

Facing Work-Family Conflict – a study of Portuguese Working Mothers

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Abstract

Portuguese women, mothers of young children and working professionals, face in their daily life, a severe burden reconciling domestic and family life organization and needs with professional career demands.

This burden is related with two major facts:

1. The persistence of a labour market organization structured by masculine and patriarchal patterns.
2. Differences in the division of domestic, parental and care giving chores, between men and women.

These differences are the result of ancestral stereotypes about gender roles, both in family and in society, that coexist with the change in women's status in the public sphere. Therefore, we think that the conflict between work and family is, in a large measure, a matter of gender and a matter of social expectations towards women's and men's roles and behaviours.

These ideas were the starting point to our investigation. We questioned 420 working women (in the western area of Lisbon) mothers of, at least, one child between six and ten years old, about their experiences of reconciling a professional career with motherhood and family demands.

We will discuss some of the results of our investigation, namely, the consequences of the strain to reconcile professional and familiar roles and the lack of time, the feelings of being unable to respond the demands, both in the professional field and in family life, and the consequences of those feelings for women's and their family's well-being.

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