European women facing discrimination compared to 9% of Spanish women.

For access to quality advising, a similar trend emerges. Only 8% of Spanish and 7% and 10% of American and European men report discrimination in this area. Meanwhile, the rates are much higher for women, with 11% of Spanish, 23% of American and 21% of European women reporting barriers to access to quality advising.

In the case of access to research assistantships or funding, there is a slight increase in reported discrimination. Among men, 10% of Spanish and European, and 7% of American men report difficulties in this area. For women, the numbers are comparable among the three samples, with 20% of Spanish, 18% of American and 15% of European women reporting discrimination. It is important to note that, in this dimension, Spanish women report higher experiences of discrimination compared to both men and their American and European counterparts, which deviates from the general pattern observed in the other categories.

Discrimination in the job market presents the largest disparities. While 12% of Spanish, 15% of American and 19% of European men report having experienced a discriminatory or unfair treatment, the numbers are significantly higher for women in the American sample. In Spain and Europe, 14% and 19% of women respectively, report discrimination but this figure jumps to 36% for American women.

Summing up, across three of the four dimensions (access to advisors, quality advising, and the job market), women responding to the American and European surveys report higher discrimination than men in both surveys and women in the Spanish sample. The exception to this pattern is access to research assistantships or funds, where Spanish women report higher levels of discrimination compared to the other groups. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that across all four dimensions, the percentage of women reporting discrimination consistently exceeds those for men, regardless of the survey considered.

4.3 Experiences of discrimination in academia

At this point, we move away from focusing on the experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment during the student period and shift to studying the phenomenon in the context where respondents were already involved in academic life in the field of economics.

4.3.1 Experiences of discrimination or unfair treatment

Figure 7 shows how personal experiences of discrimination are distributed by gender along the dimensions of promotion decisions and compensation, in the three different contexts analyzed: the Spanish, the European, and the American surveys.

In terms of promotions, 16% of Spanish men report having experienced discrimination, compared to 11% of American men and 13% of European men. Among women, 30% of Spanish women report discrimination in promotion decisions, slightly higher than the 27% and 24% of American and European women, respectively. This shows that women, in all samples, experience around two times higher rates of discrimination compared to men, with the gender gap being particularly large for American respondents (27% for women vs. 11% for men).

When looking at compensation, the gender disparities are more striking. Among men in the three regions, the reported discrimination in compensation is quite similar, with 11% of Spanish men and 12% of American and European men indicating that they faced discrimination. However, for women, the heterogeneity is much larger: 37% of American and 27% of European women report having experienced discrimination in compensation, which is significantly higher than the 18% reported by Spanish women. Once again, women (in all samples) face larger rates of discrimination compared to men, and this is particularly pronounced in the case of American women, whose rate of discrimination in compensation is more than three times higher than that of American men.

These findings highlight that, while all individuals, particularly women, experience discrimination in this area, American women are more likely to report discrimination in compensation, pointing to larger gender gaps in pay equity and fairness in the US compared to that in the European and Spanish context.

In Figure 8 we observe the distribution by gender of experiences of discrimination, but this time based on contexts of professional development opportunities and publishing decisions, in the three surveys.

Women report larger rates of discrimination than men in professional development opportunities in all samples. This gender difference is particularly striking in the European and

American samples where the percentage of women (18% in Europe and 16% in the US) reporting discrimination is more than two (in the US) or three (in Europe) times that for men (5% and 7%, respectively). In the Spanish case, the reported rates of discrimination are slightly larger than for the other two samples but the gender gap is smaller (19% of men and 23% of women report this type of discrimination).

Regarding discrimination in publishing decisions, again the proportion of women reporting this type of discrimination is larger than the proportion of men in all samples. However, the gender gap is lower than in professional development opportunities.

Over time Figure 9 shows how the prevalence of discriminatory practices by gender has evolved over time comparing the last 5 years versus those reported 5 or more years ago. This data is only available in the Spanish survey.

Beginning with promotion decisions, only 6% of men report having faced issues in the past 5 years, whereas 12% report experiencing discrimination in this area more than 5 years ago. For women, the promotion outcomes are different, with 16% reporting discrimination in the past 5 years, and 19% experiencing it 5 or more years ago. This indicates a larger improvement over time for men compared to women, as men have experienced a sharper decline in discrimination rates halving in the more recent period relative to over 5 years ago.

Moving to compensation, men report identical levels of discrimination over time (7% both in the last 5 years and 5 or more years ago). For women, however, there is an increase over time, with 14% of women experiencing compensation discrimination in the last 5 years, compared to 9% that experienced discrimination 5 or more years ago. This indicates a deterioration in compensation fairness over time across genders.

In the category of professional development opportunities, men report a slight increase in discrimination over time, with 12% reporting discrimination in the past 5 years, compared to 10% reporting discrimination 5 or more years ago. For women, the gap is larger, with 18% reporting discrimination in the last 5 years, compared to 12% in the earlier period, signaling a significant deterioration in access to professional development opportunities for women over time.

Finally, in terms of publishing decisions, men report relatively stable experiences, with 17% in the last 5 years and 16% 5 or more years ago. Women report higher levels of discrimination with a worsening trend over time (22% experienced discrimination in publishing decisions in the last 5 years compared to 18% who faced discrimination 5 or more years ago).

Caregivers In our sample, 43.5% of men and 65% of women are responsible of providing care to children or other dependents. In Figure 10 we introduce this dimension, as it has been widely studied in the gender economics literature due to its consequences on the labor market outcomes of these caregivers. This dimension is not included in the American and European surveys, so that we can only analyze the information reported in the Spanish survey.

For promotion decisions, 23% of men who are caregivers report experiencing discrimination, compared to only 9% of non-caregiver men. Among women, the difference is smaller but still notable: 32% of women caregivers report discrimination in promotion decisions, compared to 27% of non-caregiver women. This indicates that the caregiving status is associated with higher levels of discrimination for both men and women, though the difference between caregivers and non-caregivers is more pronounced among men.

Turning to compensation, the differences are also evident. Among men, 14% of caregivers report experiencing discrimination in compensation, which nearly doubles the 8% reported by non-caregiver men. For women, the gap is smaller but still noteworthy: 20% of women caregivers report discrimination in compensation, compared to 15% of non-caregivers. Although the gap between caregivers and non-caregivers is narrower for women, they overall suffer much higher levels of discrimination than men, both in promotion decisions and compensation. For instance, even women without caregiver responsibilities report substantially more discrimination than caregiver men, highlighting the broader issue of gender-based disparities in workplace experiences.

On professional development opportunities, the data shows a slight difference based on caregiving status for both genders (Figure 11). For men, 21% of caregivers report discrimination in this area, compared to 17% of non-caregivers. Among women, the rates are quite similar, with 24% of caregivers and 23% of non-caregivers reporting discrimination. This suggests that caregiving status has a slightly greater impact on men's professional development experiences while, for women, the difference between the two caregiving statuses is minimal. In the category of publishing decisions, differences are more noticeable. Men with caregiver responsibilities report higher levels of discrimination (30%) than non-caregivers (24%). For women, this disparity is even more pronounced: 34% of caregivers report discrimination in publishing decisions, compared to only 16% of non-caregivers. This underscores the substantial impact of caregiving status on women's publishing experiences, indicating that caregivers, particularly women, face higher levels of discrimination in publishing decisions.

4.3.2 Experiences of exclusion

In Figure 12 the data covers three different dimensions of experiences of exclusion: from professional meetings or events, perceptions of one's work not being taken seriously, and views on the seriousness of one's research subject or methodology.

The first panel reports data on exclusion at professional events or meetings. Men report similar levels of exclusion in Spain (39%) and America (40%) but larger in Europe (50%). In contrast, the percentages for women are noticeably higher, particularly for European (69%) and American women (65%) compared to Spanish women (51%).

The second panel addresses whether respondents felt that their work was taken less seriously compared to their economists colleagues. Here, men report lower levels of discrimination, with 38% of Spanish, 43% of American, and 57% of European men showing this perception. However, for women, the percentages are significantly higher, especially among European and American women, where 75% and 69%, respectively, report that their work is not taken as seriously as their economists colleagues, compared to 64% of Spanish women.

In the third panel, the focus shifts to perceptions on whether the respondents' research subjects or methodologies are taken seriously in the profession. Similar to previous trends, women report higher levels of discrimination, with 53% of Spanish, 59% of American and 64% of European women indicating that their subject or methodology was not regarded as seriously as that of their colleagues. The corresponding percentages for men are 40% in the Spanish and American sample and 50% in the European sample.

Over time Figure 13 shows the evolution over time of these same three categories of exclusion (from professional meetings or events, the seriousness with which their work is regarded by colleagues, and respect for their chosen subject or methodology), comparing experiences from the past 5 years to those from 5 or more years ago.

Starting with exclusion from meetings or events, men report more recent instances of exclusion, with 30% experiencing it in the last 5 years, compared to 18% from earlier periods. Women report higher levels but a similar pattern over time, with 35% facing exclusion within the last 5 years, compared to 28% for incidents that occurred more than 5 years ago. This indicates that exclusion is a more frequent issue in recent years for both men and women, although women experience slightly higher rates overall.

In the second dimension (perceptions of their work not being taken as seriously as that of their colleagues), men also report higher recent discrimination, with 26% experiencing it in the

past 5 years compared to 19% in previous years. For women, the contrast is even starker: 43% report that their work has not been taken as seriously by colleagues in the last 5 years, while 36% faced this issue more than 5 years ago. This pattern suggests that, while discrimination in this area has always affected women more, the problem has become especially pronounced in recent times, for both genders.

