

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

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Author: Maria José da Silveira Ferreira Nuncio (PHD on Social Sciences – Professor at Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas – Universidade Técnica de Lisboa).

E-mail: msilveira@iscsp.utl.pt

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.

The 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.

Introduction

Several considerations underlie the decision to study the reconciliation between work and family among Portuguese women. In first place all the studies underline the differences and the inequality in the division of work between women and men in Portugal, when considering paid and non-paid work. In reality, as a consequence of gender stereotypes still pretty much strong in Portuguese society, and resultants from the patriarchal paradigm, the domestic and family chores are majorly a responsibility of women, with low levels of male participation.

In second place, we must analyse this reality with the scenery of high levels of participation of Portuguese women in employment – the Portuguese female employment rate was 61.7% in 2005 – and this is majorly full-time employment, which is remarkably different from the situation in other European countries with high levels of female employment, but where this employment concerns majorly to part-time work.

In third place, we have to add that Portuguese working women follow a continuity pattern, meaning they don't interrupt their career, for instance during children's first years, as it is common in other European countries.

All things considered it is possible to admit that these women are facing a severe burden when reconciling work and family.

1. Theoretical Review

It was on the second half of the 70's that work and family started to be seen as interdependent realities, both in economic and sociological investigations. This interdependency can be analysed on two major domains: individual's personal life course and social organisation of contemporary societies.

The rejection of work and family as segregated spheres on people's life, determined a deep change on sociological analyses that developed the concept of work/family system, to illustrate their interdependent nature (Kanter, 1977). The conceptual frame has more recently evolved to the idea of work/family interface, but what the two concepts aim to underline is the strong relationship between work and family and the way that experiences in one domain have an influence upon the other domain. As a consequence, the interdependency between work and family becomes of great interest, both for academic research and for social policies.

It is possible to identify three major stages on the research on the relationship between work and family. On a first stage, this research was centred on the

characteristics of the Job, like routine levels, complexity and autonomy, trying to find the how those characteristics had influence upon family life.

The second stage took as main subject the stress people face when performing their job, and this new approach was determinant for the conceptual development of work/family conflict. This conflictive approach is strongly influenced by Kahn's previous theory, which on 1964, conducted a research on organisational stress, concluding that role conflict, associated to the need to answer several simultaneous demands is responsible for high levels of stress (Kahn, 1980).

When analysing the work/family relationship, using the conflictive theory, the researcher's conclusions are that the demands of a professional career and the demands of family life are mutually incompatible, so that fulfilling the demands on one domain, will necessarily, make it impossible to fulfil the demands on the other domain (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). In conclusion, the worker's performer will be affected by the demands of family life, as well as family demands will be affected by the career (Hill and others 2004: 1305). In this sense, this configures a double conflict, with consequences both on the psychological well-being of the individuals and on the social organization and relationships (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

This incompatibility results on increasing levels of stress, and in diminishing well-being. This question has been subject of research, exploring its consequences on health and individual perceptions of quality of life, as well as on familiar relationships, namely, conjugal and parental relations.

The third stage of the research on work/family conflict centred its subject on the conditions of work, like, working hours, or flexibility. The idea is that if work and family life take place in different spaces and times, performing the tasks of each sphere will *physically* constrain the individual's capacity to perform the tasks related to the other sphere (Counter e McHale, 1993).

Several studies have pointed out the invasion between the two spheres, and the way that this invasion conditions the individual's perception of conflict (Friedman e Greenhaus, 2000). Following this premise, the researchers developed the concept of work/family interface, exactly with the purpose of underlining the mutual and permanent impact between both spheres. (Greenhaus and Beutel, 1985; Voydanoff, 1990; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2002; Frone, 2003).

The research on the work/family relation has, as a consequence, been responsible for the development of a new area of studies, related with the allocation of

time to paid and non-paid work, and with the individual's strategies to cope with work and family demands. This research was also of major relevance to the human resources management, and to the development of principles of social responsibility on enterprises (Bruce and Reed, 1994). By rejecting the traditional dichotomy between work and family life, the new techniques of management, develop measures that integrate the two dimensions and make it easy to reconcile career and family, being conscious that those measures will eventually, increase employee's satisfaction, and therefore, increase productivity and competitiveness.

