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## The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) as a gender-sensitive comparative project. Objectives, achievements, limits

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# Overview

1. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) – Aims, working principles, results
2. Comparative analysis of gender roles and gender inequalities by survey research. Questions and exemplary findings from ISSP
3. Outlook: Limits and necessary complements and extensions of survey research

For more information see: [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org)

# 1. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) – Aims, organization, results

## History

Established in 1984 as cooperation between research organizations in England (SCPR, London), Germany (ZUMA, Mannheim) and USA (NORC, Chicago) in order to supplement existing national social surveys by a comparative component

## Member countries

Since then, more and more research groups joined ISSP (some also left); today, 48 countries are members (see following map).

A new country group is accepted if its survey organization fulfils the methodological principles of ISSP and is able to carry out regularly the respective surveys

One member countries provides a general secretariat – at present Israel – for a limited period of time

### International Social Survey Programme 2008



# ISSP working principles and rules (1)

Focus on specific topics (difference to *World Value Survey*):

Each module covers one specific topic with about 60 questions (items) or 10 minutes interview time + extensive list of socio-demographic variables

Up to now, 11 topics have been covered, several of them already four or five times (See following slide)

Representative population surveys

A country sample usually includes 1000 persons; this means, that every year about 40.000 people are interviewed; in all years since 1985 (28 years) about half a million people may have been interviewed worldwide

Strict methodological rules (sampling, translation procedures, data preparation) have been developed to insure a high quality of research

# Principles of ISSP research procedures (2)

## A „democratic“ research programme

All decisions concerning selection of topics, development of questionnaires, rules of cooperation are decided by majority vote at the 4-day annual meetings which take place in varying member countries in spring each year (difference to „safari research“)

## Full scientific and political independence

All participant organisations (usually leading social scientific institutes of their countries) are institutes without any direct affiliation to governments or political groups; a problem is how to get financing for the annual surveys

These principles are recorded in the ISSP „Organisational Structure and Working principles“ which are amended from time to time.

# Topics covered by ISSP

- Role of government (1985,1990,1996,2006,2016)
- Social networks and support systems (1986,2001,2017)
- Social inequality (1987,1992,1999,2009)
- Family and changing gender roles (1988,1994, 2002,2012)
- Work orientations (1989,1997,2005,2015)
- Religion (1991,1998,2008)
- Environment (1993,2000,2010)
- National identity (1995,2003,2013)
- Citizenship (2004,2014)
- Leisure time and sports (2007)
- Health (2011)

# Scientific output and results from ISSP

## As a survey research programme

The survey method (representative population interviews with standardized questionnaires) is one of the main sources of social-scientific knowledge

## As a comparative research programme

The analysis of attitudes and behavior patterns comparing different countries and cultures makes it possible to investigate classical and central scientific questions relevant also for social policy; e.g.:

- effects of socio-economic development on attitudes and behavior
- effects of religion and/or political ideologies, both on the individual and collective level
- Effects of different political systems (e.g., democratic character, welfare state)

The names of countries can be substituted by variable categories (e.g. GNI/head, type of political system, dominant religion)

Multilevel regression analysis allows to investigate simultaneously the effect of individual and context variables (e.g., how does my personal religious affiliation and the dominant religion in my country influence my attitudes?)

## Publications from ISSP

The ISSP-data are made available to the world-wide scientific community for analyses by GESIS (Germany); they are also used for teaching (diploma and doctoral theses)

Till 2014, 14 books and readers have been published, and about 6000 papers, academic papers and theses (see <http://issp.org/page.php?pageId=150>)

## 2. Comparative analysis of gender roles and gender inequalities through ISSP

Three possibilities:

- Investigating gender role expectations and behaviors in different societies and their connection to societal characteristics
- Showing differences between men and women in different areas of social attitudes and behavior
- Showing interaction effects between social attitudes and behaviors and countries resp. country level context factors

In the following, examples for all three strategies of analysis from my own research are presented shortly