The final category refers to the perceived seriousness of the research subject or methodology. For men, recent incidents of this type of discrimination stand at 31% versus a 18% of older cases. Women, again, report higher levels of discrimination, with 40% experiencing it within the last 5 years and 29% having suffered it more than 5 years ago.

In spite of the general worsening trend, these results show that gender plays a distinct role in these experiences, as women consistently report higher rates of discrimination than men.

Caregivers Figure 14 depicts rates of discrimination on those same three dimensions but now differentiating by caregiving status.

First, in terms of exclusion from meetings or events, men who are caregivers report slightly more discrimination (42%) compared to non-caregivers (37%). For women, however, non-caregivers report a higher level of exclusion (54%) than those with caregiving responsibilities (49%).

The second dimension captures discrimination related to how seriously respondents feel their work is taken, compared to that of their colleagues. Men caregivers report higher levels of discrimination in this area (46%) than non-caregivers (31%). For women, the disparity is more pronounced, with caregivers experiencing the highest levels of discrimination in this category (65%), while non-caregivers reporting a slightly lower rate (62%). This pattern reflects a gendered dynamics where women, regardless of caregiving status, tend to encounter more discrimination regarding the credibility of their work than men, with caregiving women feeling it most acutely.

The third dimension assesses discrimination in terms of the seriousness by which the profession values the respondents' subject or methodology. Among men, caregivers report higher discrimination (44%) than non-caregivers (37%). For women, both groups report significant discrimination, though caregivers experience it at a slightly lower rate (54%) compared to non-caregivers (50%).

Overall, the data suggests that women face higher levels of discrimination than men, particularly in terms of how their work and academic focus are valued. While caregiving responsibilities exacerbate these experiences of discrimination for men, women consistently face significant challenges, regardless of caregiving status, with women caregivers often encountering the highest levels of discrimination. This highlights the dual impact of gender and caregiving on professional experiences within the field.

4.3.3 Non-promotable tasks

At this point, we explore one particular issue that is only included in the Spanish survey: the incidence of non-promotable tasks (NPTs). These are tasks that benefit the organization in which the individual works, but do little to advance the worker's career. Some examples of these tasks are training new hires, scheduling appointments, taking notes at meetings, organizing department parties, etc (Babcock et al., 2017). In the survey, respondents are asked whether they felt they were assigned, they volunteered for or they accepted non-promotable tasks more often than their economist colleagues.

In Figure 15 we can see that the percentage of women responding positively to any of these three dimensions is higher than that of men, with a difference of about 20 percentage points. Nonetheless, the numbers are relatively high for both men and women.

Over time Figure 16 illustrates the difference in NPT assignments, volunteering, and acceptance over time. Specifically, it compares the share of NPTs assigned, volunteered for, and accepted, within the last five years versus those completed five or more years ago. We observe a noticeable increase in all three NPT categories over the past five years, with women showing consistently higher percentages than men. This trend suggests an upward shift in the frequency of NPT involvement, particularly among women, regardless of the dimension (assigned, volunteered, or accepted).

Caregivers Finally, in Figure 17, we distinguish between individuals with and without caregiver responsibilities and, while the numbers are in the same range for women with or without caregiving responsibilities, the results are higher for men with caregiving responsibilities (compared to men without them). Independently of the caregiving status, the numbers are always lower for men than for women.

4.3.4 Actions taken to avoid possible harassment, unfair treatment, or disrespect

Figure 18 examines gender differences in several actions taken to avoid negative experiences such as harassment, unfair treatment, or disrespect. Each panel covers choices to abstain from specific career actions: not applying for graduate school, not seeking an employment position, not pursuing a promotion, leaving an employment position, not speaking during seminars, refrained from presenting their ideas, and avoided conducting research in a particular field.

In the first panel, men in all samples show similarly low rates of choosing not to apply for graduate school (5% in the Spanish and American sample and 6% in the European sample), while women always exhibit higher rates (12%, 10% and 11%, respectively), suggesting a stronger avoidance behavior among women.

The second panel reveals that a substantial proportion of women (24% in Spain and the US, and 22% in Europe) opted not to apply for employment positions to avoid potential negative experiences, a much larger rate than their male counterparts (8% for Spanish men and 12% for American and European men).

The third panel shows that Spanish (15%), American (12%) and European (10%) women chose not to apply for promotions at a rate higher than Spanish (8%), American (5%) and European (6%) men. This reflects a protective action among women to sidestep possible unfair treatment associated with career advancement. This is consistent with previous literature showing higher risk-aversion behavior for women than for men (Croson and Gneezy, 2009; Shurchkov and Eckel, 2018).

The fourth panel indicates that a greater share of Spanish women (19%) left an employment position, compared to European (17%) and American women (15%), with all groups reporting higher rates than men.

The fifth panel shows that Spanish (19%), American (20%) and European (30%) men report low to medium rates of choosing not to speak during seminars. In contrast, a higher percentage of women chose not to participate in seminar discussions, as the rate is 42% for Spanish, 46% for American and 56% for European women. This suggests that women are more likely to avoid speaking in seminars to potentially mitigate negative interactions.

In the sixth panel, similar rates are seen for men (around 25%) who refrained from presenting their ideas or views. Women, however, report significantly higher rates in this area: 54% for European, 47% for American and 37% for Spanish women. This suggests that women avoid sharing their ideas more often, possibly as a strategy to avoid harassment or disrespectful responses. The numbers for not attending social events, shown in the seventh panel, are very

similar to those observed for refraining from presenting their ideas.

When asked about avoidance behavior related to not participating in a conference or not making a professional visit (panels 8 and 9), the rates are always higher for women than for men, and not participating in a conference seems to be a more prominent avoidance behavior than not making a professional visit for both genders.

The tenth panel reflects the choice to abstain from research in specific fields. Spanish men show the lowest rate of non-engagement in certain research areas (8%), followed by American (14%) and European (18%) men. Women report higher rates in this regard, with 18% of Spanish, 25% of American and 28% of European women opting not to engage in specific research fields.

These patterns suggest that women are more likely than men to modify their behavior and limit their interactions during their academic careers to avoid potentially negative or uncomfortable experiences.

Over time Figure 19 explores changes over time in the frequency of career decisions taken by men and women to avoid harassment, unfair treatment, or disrespect. The data compares decisions made within the last 5 years to those made over 5 years ago, covering the same categories as before. The information is only available for the Spanish context.

It is quite concerning to note that, most of these avoidance behaviors, have become more pronounced in the last five years for both men and women, including not applying for promotions, refraining from speaking at seminars, withholding ideas, avoiding social events, neglecting professional visits, and not doing research in particular fields. From all these avoidance behaviors, the only one that is decreasing over time is leaving an employment position.

Caregivers Finally, figure 20 explores how individuals make career decisions to avoid experiences of harassment, unfair treatment, or disrespect, in association to their caregiving status. Again, this information is only available in the Spanish survey.

The same gradient we observe for the experiences of discrimination and exclusion is reproduced here for most of the panels, with the highest rates for women caregivers, followed by women non-caregivers, men caregivers, and men non-caregivers.

Importantly, the data shows that, although the numbers are mostly larger for caregivers, caregiving status alone does not fully account for gender gaps in avoidance strategies.

4.3.5 Harassment

This section refers to the most extreme experiences of discrimination, such as sensitive, uncomfortable or inappropriate interactions. This may also be the reason why the non-response rate in the following questions was particularly high. In the appendix section we include the same figures as in the main text but considering a “no response” as a negative response. This comparison is only possible in the case of the Spanish survey.

We divide the set of sensitive interactions in three categories: flirtatious or sexist comments, unwanted romantic or sexual advances, and uncomfortable physical contact. Figure 21 depicts the experiences reported by Spanish, American and European economists, segmented by gender.

The data reveals notable trends in how these experiences differ by gender and survey. The first category captures flirtatious or sexist comments. Here, Spanish men report experiencing these comments at a rate of 23%, compared to 13% for American and 10% for European men. For women, the reported rates are significantly higher, with 54% of Spanish, 43% of American and 42% of European women indicating they have encountered such remarks.¹ The fact that so many women in the Spanish survey have experienced sexist remarks is particularly concerning.

The next category addresses unwanted attempts to initiate romantic or sexual relationships, even when efforts were made to discourage these advances. While men report lower rates—4% for Spanish men and 3% for American and European men—the figures for women are substantially higher. Among Spanish women, 10% report having suffered such attempts while, among American and European women, the rate increases to 23% and 20%, respectively. This difference suggests that women, particularly American and European women, are more likely to encounter these unwanted attempts.

The third area examines incidents of unwanted physical contact. Women respondents indicate a higher incidence, with 10% of Spanish and 13% of American women reporting such experiences. In contrast, men report lower rates, with both Spanish and American men at just 2%. This suggests that instances of uncomfortable physical interactions are also more common for women.

Figure 22 explores the role of the hierarchical level in shaping experiences of inappropriate or uncomfortable interactions within academic settings, focusing on the same three types of incidents. The data compares interactions between individuals and colleagues of the same level (*Same*) versus those with senior colleagues (*Senior*) and it is broken down by gender.

¹Figure A1 in the appendix section shows that, even when no-responses are recoded as zeros, the percentages (17% for men and 38% for women) are similar to the ones reported in the other Associations.

In the first category, which addresses flirtatious or sexist remarks, men report slightly lower rates when interacting with peers (15%) compared to senior colleagues (16%). For women, these interactions are more prevalent, with 31% experiencing such remarks from peers and a notable increase to 45% with senior colleagues. This suggests that women are more likely to encounter discomfort in interactions involving hierarchical power dynamics, particularly with senior colleagues, where the reported rate is significantly higher.²

The second category examines unwanted romantic or sexual advances. For men, the overall rates are low, with 4% of interactions with peers involving such advances, while interactions with senior colleagues drop slightly to 2%. Women also report low rates, though higher than men's, with 7% involving peers and an increase to 10% with senior colleagues. This trend indicates that women experience more unwanted advances from senior colleagues than from those at the same level of seniority, underscoring a noteworthy vulnerability linked to hierarchical dynamics.

