

PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF ERA ON FAMILIES AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES

V V Prakasa Rao and N Nandini Rao, Jackson State University, Mississippi

INTRODUCTION

Historically women workers were found only in a few occupations. From 1900, as the society became industrialized and rationalized, the proportion of women in the labor force and in different types of occupations kept increasing. Meanwhile, societal attitudes toward women's participation in various types of work has undergone great change. However, to this day, employer prejudice and women's own sex role socialization keeps most women workers out of better paying jobs. The anticipated equality of sexes has not been achieved despite federal and state laws mandating equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunity in the labor market.

Although an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution (ERA) has been introduced in every session of Congress since 1923 to eliminate sex discrimination, it was not approved in Congress until 1972. The amendment reads: **Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.** Even after years of effort by women's organizations, and after extension of the time limit for ratification to 10 years, legislatures of only 35 of the required 38 states (three fourths) had ratified, and the amendment failed. It will be reintroduced, but a major opportunity was lost.

Opposition to ERA was more vigorous and more publicized than its support. It was argued that ratification of ERA would damage standards of behavior and social norms. It would command legislatures to ignore the sex of the individual in lawmaking, and would endanger women by nullifying laws which require the husband to support the wife and minor children. Major points of the opposition centered on the family and the law, property rights, unisex lavatories, desegregation of institutions such as prisons, homosexual marriages, and women's place in occupations.

Resistance to ERA came from women as well as men, and a cross-section of organizations. One of the main reasons for the ERA defeat in most non-ratifying states was active opposition by a minority of women resisting a measure intended for their benefit. Phyllis

Schlafly, the anti-feminist leader, identifies the supporters of women's movements as radical, anti-family, and pro-lesbian. She insists that women's place is at home. Arguing that the ERA would deprive women of rights, Schlafly (1977) stated: "... this will avoid the husband's obligation to support his wife, to provide her with a home and to support their minor children... most people do not think a union of a person and a person is the same as a union of a man and a woman ..." because passage of ERA requires neutralization of all sexist words.

Many conservative religious, labor, political and social organizations worked against passage of the ERA at the national level and in wavering states. The Republican Party withdrew its longstanding support in the 1980 presidential election. Such groups argued that man and women are made differently, being equal partners in life, but not the same. They argued that the ERA would increase responsibilities for the wife and reduce them for husbands, threatening the stability of the family (Baumi 1980; Goode 1980; Hacker 1980; Mandle 1979; Millstein, Bodin 1977; Snyder 1979; Walum 1977; Yates 1975).

Most professional women felt that life would be incomplete without children. "So long as women fight only for increased employment and ignore alternative life plans, and other values, they will exchange one confining role for another. The brass cage of domesticity is no smaller than the golden cage of the office." (Bardwick 1973)

Only limited research was conducted in determining the variables associated with women's liberation ideology and activism. Analysis of a sample of 448 undergraduate college women from distinctive educational settings showed that mother's religion, mother's politics, college major, number of relationships, types of relationships, marriage and career expectations, political preference, homosexuality and aggression were significant predictors of the female student's ideology on women's liberation (Goldschmidt et al 1974). Another study showed that age, education, occupational status, religious practice, ever married, political party identification,

and liberalism were strongly related to the womens' liberation movement (Welch 1975). Analysis of responses by Illinois residents in two random samples taken in 1976 and 1977 showed that womens' approval lagged behind that of men, but increased slightly in the interval between samples. Regression analysis revealed that womens' ERA approval related positively to higher educational attainment and negatively to being non-Protestant (Huber et al 1978).

National polls indicated that several variables were associated with women who continued to resist the liberation movement. Women who were older, or less educated, or low income, or rural or married tended to take the opposing side (Harris 1980; Roper 1980). Women living in the south and midwest were likely to withhold support. Working class women and minority women were also likely to doubt the intent of the movement, and perceive it to emphasize change only in the womens' domestic role which gives more meaning to their lives (Mandel 1979).

METHODS

The present study examines differences between male and female college students in the consequences they perceive for the ERA on the family and the job market. We believe that these attitudes will have far-reaching consequences for the future of the womens' liberation movement.

Data came from 300 undergraduate students enrolled in five educational institutions in Jackson Mississippi. In the sample, 36 percent were male, 64 percent female; 35 percent were white, and 65 percent black. There were 15 predictor variables and four dependent variables. Four statements were used to assess the predictor variables (Huber et al. 1978): If ERA were passed, it would—

- 1) be harder for men to get good jobs.
- 2) increase women's job opportunity.
- 3) be easier for men to get a divorce.
- 4) be easier for women to get a divorce.

Respondents chose on a scale of five responses from "very unlikely" to "very likely."

Demographic variables include: age, race (black, white), year in college, grade point ratio, college major (social science, other), church attendance (5 points, weekly to never), home town (5 points, rural to large city),

family income (6 points, under \$5000 to \$25,000+), mother's education, father's education, mother employed (yes, no), attitude to ERA (support, oppose), and student residence (on-, off-campus).