**Attitudes toward the role of women between family and work in  
eight countries (1988)**

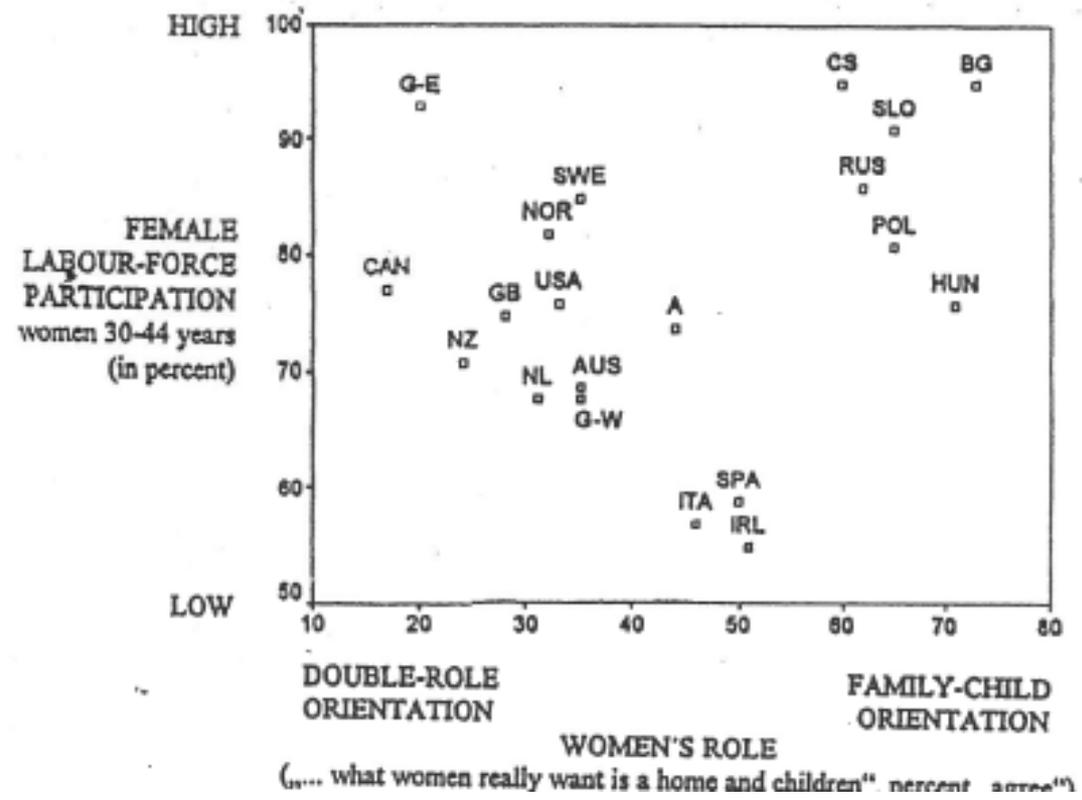
		USA	GB	NL	FRG	ITA	IRL	A	HUN	Factor-analysis		
										F1	F2	F3
A working mother can have just as warm a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work	%	66	59	57	(70)	59	55	(71)	52	.69		
A pre-school child will suffer if hjs/her mother works	%	(43)	(47)	60	72	67	53	(77)	(71)	.82		
Family life will suffer if the woman works full-time	%	(35)	(42)	49	59	65	54	(76)	63	.82		
A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job to look after home and family	%	(28)	(29)	(27)	45	40	41	(56)	44	.62		.65
A job is alright, but most women want a home and family	%	(34)	(33)	(38)	41	51	58	60	(76)			.82
Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay	%	54	42	44	50	43	(66)	(60)	(91)			.83
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent	%	(44)	63	(45)	68	68	58	(75)	55			.79
Husband and wife should contribute to the household income	%	50	54	24	50	73	65	66	(85)			.76
A woman and her family will all be happier if she goes out to work	%	17	18	27	20	(48)	22	14	36	-.53	.55	

Explained Variance: 37% 16% 12%

# The variation of attitudes toward women's home and family role by actual female labour force participation in 20 countries

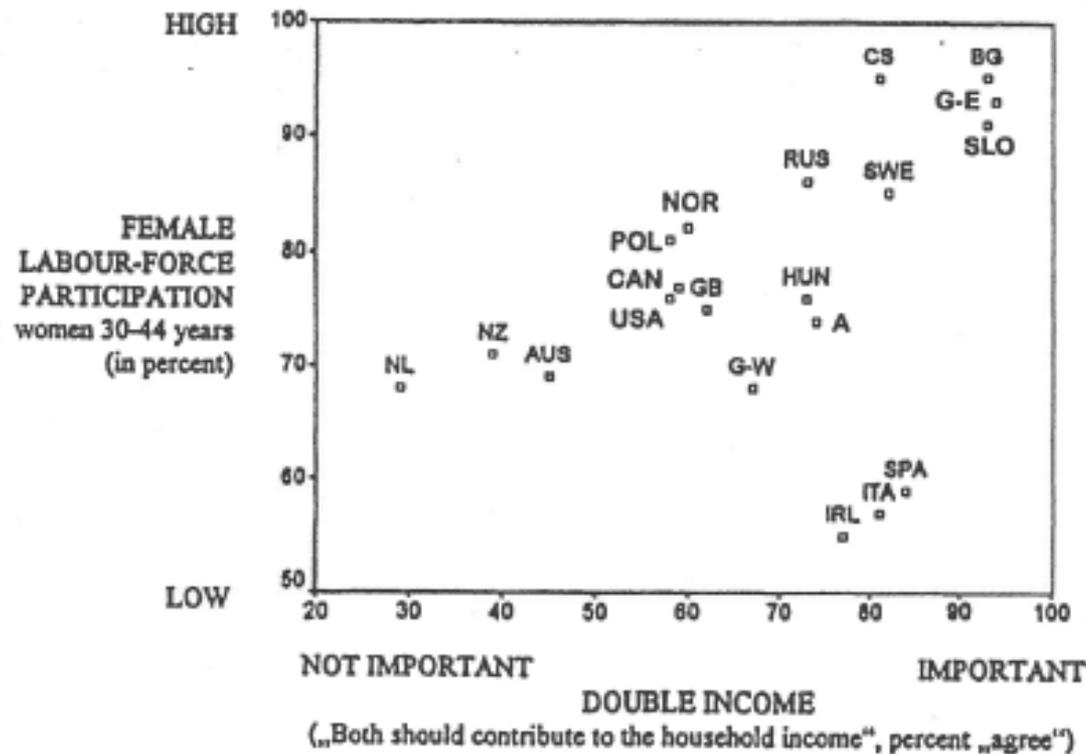
Figure 1: Level of female labour-force participation vs. women's role orientation