From a gender perspective the subject of work/family conflict has become increasingly interesting because of the gender differences in the time allocated to paid and non-paid work and because of the way those differences reflect the traditional sexual division of work paradigm, with all its consequences to the social devaluation of women's activities, comparing to men. The contributions of feminist authors and researchers, in their analyses of the experiences of women, were particularly relevant.

The feminist approach to the subject changed in the middle 90's; with the affirmation of a new feminism (the third wave feminism) and its defence of a new paradigm for gender relations, meaning a new division of work in which the participation of women in the public sphere (work, education, politics) is accompanied by the full participation of men in the private sphere of family life.

The gender approach to the work/family relation took as main subjects: the gender participation in employment; the economic decisions of the families concerning the allocation of work and working strategies; and, finally, the domestic and familiar work. The researchers have pointed out deep differences on the rhythms of change on the public sphere, with high levels of female participation on employment, and on the domestic sphere, where the male's participation is increasing but very slowly, reflecting the traditional patriarchal model.

In this sense the subject of the work/family conflict turned itself to be a gender subject, since are women that due to the real conditions of family life in most contemporary societies face a bigger burden, when reconciling professional career and family life (Higgins and others, 1994; Hammer and others, 1997; Cinamon and Rich, 2002; Keene and Quadagno, 2004; McElwain and others, 2005). This burden is even more severe when women are mothers of young children whose needs are primarily a mother's responsibility (Galinsky and others, 2001). Not surprisingly, on a recent

research Hakim (2003) concluded that the major aspiration for 60% of women is to reconcile work and family life.

2. Empirical Framework

The theoretical review helped us on the construction of our research and its analyses.

It was our purpose to verify how Portuguese working mothers of small children face the need to reconcile their work with the family demands, and the perception of conflict between work and family, and the consequent burden.

To develop our analyses we adopted the concept of work/family interface, assuming that the relation between the two domains is influenced by factors related both to working conditions and to family life conditions (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Frone, 2003; Duxbury and others, 1994; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Voydanoff, 2002). On the working conditions we were interested to know the working hours and the level of stress. Concerning family life we analyzed the satisfaction with children's caring solution during working time; the hours allocated to domestic and family chores, the marital division of domestic chores and the time for leisure and for personal needs.

To evaluate the work/family conflict, we asked women if they feel that their work is responsible for a lack of time to family; if they feel like they loose career opportunities due to family demands, and, finally, how they evaluate the relationship between family and work.

2.1. Researching Procedures

We used two inquiring procedures: the questionnaire and the interview. With the questionnaire we expected to reach a general perspective of work/family, and the interview had the purpose of exploring individual difficulties and strategies, when reconciling work demands and family needs.

2.2. Sample Procedures

As it was our purpose to evaluate the work/family conflict among Portuguese mothers, the definition of our target were the working mothers with children from 6 to 10 years old (elementary school ages). This is a particular stage ate family life course with specific needs and demands that suppose several and deep changes on family organization, with inevitable consequences on work/family reconciliation.

The sample was chosen by geographical criteria, corresponding to 4 neighbourhoods in western Lisbon – Alcântara, Ajuda, Santa Maria de Belém e São

Francisco Xavier. This sample included all the public elementary schools of those neighbourhoods (12 schools) and 4 random chosen private schools. Our sample is composed of 420 respondents to the questionnaire. For the interview we asked working mothers from our acquaintances to bring others, and we managed to get 18 interviews.

3. Empirical Results

Concerning women's age, the majority is in the group 35 to 39 years old (36%), and 40-44 years old (26%). The third group includes women of 30 to 34 years old (22%). The average is 37 years old. On what marital status concerns, 75% of women are legally married and 11% live an informal conjugality. 10% are divorced or separated. 50% of women have two children and 25% are mothers of a single child. Only 18% of these families have three children. The children's age is, on average 8 years old.