In the final category, uncomfortable physical touch, the rates are generally low across all groups. Men report 1% for both peer and senior colleagues interactions. Women, however, report higher rates, with 7% for interactions with peers and 6% with senior colleagues. This consistency across levels suggests that uncomfortable physical interactions are less influenced by hierarchy, though women remain more likely than men to report such experiences.

5 Conclusions

In this paper we have reported the results of the first survey on the work environment in Economics among the members of the Spanish Economic Association. The results highlight systemic challenges in the profession, including disparities in perceived value, experiences of discrimination, and gendered dynamics within academic and professional settings.

The survey is closely inspired by the pioneering experience of the American Economic Association, also replicated by the Minorities in Economics Committee of the European Economic Association. Thus, most of the questions allow a direct comparison of the work environment across the Spanish, American, and European contexts.

Key findings reveal that both men and women face discrimination, but the intensity and nature of these experiences differ significantly by gender and caregiving responsibilities. Women, particularly caregivers, report higher rates of exclusion from key professional opportunities and feel their work and methodologies are often not taken as seriously. Moreover, the perception

²Figure A2 in the appendix section, shows that when no-responses are recoded as zeros, the percentages for women are lower in level but still more frequent with senior colleagues than with those of the same level (32% and 22%, respectively).

of gender-based discrimination persists in critical areas such as promotion, compensation, and publishing, with women consistently reporting higher rates than men.³ While institutional environments generally receive better evaluations than the broader profession, younger professionals and early career academics express significant concerns about inclusiveness and support.

The data also shows significant gender disparities within the profession regarding the prevalence of non-promotable tasks and sexual harassment. Women are disproportionately burdened with non-promotable tasks, a division of labor that underscores structural inequities hindering career progression (Babcock et al., 2017). Additionally, avoidance behaviors, such as avoiding social interactions, refraining from presenting ideas, or pursuing research in certain areas, reveal a reactive strategy to cope with anticipated or experienced harassment and disrespect. Importantly, comparison across different surveys shows that similar patterns exist across American and European contexts. These findings emphasize the urgent need for systemic interventions to combat harassment and foster a safer and more inclusive work environment in economics.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize the need for sustained effort to create an environment where all professionals, regardless of gender, caregiving status, or career stage, can thrive.

Data and codes availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed in the current study are not publicly available due to privacy reasons. It will be possible to apply for access to a shareable version of the data of the study at the BELab of Banco de España. Codes will be made available.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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³This perception is consistent with previous literature showing that women have lower wages (controlling for job level) than men, lower promotion rates than men and are underrepresented at higher levels of the corporate hierarchy (Goldin, 2014; Blau and Kahn, 2017; Cook et al., 2020).

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Figures

Figure 1: Tenure status and career stages in academic research, by gender

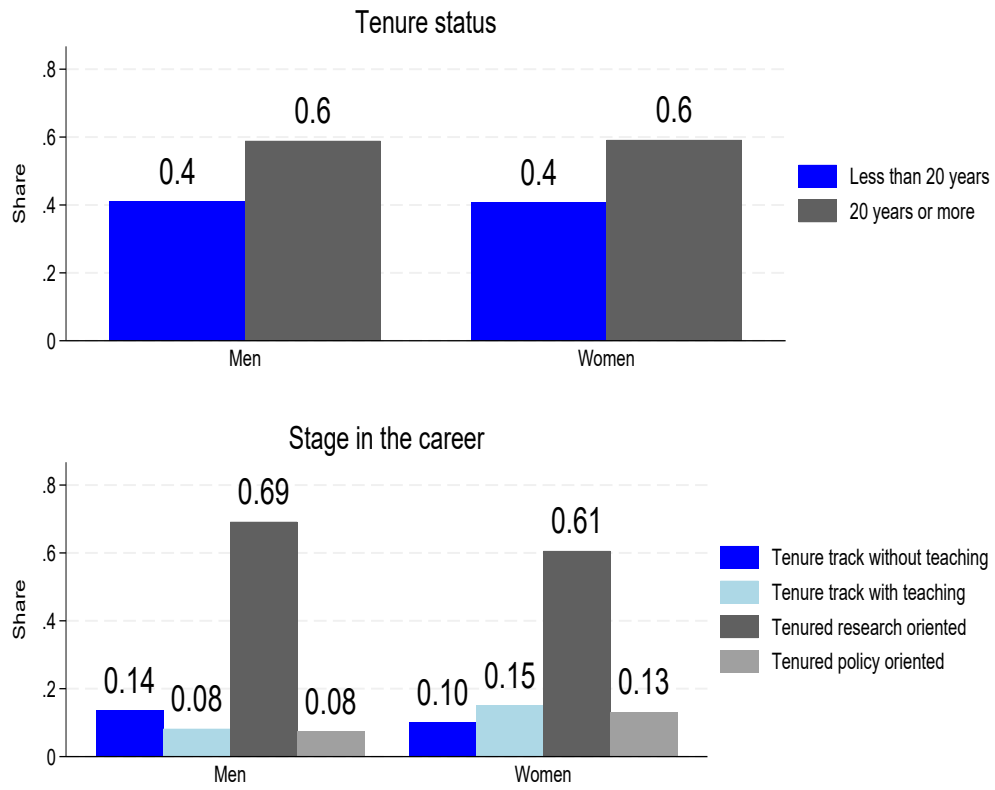


Figure 2: Share of respondents that feel valued in Economics and at their own institution, by survey

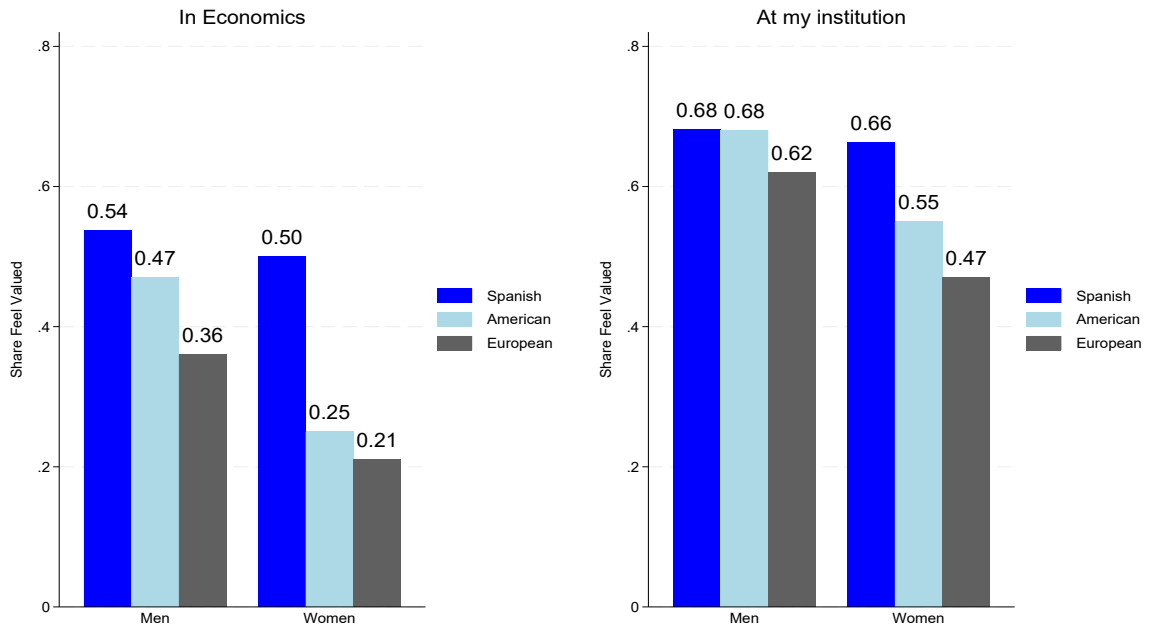


Figure 3: Share of respondents that feel valued in Economics and at their institutions, by the number of years in the profession

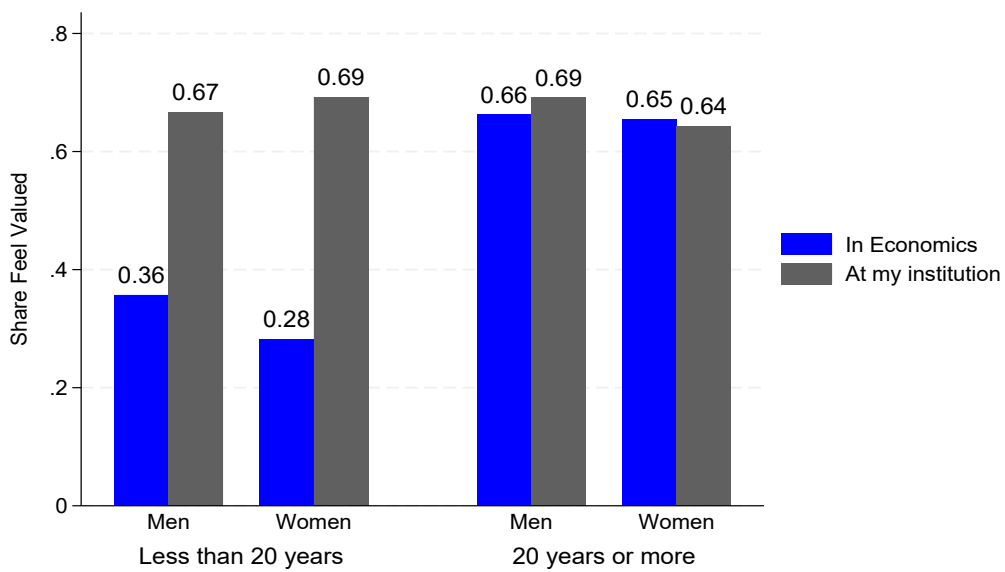


Figure 4: Share that have ever been personally discriminated/have witnessed discrimination based on sex, by gender