Haller/F. Höllinger/  
M. Gomilschak  
(1999), Attitudes  
toward gender  
roles in  
international  
comparison, in  
R.Richter, S.  
Supper, eds., New  
Qualities in the  
Lifecourse,  
Würzburg: Ergon,  
pp.131-152



# Attitudes toward the importance of a double income by actual female labour force participation in 20 countries

Figure 2: Level of female labour-force participation vs. double income orientation



# Gender as a determinant of social attitudes and behaviors

## General finding:

Usually there are no large differences between men and women

Some examples:

- Environmental attitudes: women are more fatalistic, but more ready to engage in environmental-friendly behavior
- Political interest and activities: women are less interested and active
- Voluntary activities: women are more active
- Life satisfaction/ happiness: women (and housewife) are more happy, in spite of the fact that they feel to have less freedom to decide about their life
- Leisure time stress and boredom: Women feel more stressed, but are also less bored

## -Conclusion

The small effect of gender as such is plausible, given the fact that „gender“ is only a statistical category which includes people in very different situations; in many regards, the differences between different groups of women (or men) are much more pronounced than those between men and women in general.

In most cases, other variables – age, education, occupational position – are more important. Thus, every sound analysis must include other dimensions, but also investigate interaction effects between gender and other variables (see below).

## Socio-demographic characteristics and aspects of personal identity as determinants of general life satisfaction (Austria 2004; regression analysis)

Selected independent variables (with clear effects)	Effects on life satisfaction (Beta's)
Gender	ns (not significant)
Age	ns
Unemployed	-.13***
Married	0.19**
Identification with family role	0,18***
Identification with occupation/professional role	0.14***
Identification with gender role (as man/woman)	0,14**
Feeling that life is meaningful	0,23***
Feeling that life is meaningless	-0.16