When analyzing the education levels we realized that the majority of women have a university degree, 37%. The secondary school is the highest educational level for 17% of the sample. Concerning professional groups, the two most representative groups are the highly skilled jobs, like managers (public and private sectors), top executives, intellectual and scientific professions (43%). Medium skilled professionals correspond to 40% and low-skilled professionals are 14% of our sample.

Considering the answers about work/family reconciliation, a large proportion of women find it difficult to reconcile the two domains (68%). We found also a large proportion of women who feel that family interferes with career opportunities 54%. More significantly we found that 61% of women feel that their professional work deprives them of time to family

Table 1 – Work/family Reconciliation

Evaluation	Number	%
<i>Difficult</i>	240	68,4
<i>Easy</i>	111	31,2
<i>Total</i>	350	100,0

Table 2 – Lose of career opportunities due to family life

Lose of career opportunities due to family life	Nº	%
<i>Yes</i>	191	54,4
<i>No</i>	160	45,5
<i>Total</i>	351	100,0

Table 3 – Lack of time to family due to work

Lack of time to family due to work	Nº	%
<i>Yes</i>	213	60,7
<i>No</i>	138	39,3
<i>Total</i>	351	100,0

Most of these women work from 31 to 40 hours per week (54%). And the average working hours is 37.9 hours. Still it is to underline that 27% of this sample works more than 40 hours per week, and 12% works more than 46 hours per week. The part-time work represents a proportion of just 20% of the sample, showing the poor tradition of part-time work in Portugal, especially, when referring to high or medium qualified jobs.

Table 4 – Weekly working hours

Weekly working hours	Nº	%
<i>Less than 20 hours</i>	9	2,6
<i>20 to 30 hours</i>	59	17,0
<i>31 to 40 hours</i>	185	53,5
<i>41 to 45 hours</i>	51	14,7
<i>More than 46 hours</i>	42	12,1
<i>Total</i>	346	100,0

Many researches pointed out the influence of high levels of professional stress on the work/family conflict. The impact of professional stress determines an invasion of family life and reduces family's well-being (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Frone, 2003; Schneider and others, 2004). This impact seems to be more severe to women since due to their domestic chores, they don't have enough time to relief stress, for instance during the evening or on weekends.

Table 5 – Level of Professional Stress

Professional Stress	Nº	%
<i>High</i>	149	43,1
<i>Normal</i>	166	48,1
<i>Low</i>	30	8,7
<i>Total</i>	345	100,0

Crossing the results related to stress with the evaluation about work/family reconciliation it is clear that high levels of Professional stress are related to a poorer evaluation of the reconciliation between the two spheres.

Table 6 – Professional stress and work/family reconciliation

			Professional Stress				Total
			<i>High</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Others</i>	
Work/family Reconciliation	Difficult	Count	124	103	12	1	240
		% within Reconciliation	51,7%	42,9%	5,0%	,4%	100,0%
		% within Stress	82,7%	60,9%	38,7%	100,0%	68,4%
		% of Total	35,3%	29,3%	3,4%	,3%	68,4%
		Adjusted Residual	5,0	-2,9	-3,7	,7	
	Easy	Count	26	66	19	0	111
		% within Reconciliation	23,4%	59,5%	17,1%	,0%	100,0%
		% within Stress	17,3%	39,1%	61,3%	,0%	31,6%
		% of Total	7,4%	18,8%	5,4%	,0%	31,6%
		Adjusted Residual	-5,0	2,9	3,7	-,7	
Total		Count	150	169	31	1	351
		% within Reconciliation	42,7%	48,1%	8,8%	,3%	100,0%
		% within Stress	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	42,7%	48,1%	8,8%	,3%	100,0%

$\chi^2=31,56$; $DF=3$; $p=0,000$ ($cf=0,32$)

On family life domain, we analyzed the time devoted to domestic and family chores, but also the evaluation about the sufficiency of time for family, for domestic chores and for personal needs. We asked women how many hours they dedicate to domestic chores (like cleaning, laundry, meals...) on a week day, and how many years they devote to their children, accompanying and caring them. On average, women spend daily 3.2 hours with their children, and 2.6 hours with domestic chores.

Crossing these results with the ones related to professional working hours it is pretty obvious the burden that affects women in their daily routine.