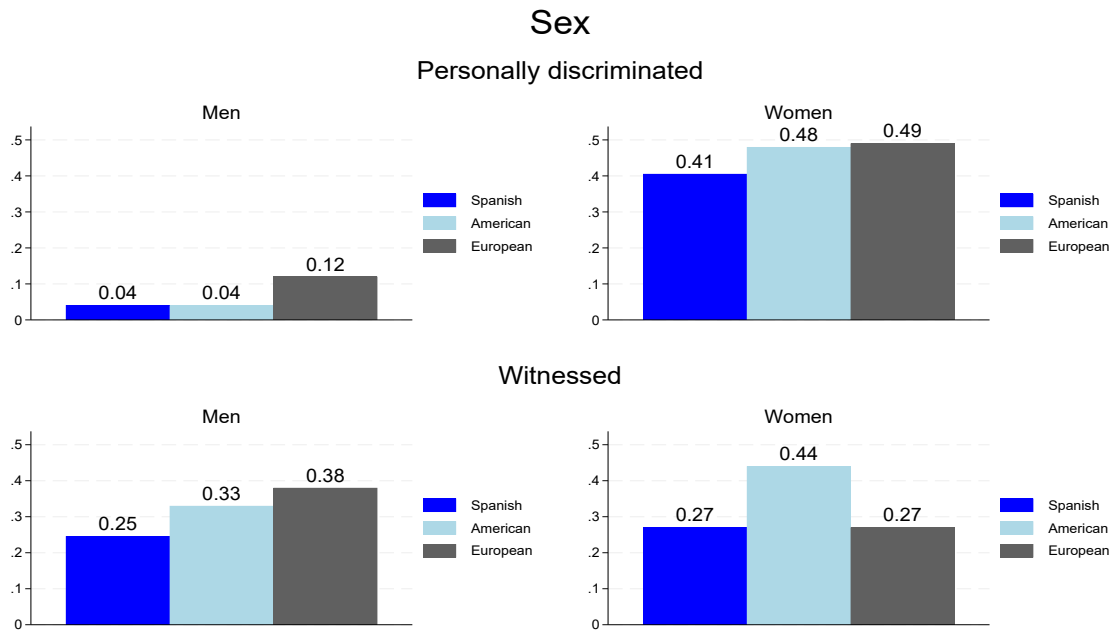


Figure 5: Share that have ever been personally discriminated/have witnessed discrimination based on age, by gender

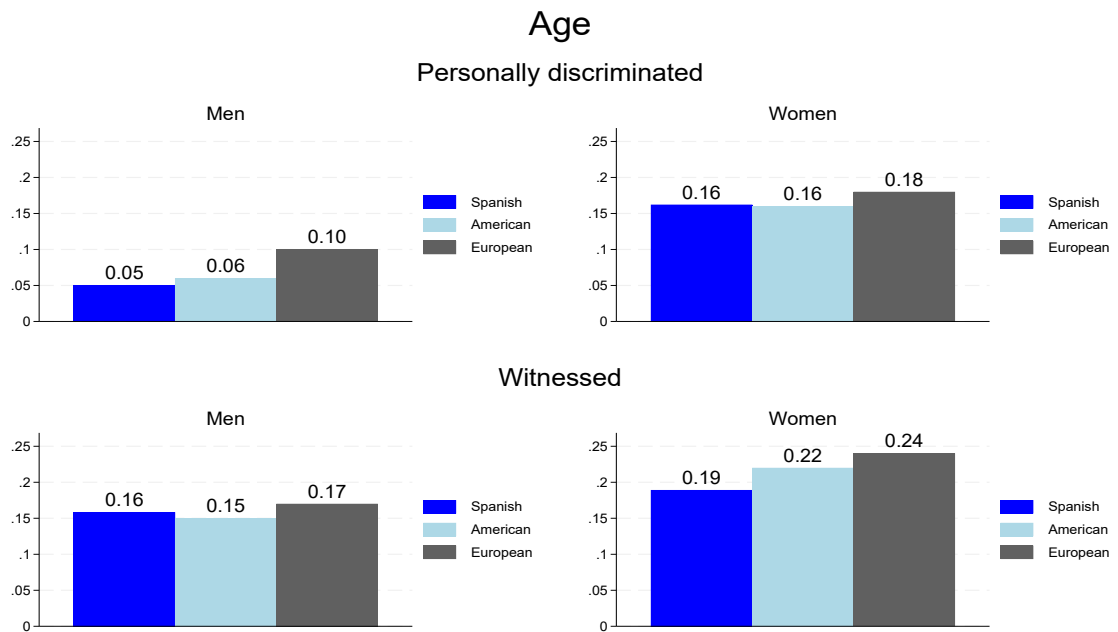


Figure 6: Experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment while student, by gender and survey

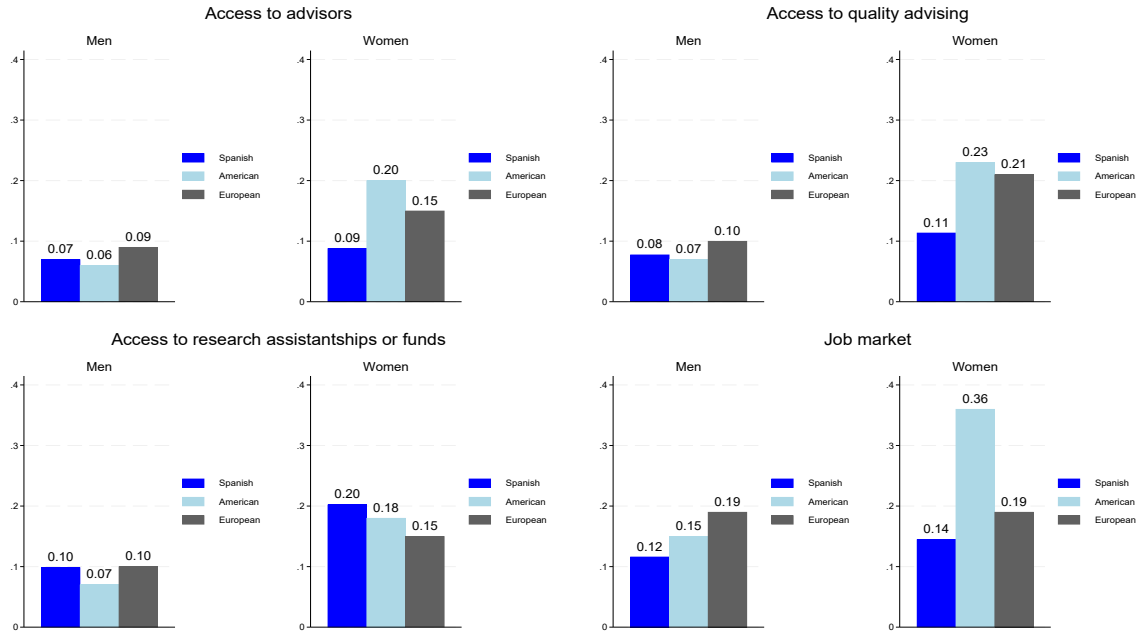


Figure 7: Experiences of discrimination in promotion decisions and compensation, by gender and survey

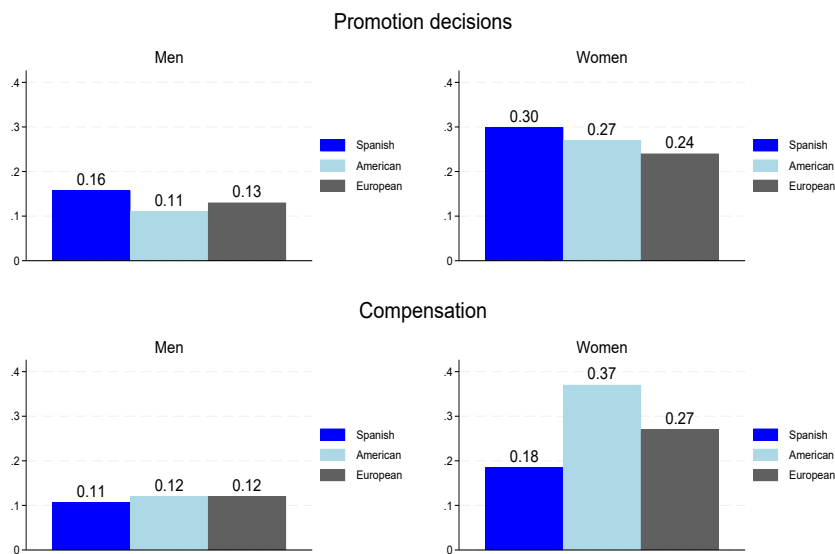


Figure 8: Experiences of discrimination in professional development opportunities and publishing decisions, by gender and survey