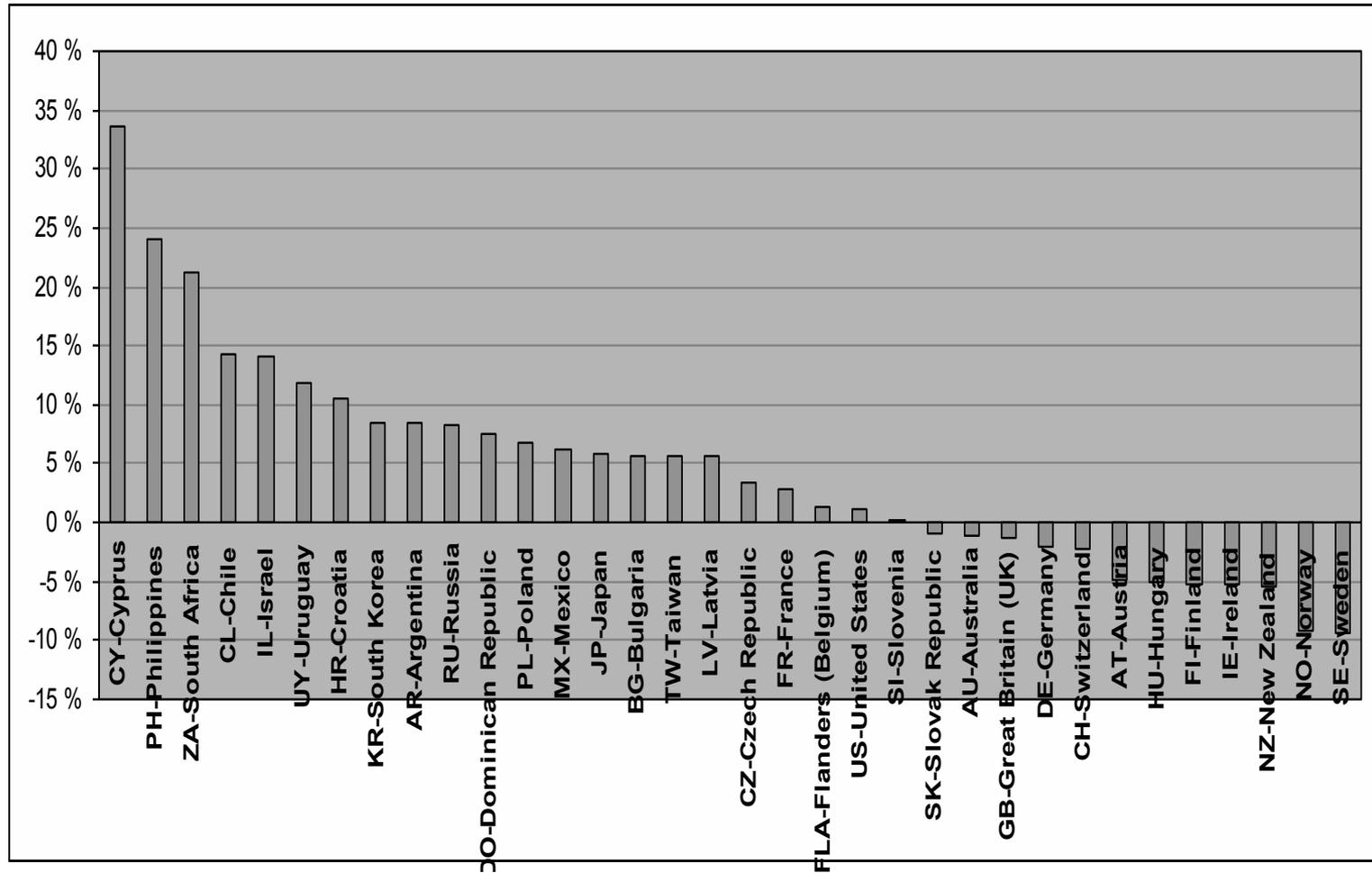
Source: M. Haller/ B. Müller, Characteristics of personality and identity in population surveys, Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique, July 2008, p.5-33.

# Linear regression analysis of sport and physical activity in eight country groups: A surprising reversal of the effect of gender

	Northern Europe		Australasia		North America		West and Central Europe	
	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>
Education	0.07**	0.02	0.14**	0.021	0.27**	0.09	0.14**	0.04
Gender	0.13**		0.02		-0.004		0.01	
Age	-0.006		-0.01		-0.1**		-0.11**	
	East Asia / Middle East		Latin America		Eastern Europe		Others	
	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>	B	R <sup>2</sup>
Education	0.14**	0.21	0.18**	0.06	0.15**	0.1	0.14**	0.13
Gender	-0.06**		-0.10**		-0.04**		-0.22**	
Age	-0.03*		-0.09**		-0.23**		-0.22**	

Source: T. Rohrer, M. Haller, Sport und soziale Ungleichheit, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie u. Sozialpsychologie, vol.67 (2015), 57-82; M. Haller, T. Rohrer, M. Steuer, Class and gender as determinants of sport activity: An international comparison, in preparation.

# Sport and physical activity by gender in 34 countries around the world: The difference between men and women exercising sport (in %)



### 3.Outlook: Limits and necessary complements of comparative survey research

#### Limits of survey research and of ISSP:

- Large groups of countries are not participating in ISSP;  
particularly missing are most Arab-islamic and Sub-Saharan African countries; to know more about gender differences, inequalities and relations in those countries would be very important
- The comparability of basic concepts is often difficult; translation procedures must be improved; often „functional equivalence“ (using different terms with similar meanings) is the only solution
- Questions on gender roles may be biased and reflect present-day concerns only; it is difficult to invent questions and items about phenomena in the making

# Necessary complements and extensions of comparative survey research

- Standardized survey research should be supplemented by qualitative research methods (open-ended interviews, participant observations etc.)
- Historical and institutional research and analysis (how did cultures, political systems etc. evolve and what are their characteristics...)
- All comparative research must be based explicitly on theoretical considerations, development of typologies and hypotheses, given the huge amount of data available

For more information see:

Max Haller, Roger Jowell, Tom Smith, eds., *The International Social Survey Programme, 1984–2009. Charting the Globe*, London/ New York: Routledge, 2009,