When asked about the satisfaction with the time they dispose for family life, women showed to be satisfied with the time devoted to children and to domestic chores, evaluating it as sufficient or even more than sufficient. However they show to be very unsatisfied with the time they have to themselves and to their personal needs.

Table 7 – Sufficiency of time

<i>Sufficiency of time</i>	For Children		For Domestic Chores		For themselves	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Unsufficient</i>	157	37,6	97	23,3	283	67,9
<i>Sufficient</i>	205	49,0	268	64,3	118	28,3
<i>More than sufficient</i>	56	13,4	52	12,4	16	3,8
<i>Total</i>	418	100,0	417	100,0	417	100,0

These results show that facing the lack of time to respond all the demands, women seem to follow a pattern of abnegation, consequence of the *feminine ethics of care*, scarifying their own needs to fulfil the exigencies of work and family life. However this attitude has effects on women's and family well-being as several women pointed out during interviews. Doing that, women may also be trying to mitigate the common *guilty feeling* that many mothers face when they leave their children to go to work.

Table 8 – Time for themselves anf work/family reconciliation

			Time for themselves				Total
			<i>Unsufficient</i>	<i>Sufficient</i>	<i>More than sufficient</i>	Others	
Work /Family Reconciliation	Difficul	Count	192	45	2	1	240
		% within Work /Family Reconciliation	80,0%	18,8%	,8%	,4%	100,0%
		% within Time for themselves	76,8%	48,4%	33,3%	50,0%	68,4%
		% of Total	54,7%	12,8%	,6%	,3%	68,4%
		Adjusted Residual	5,3	-4,8	-1,9	-,6	
	Easy	Count	58	48	4	1	111
		% within Work /Family Reconciliation	52,3%	43,2%	3,6%	,9%	100,0%
		% within Time for themselves	23,2%	51,6%	66,7%	50,0%	31,6%
		% of Total	16,5%	13,7%	1,1%	,3%	31,6%
		Adjusted Residual	-5,3	4,8	1,9	,6	
Total		Count	250	93	6	2	351
		% within Work /Family Reconciliation	71,2%	26,5%	1,7%	,6%	100,0%
		% within Time for themselves	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	71,2%	26,5%	1,7%	,6%	100,0%

$\chi^2=29,10$; $DF=3$; $p=0,000$ ($cf=0,63$)

Concerning the division of domestic and family work, we asked women to indicate who is the main responsible for each task presented, if them, their husband or both. The literature shows that the levels of division are still low, especially when considering routine domestic chores. For instance, in the middle 90's two thirds of men did not do any domestic work (Le Feuvre, 2005). Since the majority of women that composed our sample, work fulltime the division of domestic work is an important dimension to analyze the work/family conflict.

To verify the patterns of division of domestic and family work, we created two different groups of items: the first one related to routinely domestic chores and

housekeeping (10). The second one corresponded to tasks directly related to parenthood (6). On a global analyzes we can see that the division of tasks is still very poor on domestic and housekeeping tasks, being slightly better on the tasks related to children.

Table 9 – Division of domestic work

<i>Tasks</i>	Woman		Man		Both		Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Organization</i>	109	30,3	119	33,0	131	36,4	1	0,3
<i>Management of the family budget</i>	86	23,8	41	11,4	234	64,8	0	0,0
<i>Cleaning/vacuum cleaning</i>	156	43,2	3	0,8	74	20,5	128	35,5
<i>Doing the house</i>	203	56,2	1	0,3	119	33,0	38	10,5
<i>Cooking</i>	218	60,4	13	3,6	96	26,6	34	9,4
<i>Washing Dishes</i>	181	50,1	10	2,8	148	41,0	21	5,8
<i>Washing Clothes</i>	277	76,7	2	0,6	38	10,5	44	12,2
<i>Ironing</i>	189	52,4	0	0,0	18	5,0	154	42,7
<i>Sewing</i>	233	64,5	0	0,0	8	2,2	120	33,2
<i>Making the bed</i>	155	42,9	1	0,3	151	41,8	54	15,0
<i>Repairing</i>	9	2,5	210	58,3	103	28,6	38	10,6
<i>Daily shopping</i>	193	53,5	15	4,2	148	41,0	5	1,4