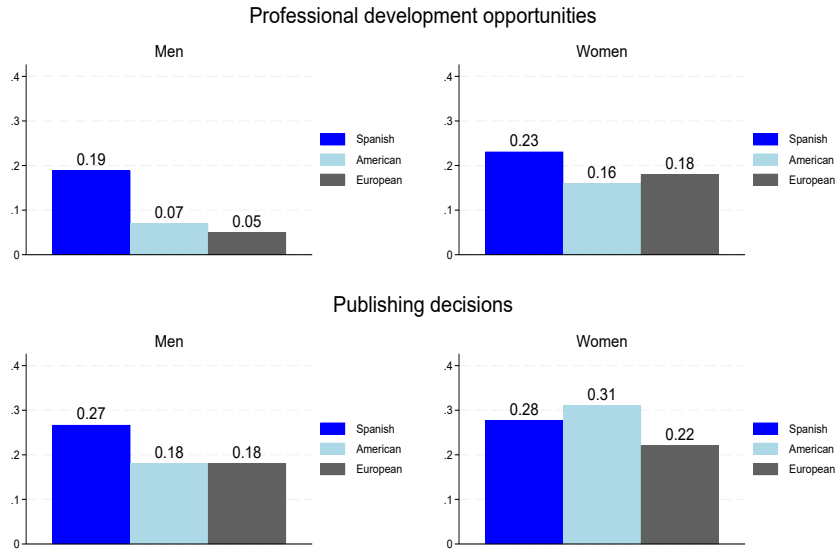


Figure 9: Experiences of discrimination in academia, by gender over time

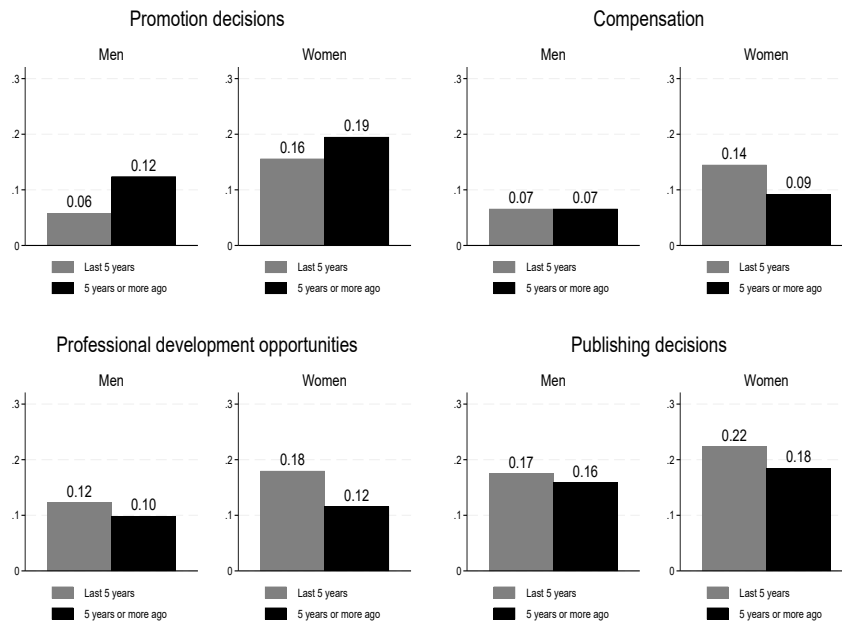


Figure 10: Experiences of discrimination in promotion decisions and compensation, by gender and caregiving status

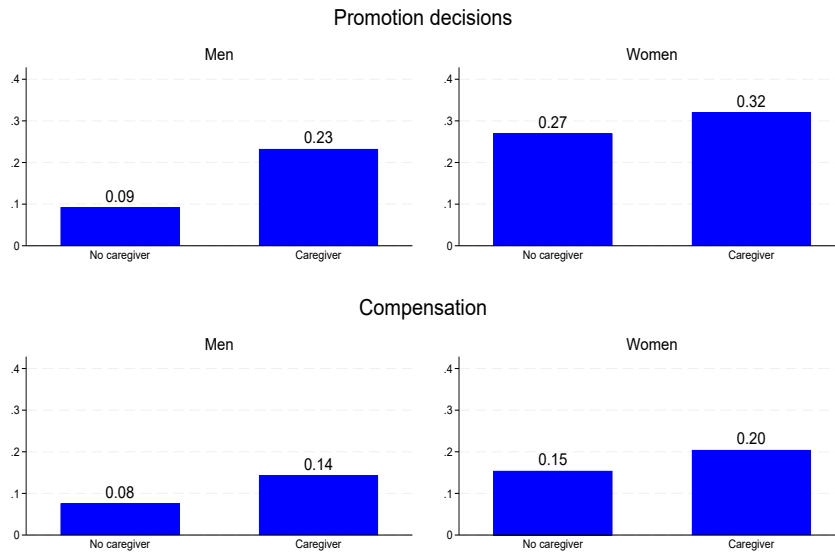


Figure 11: Experiences of discrimination in professional development opportunities and publishing decisions, by gender and caregiving status