To determine whether one considered oneself as supporting the feminist movement, students were asked: "Defining a feminist as someone who believes in total equality between males and females, do you consider yourself to be a feminist?" Response choices were: *definitely*, *somewhat*, and *definitely not*. High score indicates a nonfeminist response. To measure sex role orientation, an 18-item sex role ideology scale was used; 13 items dealt with the traditional wife role and the traditional mother role (Scanzoni 1975); 5 statements developed by the authors refer to sexual role orientation:

- 1) A woman's place should be in the home.
- 2) A woman should be protected first by her father, then by her husband, finally by her son.
- 3) A woman should not mix freely with males in her social relations.
- 4) A woman should give more importance to the needs of her family than her personal ambitions and needs.
- 5) Although a woman is highly educated, she should be encouraged to assume the domestic role.

Responses on a 4-point forced-choice scale ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, with lower score indicating the more traditional sex role orientation.

FINDINGS

Analysis includes 1) examination of percentage difference in male and female attitudes to ERA effects; 2) stepwise multiple regression to weigh the rank effects of independent variables on the dependent variables.

No significant differences appeared between males and females in attitudes to effect of ERA passage on whether it would be harder for men to get jobs, increase job opportunities for women, or make it easier for men or women to get a divorce (t-tests). Almost 57 percent of the respondents do not think that the passage of ERA would increase difficulty for men to find good jobs. At the same time, 67 percent report that it would increase job opportunities for women. On divorce, 36 percent think that ERA passage would make it easier

for men to get a divorce and 39 percent think it would facilitate getting a divorce for a woman; 33 percent were not sure about the effects of ease of getting a divorce.

Stepwise multiple regression indicates the joint impact of socio-economic and demographic variables in perceived consequences of ERA passage on four criterion variables — two for getting jobs, by sex, and two for ease of getting a divorce, by sex. Tables show the results 1) for the total sample, 2) for males, and 3) for females.

Consequences for men's job opportunities.

A 3-variable model was the model of choice for *men getting good jobs* for the total sample. Grade point average, sex role orientation and church attendance were significant for explaining the variance in the dependent variable. Those with a high grade point average expressed liberal sex role attitudes and attended church less often. They also tend to think that ERA passage would have little effect on men's job opportunities. These variables explained 5.6 percent of the variance in the criterion variable. The optimal model for males indicates that those with an egalitarian sex role ideology, reporting high grade point averages, and having working mothers did not think ERA passage would adversely affect men's job opportunities. The model for males explained 13.4 percent of the variance while all independent variables together explained 16.7 percent of the variance. The female model reveals that women students who did not attend church frequently, and who had high grade point averages also did not think that ERA passage would hurt men's job opportunities. We note that although grade point average is the second most potent contributor in explaining variance in both models, it is a greater factor in the male than in the female model. The female model explained only 4.4 percent of the variance.

Consequences for women's job choices.

Two variables— attitude toward ERA and church attendance— emerged as most significant in explaining variance in perceived ERA effects on women's job opportunities. Though church attendance was not significantly related to the criterion variable, it was significant in explaining variance. Those favorable to ERA passage with high church attendance think that ERA would improve women's job

TABLE 1. STEPWISE REGRESSION ON EFFECTS OF ERA PASSAGE
(Total Sample: N = 300)

Variables	Multiple R	R ²	Change	Beta*
1. Men getting jobs				
Grade point average	.15	.02	.023	-.12
Sex role orientation	.21	.05	.022	-.16
Church attendance	.24	.06	.011	-.11
All variables	.28	.08		
2. Women get jobs				
Attitude to ERA	.34	.12	.118	-.29
Church attendance	.36	.13	.010	-.10
All variables	.40	.16		
3. Men getting divorce				
Father's education	.19	.04	.035	-.15
Year in college	.24	.06	.021	-.08
Race	.27	.07	.018	.13
Feminism attitude	.30	.09	.017	.13
Residence	.32	.10	.012	-.12
Home town size	.34	.11	.011	.11
All variables	.36	.13		
4. Women getting divorce				
Father's education	.15	.02	.022	-.13
All variables	.27	.17		

Significance criterion: .05; * Standardized beta.

opportunities. For the criterion variable the two predictors in the model explained 12.8 percent of the variance. Most of the effect was due to attitude to ERA.