Table 10 – Division of children’s keep and caring tasks

<i>Tasks</i>	Woman		Man		Both		Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Bathing, Dressing</i>	172	47,7	2	0,6	184	51,0	3	0,8
<i>School affaires</i>	205	56,8	17	4,7	137	38,0	2	0,6
<i>Taking to School</i>	117	32,4	50	13,9	166	46,0	28	7,8
<i>Taking to the Doctor</i>	204	56,5	5	1,4	149	41,3	3	0,8
<i>Helping with homework</i>	162	44,9	6	1,7	190	52,6	3	0,8
<i>Staying home with sick children</i>	270	74,8	6	1,7	62	17,1	23	6,4

Considering the satisfaction with the solution to keep their children during working time, women seem to be mostly satisfied in this area. We also could confirm that the satisfaction with children’s keeping solution has a great influence on the way mothers perceive the work/family reconciliation. In fact, women who are not satisfied

with the solution to keep their children during their working time, show higher levels of difficulty in reconciling work and family.

Table 11 – Satisfaction with children’s keeping/caring solution

<i>Satisfaction with children’s keeping/caring solution</i>	N	%
<i>Not satisfied</i>	30	7,3
<i>Satisfied</i>	186	45,2
<i>Very satisfied</i>	195	47,5
<i>Total</i>	411	100,0

Table 12 - Satisfaction with children’s keeping/caring solution and work/family reconciliation

			<i>Satisfaction with children’s keeping/caring solution</i>				Total
			<i>Not satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i>	Others	
Work/family reconciliation	Difficul	Count	21	125	93	1	240
		% within Work/family reconciliation	8,8%	52,1%	38,8%	,4%	100,0%
		% within Satisfaction	87,5%	76,2%	58,1%	33,3%	68,4%
		% of Total	6,0%	35,6%	26,5%	,3%	68,4%
		Adjusted Residual	2,1	3,0	-3,8	-1,3	
	Easy	Count	3	39	67	2	111
		% within Work/family reconciliation	2,7%	35,1%	60,4%	1,8%	100,0%
		% within Satisfaction	12,5%	23,8%	41,9%	66,7%	31,6%
		% of Total	,9%	11,1%	19,1%	,6%	31,6%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,1	-3,0	3,8	1,3	
Total		Count	24	164	160	3	351
		% within Work/family reconciliation	6,8%	46,7%	45,6%	,9%	100,0%
		% within Satisfaction	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	6,8%	46,7%	45,6%	,9%	100,0%

$\chi^2=18,20$; $DF=3$; $p=0,000$ ($cf=0,95$)

4. Conclusions

The feminine experience of the work/family conflict reflects a deep contradiction between tradition and modernity in contemporary societies, related to gender roles and social representations about gender. This paradox lies on the massive participation of women on employment when, at home, they keep all their traditional functions, with low levels of male’s participation on domestic and family work.

This paradox underlines highlights a gender profile on the work/family conflict, since when we consider paid and non-paid work, women spend more time working than

men, with the consequent burden that affects individual's well-being. This is particularly true on the Portuguese society, where not only women participate strongly on employment, in full-time jobs (mostly because of the low wages that make almost impossible for a family to survive with only one wage, or even with one and a half wage), but also there is a persistence of traditional and patriarchal representations of gender roles, more common in southern European countries.

In our research we were able to find this pattern of female's full-time jobs as well as the low levels of division of domestic work. We also found a conflict between career and family, quite evident on women's difficulty on reconciling both areas, and a perception of interference between the two spheres, shown on women's feeling of lack of time for family and for themselves and on women's perception of lose of career opportunities due to family demands.

We also found a relationship between the job conditions like job's qualification, working hours and levels of professional and the work/family conflict. In family life, this conflict is strengthened by women's dissatisfaction with the keeping/caring children's solutions while they are working, and by the men's low participation on domestic work.

Other source of difficulty on reconciling both spheres is the women's feeling of lack of time for themselves, which they see as an element that reduces their own well-being but also the psychological and emotional family's well-being.

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