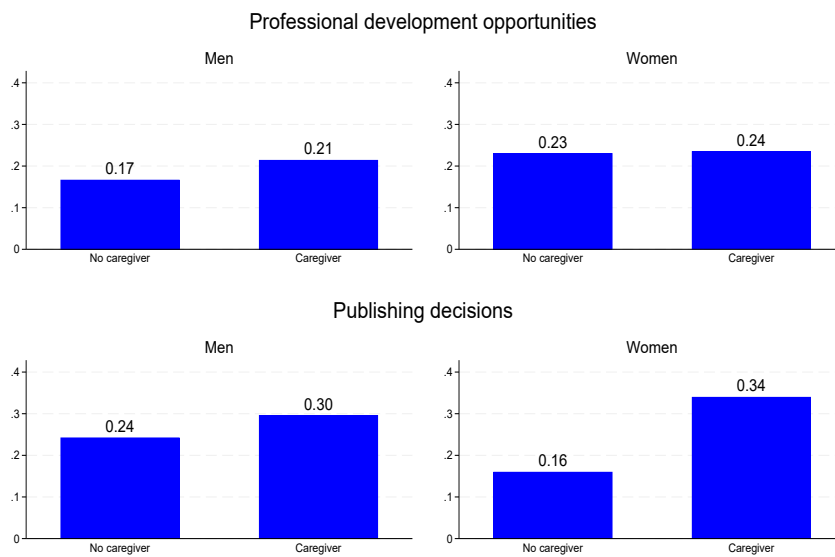


Figure 12: Experiences of exclusion, by gender and survey

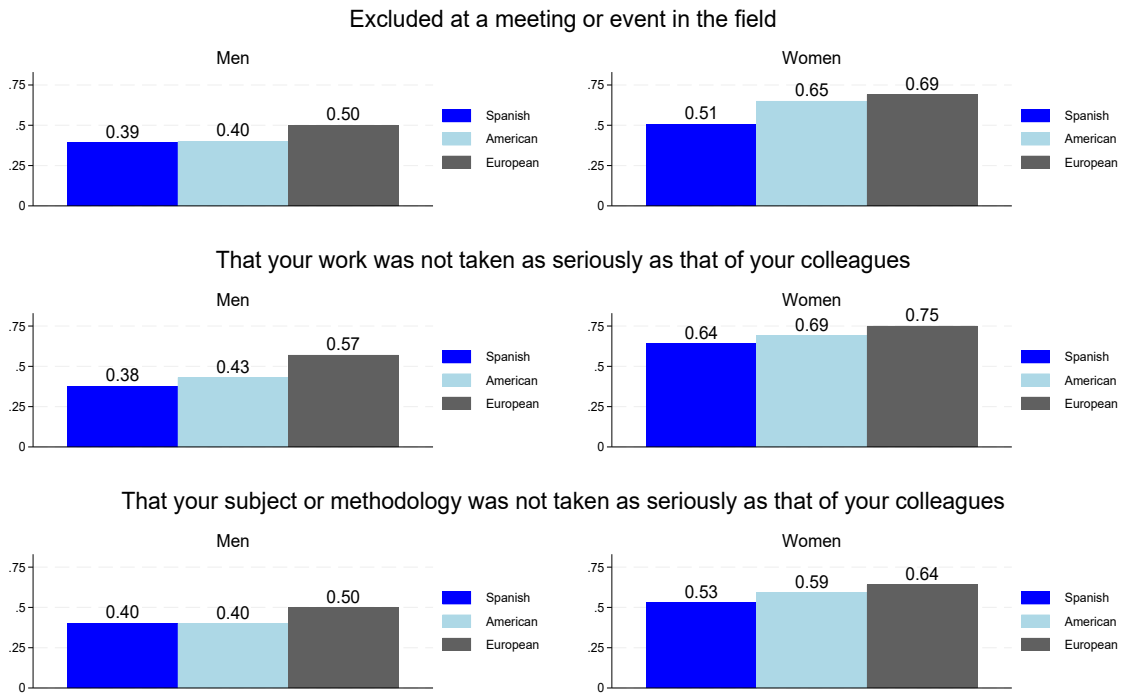


Figure 13: Experiences of exclusion, by gender over time

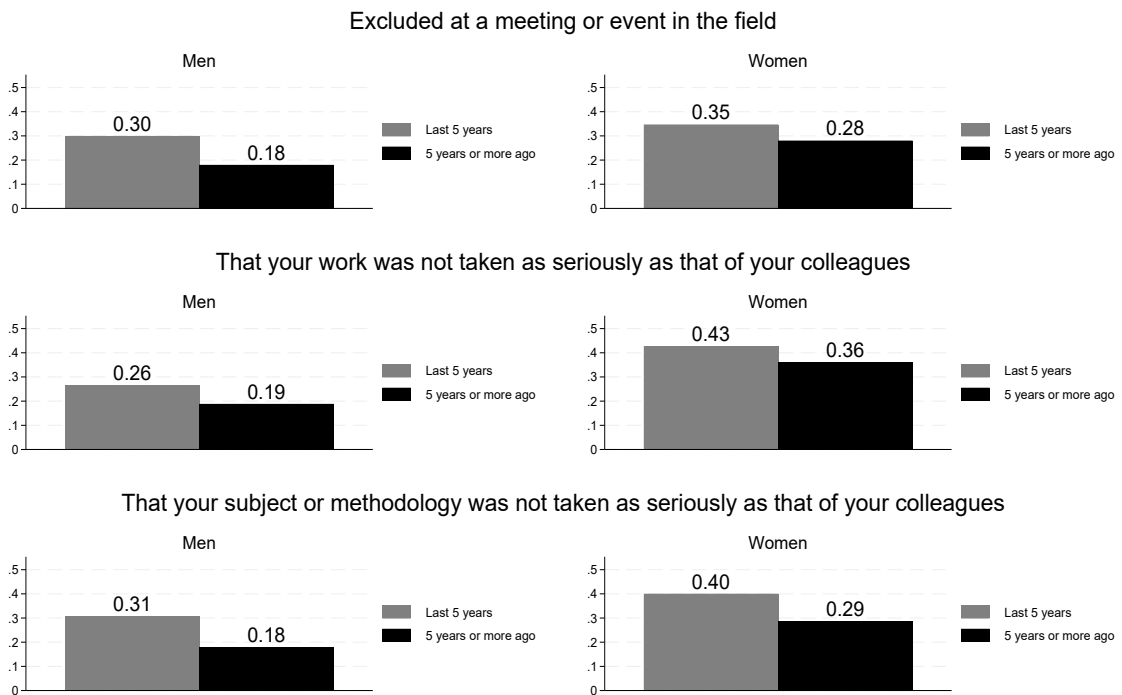


Figure 14: Experiences of exclusion, by gender and caregiving status

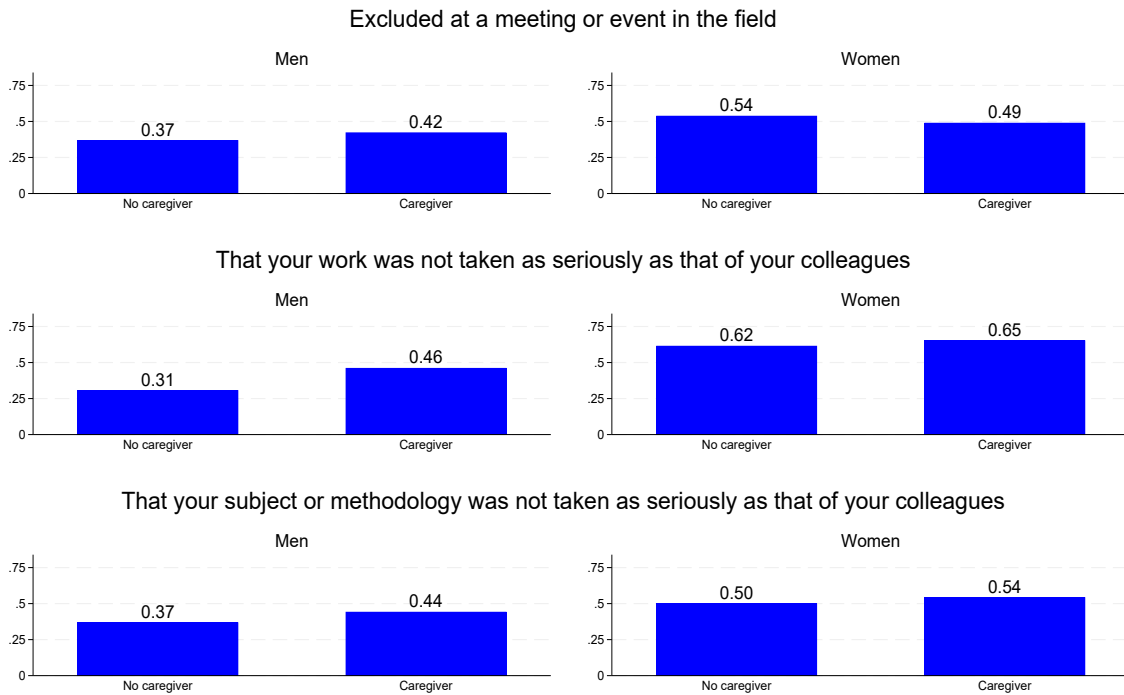


Figure 15: Frequency of non-promotable tasks across assigned, volunteered, and accepted roles, by gender

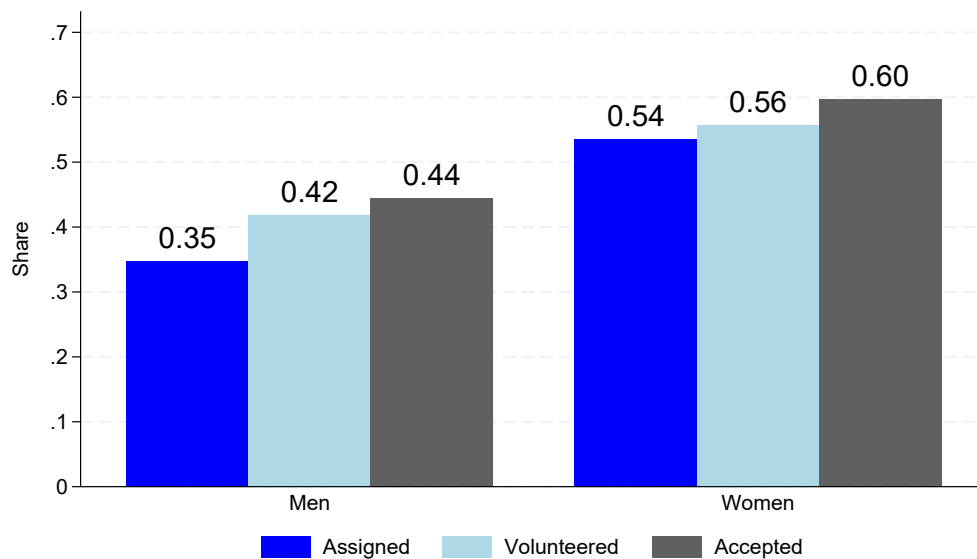


Figure 16: Changes in non-promotable tasks involvement by gender over time across assigned, volunteered, and accepted roles

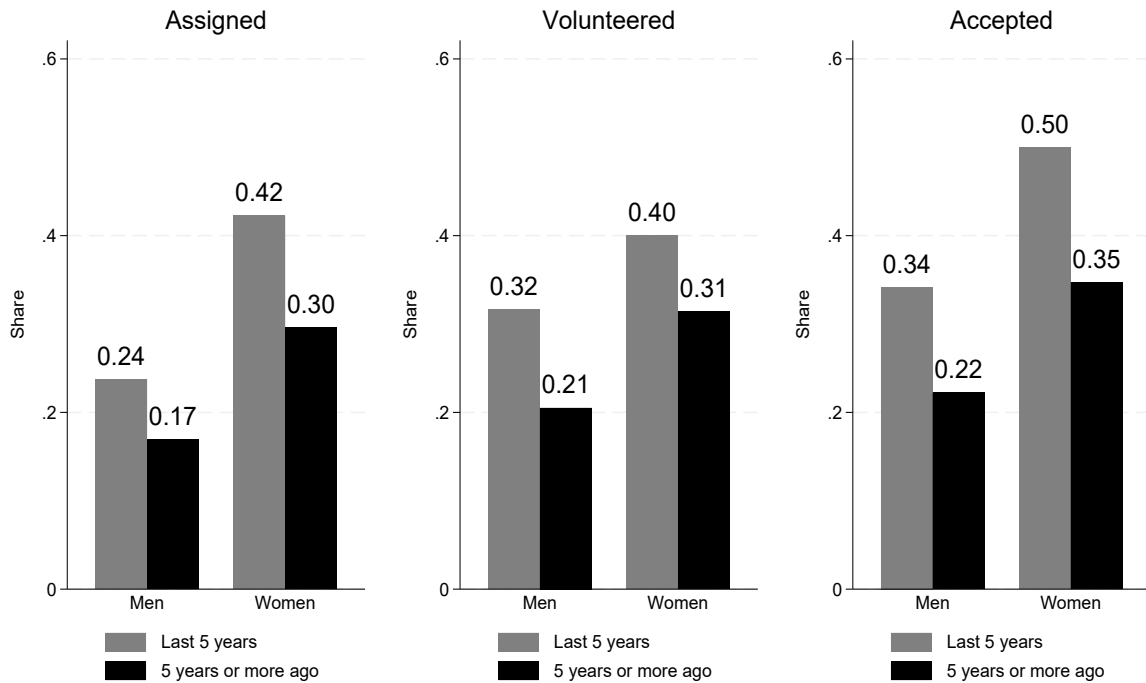


Figure 17: Frequency of non-promotable tasks across assigned, volunteered, and accepted roles, by gender and caregiving status