Regression analysis shows that attitude to ERA, mother's employment status, and sex role orientation were the salient variables for the male subsample, while attitude to ERA, sex role orientation, church attendance and residence were more salient for the female subsample, for explaining effect on the dependent variable, women's job opportunities. Males opposing the ERA had a working mother, and expressed liberal sex role attitudes with doubt that passage of the ERA would increase women's job opportunities. Females unfavorable to the ERA reported traditional sex role attitudes, attended church less often, lived off-campus, and thought that ERA passage would not improve women's job opportunities. As we expected, sex role

TABLE 2. STEPWISE REGRESSION ON VARIABLES AFFECTING ERA BELIEFS
(Male subsample: N = 103)

Variables	Multiple R	R ²	Change	Beta*
1. Men getting jobs				
Sex role orientation	.25	.06	.062	-.26
Grade point average	.35	.12	.062	-.25
Mother's employment	.37	.13	.010	-.11
All variables	.41	.17		
2. Women getting jobs				
Attitude to ERA	.31	.10	.097	-.29
Mother's employment	.33	.11	.012	.08
Sex role orientation	.34	.12	.010	-.09
All variables	.38	.14		
3. Men getting divorce				
Race	.34	.12	.117	.14
Residence	.39	.16	.038	-.17
Father's education ¹	.42	.17	.019	-.05
Attitude to ERA	.44	.19	.016	-.20
Feminism attitude	.45	.21	.015	.10
College major	.47	.22	.011	-.09
Church attendance	.48	.23	.010	.10
All variables	.52	.27		
4. Women getting divorce				
Attitude to ERA	.22	.05	.049	-.21
Mother's employment	.27	.07	.025	.17
Sex role orientation	.32	.10	.029	-.22
Residence	.35	.12	.020	-.17
Feminism attitude	.38	.15	.023	-.17
Father's education	.40	.16	.011	.13
All variables	.41	.17		

Significance criterion: .05; * Standardized beta

orientation had differential influence for males and females. Females with liberal attitudes tend to think ERA would increase women's job opportunities while men with similar attitudes expressed the opposite view. The model for males explained 11.9 percent of the variance, compared to 19.6 percent for the females. Attitude to ERA explained the most variance in both models.

Consequences on men's divorce. The optimal model for ease of men getting a divorce was the 6-variable model for the total sample. Father's education, year in college, race, attitude to feminism, residence, and size of home town were influential variables. White respondents with more educated fathers, in

TABLE 3. STEPWISE REGRESSION ON VARIABLE EFFECTS ON ERA BELIEFS
(Female subsample: N = 197)

Variables	Multiple R	R ²	Change	Beta*
1. Men getting jobs				
Church attendance	.18	.03	.033	-.15
Grade point average	.21	.04	.011	-.08
All variables	.29	.08		
2. Women getting jobs				
Attitude to ERA	.36	.13	.131	-.29
Sex role orientation	.40	.16	.026	.15
Church attendance	.43	.19	.028	-.21
Residence	.44	.20	.011	.09
All variables	.46	.21		
3. Men getting divorce				
Age	.17	.03	.029	-.10
Father's education	.26	.05	.022	-.15
Year in college	.26	.07	.016	-.07
Attitude to ERA	.28	.08	.011	.12
Home town size	.30	.09	.010	.10
All variables	.33	.11		
4. Women getting divorce				
Race	.15	.02	.021	.22
Church attendance	.21	.04	.023	-.16
Family income	.26	.07	.020	.14
Father's education	.28	.08	.010	-.12
All variables	.32	.10		

Significance criterion: .05; Standardized beta.

in later years of college, considered themselves feminist, lived in rural areas, and tended to think that ERA passage would not make divorce easier for men. The model explained 11.4 percent of the variance.

Turning to regression analysis for both sexes, we find that race, residence, father's education, attitude to ERA and to feminism, college major and church attendance were most significant variables for the males, while age, father's education, year in college, attitude to ERA, and size of home town were salient variables on female beliefs about ERA effect on ease for men to get a divorce. For males, the model explained 22.6 percent of the variance, while for females, it explained 8.8 percent of the variance. Race alone accounted for nearly half of explained variance in the male subsample. Age explained about

one third of the variance in the criterion variable for the female subsample.

Consequences on women's divorce. A weak 1-variable model shows slight effect (2.2 percent of variance) of high level of father's education on facilitating divorce for women. For male respondents, attitude to ERA, mother's work status, sex role orientation, residence, attitudes to feminism and father's education were the salient variables. For female respondents, race, church attendance, family income and father's education were salient variables. Males opposed to ERA had a working mother, expressed liberal sex role attitudes, lived off-campus, said they were not feminist, had fathers with less education, and did not think that ERA would facilitate women getting a divorce, a belief shared by black women more rarely attending church, with high family income and more educated fathers. The 6-variable model explained 15.7 percent of variance for males and 7.6 percent of variance for female respondents.

CONCLUSION

Since women tend to gain much more from equality, we expected that more women than men would approve passage of ERA, but the data reveal no significant differences between the sexes. The rate of approval for both is about 55 percent. Though women are the intended beneficiaries of the Amendment, they may perceive themselves as losing protection of existing family support laws, and facing more hardship in the competitive world of work.

Although no significant intersex differences were found, the predictor variables were different. The gender of the respondent may condition effects of demographic, socioeconomic and other variables on anticipation of ERA consequences on family and job finding. Explanation of attitude variance for the total sample may obscure effects of other variables across sex groups.

More study is needed on effects of social and situational variables on male and female attitudes to the women's movement, either to substantiate or modify or reject our findings. This was a homogeneous sample of college students, with background characteristics which may not be comparable to other populations. Therefore, caution is advised in

generalizing to other populations.

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