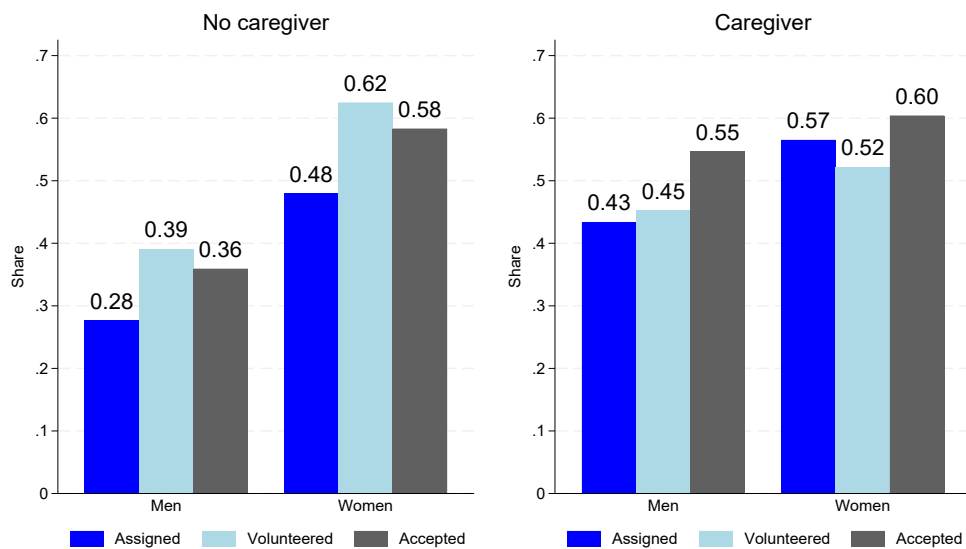


Figure 18: Avoidance behavior, by gender and survey

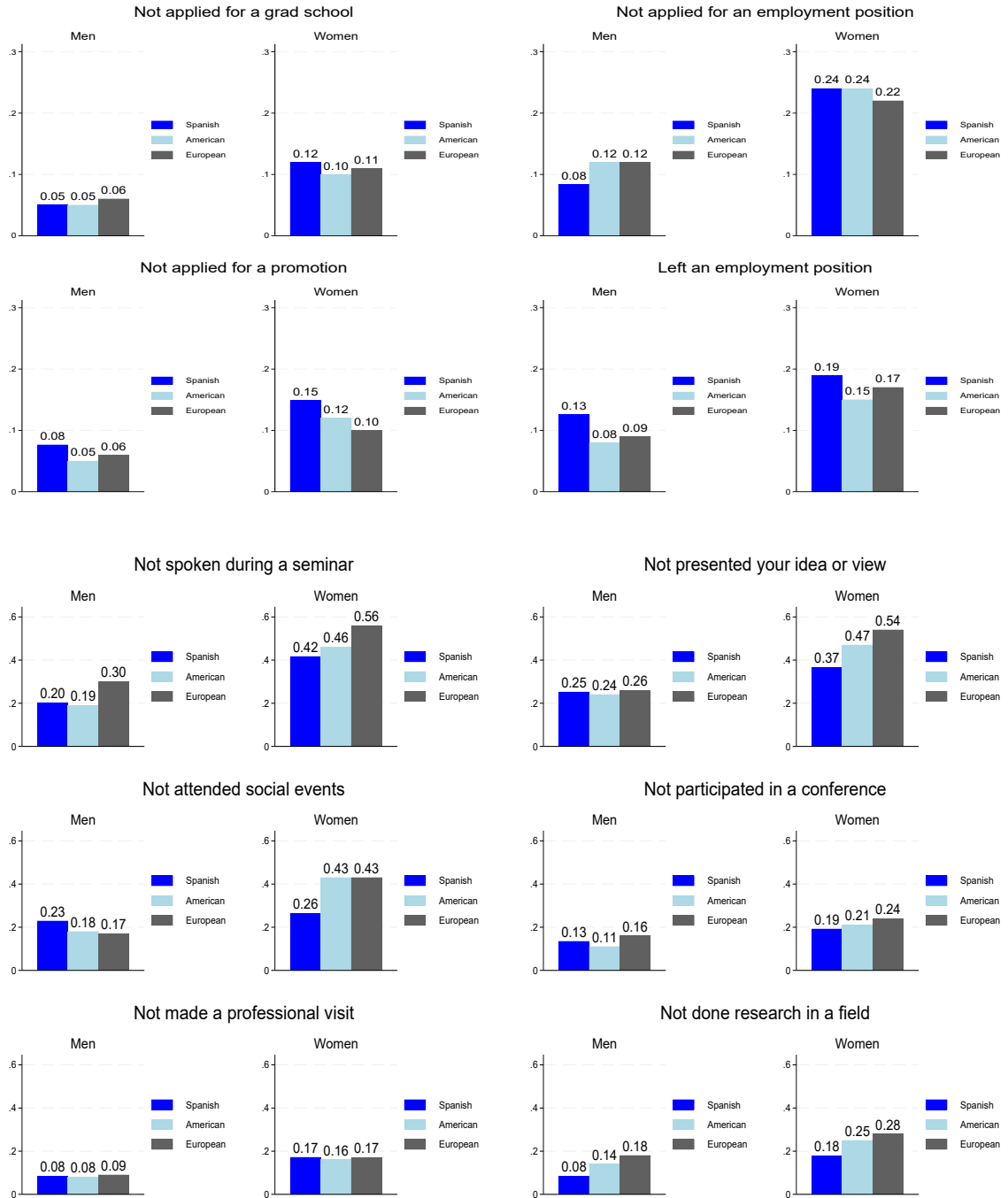


Figure 19: Avoidance behavior, by gender over time

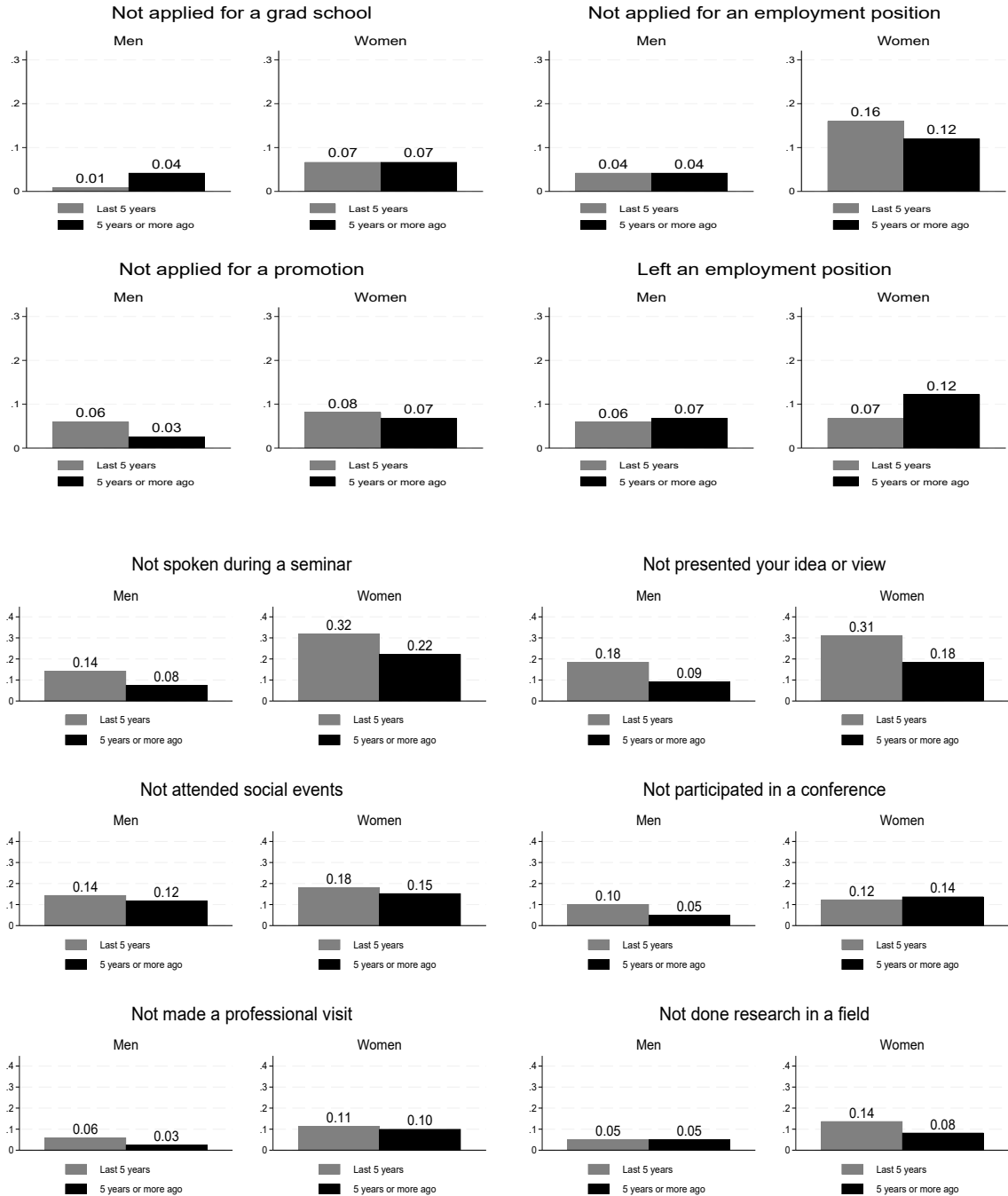


Figure 20: Avoidance behavior, by gender and caregiving status

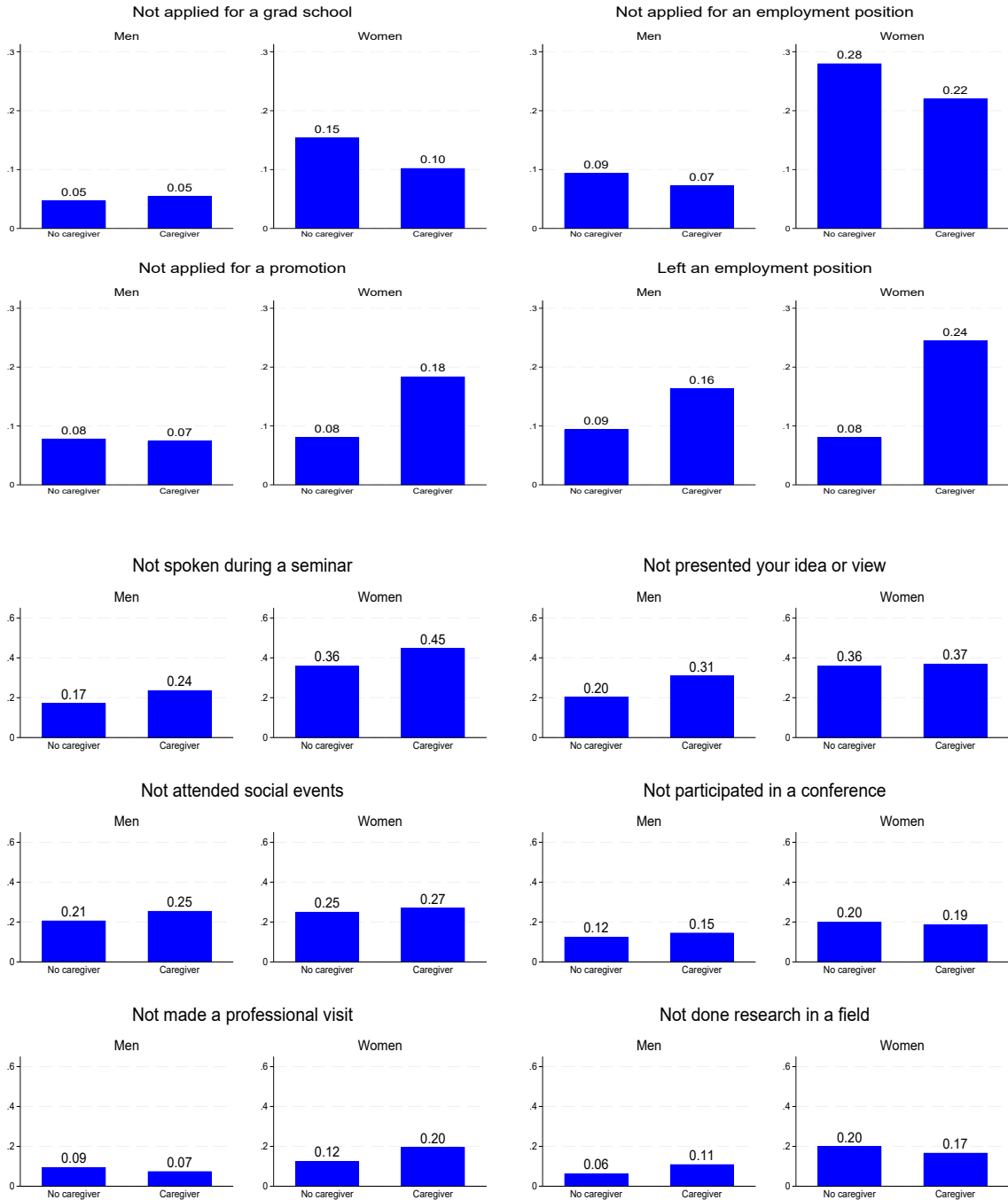


Figure 21: Prevalence of uncomfortable and inappropriate interactions, by gender and survey

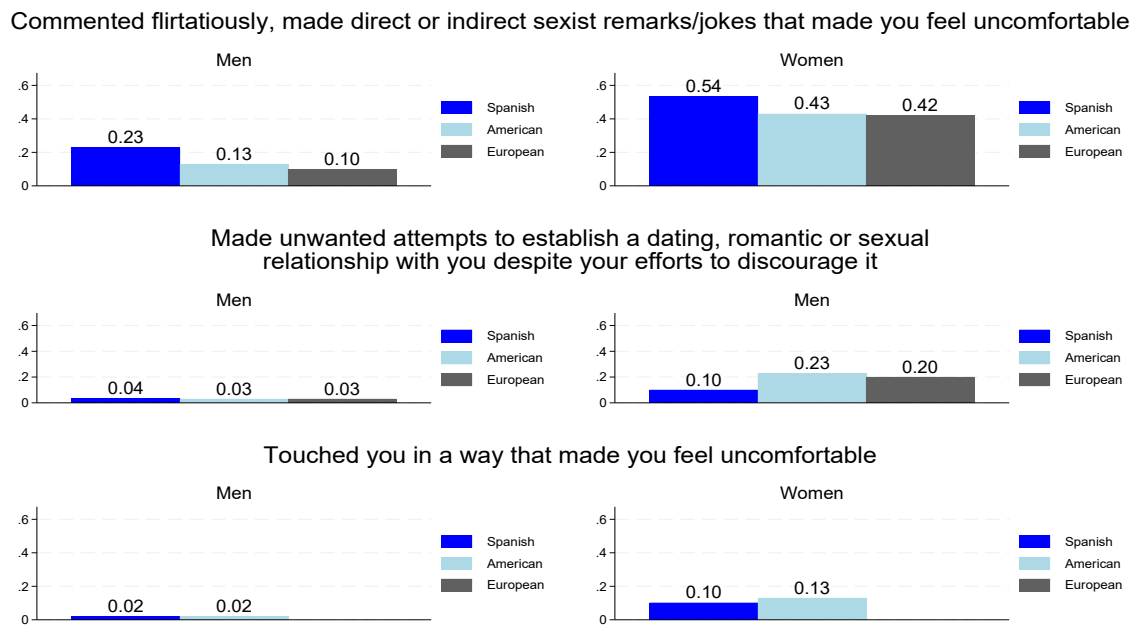
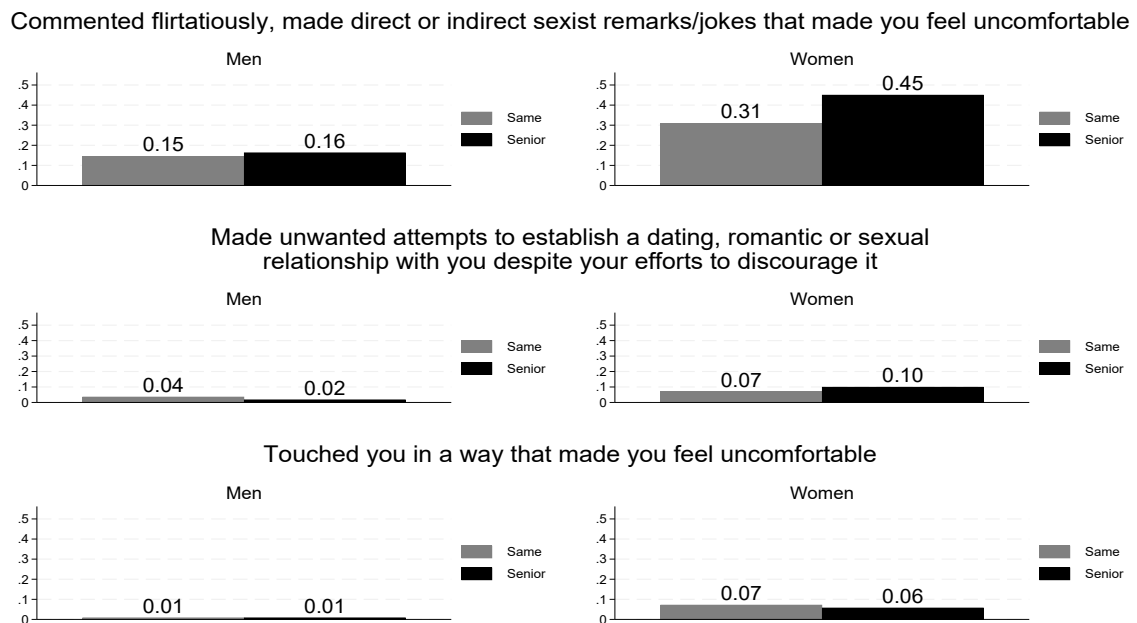


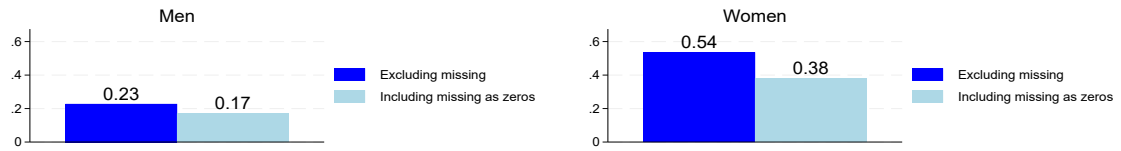
Figure 22: Prevalence of uncomfortable and inappropriate interactions, by gender and academic hierarchical level



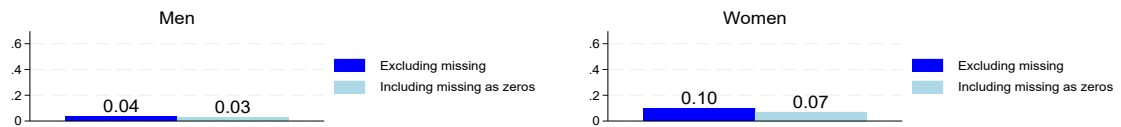
A Additional Figures

Figure A1: Prevalence of uncomfortable and inappropriate interactions, by gender

Commented flirtatiously, made direct or indirect sexist remarks/jokes that made you feel uncomfortable



Made unwanted attempts to establish a dating, romantic or sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it



Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable

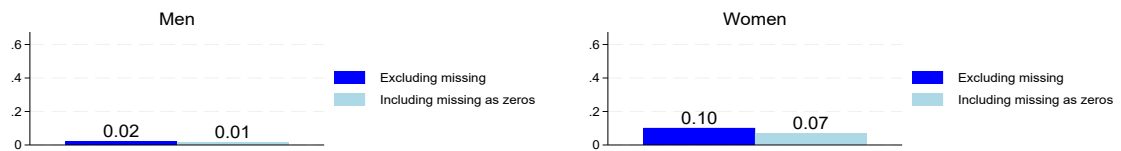


Figure A2: Prevalence of uncomfortable and inappropriate interactions, by gender and academic hierarchical level

