

Motherhood And Work: Career And Family In Perspective

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Abstract

The study investigated the relation between motherhood and work through factors that lead professional women to prioritize career or family. An exploratory, descriptive, mixed methods field survey conducted with two groups of couples: in one the women interrupted their career to look after their children, and in the other group they remained in the job after the maternity leave. Data was qualitatively analyzed using Bardin's categorial content analysis, and quantitatively using descriptive statistics. With respect to the reasons that made women make one or other decision, in the group of women who decided for a career break, the main reasons were related to integral childcare, followed by job dissatisfaction and desire of participating in the child's life. In the responses of women who remained in the job, the main reasons were financial needs, job satisfaction, and career and life plans.

Key words: Woman.
Motherhood. Career. Family



Available online
www.bmdynamics.com
ISSN: 2047-7031

INTRODUCTION

The massive entry of women in the labor market in the 1970s, which gained momentum with industrialization, brought about significant changes in the family structure and rearranged the roles of men and women (Diniz Neto & Férez-Carneiro, 2005). The nuclear family model still prevails in most Brazilian households, and new forms of arrangements, defined by affection rather than kinship, are increasing (Nascimento, 2006). Such diversity of family arrangements brought about new roles to the spouses, and the role traditionally played by men is today largely performed by women and vice versa (Araújo, 2011; Cerveny, 2000; Nascimento, 2006).

The shift in female roles facilitated more participation of men in the care of children, their education, leisure, hygiene and feeding (Goetz & Vieira, 2009; Sutter & Bucher-Maluschke, 2008). It seems certain that this participation contributes to a healthier emotional and cognitive development of the children (Cardoso & Vivian, 2018; Marshall, English & Stewart, 2001).

These changes represent a feminist achievement, because women could then place less importance on motherhood and invest in a professional life and financial independence. (Diniz Neto & Férez-Carneiro, 2005). Gradually, professionalization and improvement of women education consolidated their entry and permanence in the labor force. Financial independence, wish of freedom, the unimportant meaning of motherhood conveyed by the previous generation and a decreased social imposition toward motherhood, allowed women to choose other possibilities of fulfillment (Smeha & Calvano, 2009). Anyway, motherhood is still desired by most women (Smeha & Calvano, 2009; Beltrame & Donelli, 2012).

However, due to the expansion of such possibilities, women had to make choices, leading to a dilemma when it comes to deciding between investing in motherhood or in the professional career. Today, it can be seen that women want to have children, but including them in their projects of life, in their careers. Thus, concerns and the time to be spent with the children become part of the woman's personal planning, both demanding success (Beltrame, & Donelli, 2012; Kanan, 2010).

On the other hand, given the constant and increasing number of women in the labor market, it can be seen that many women decide not to have children, and among those who decide otherwise, some prefer to devote their time exclusively to the family in detriment of their career. Given this scenario, this study

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aimed to investigate specificities associated with the women's decision to continue in the labor force after the children's birth or interrupt their career after becoming mothers.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

An exploratory, descriptive, mixed methods (qualitative-quantitative) field research. Two groups of couples with children, the first (Group A) comprised of women that interrupted their careers for child rearing, and their husbands (16 couples); and the second group (Group B), of women who did not take a career break, and their husbands (20 couples).

The minimum educational level of the female participants, which was defined prior to the study, was higher education, based on the assumption of higher earnings and, consequently, of a choice between maintaining their career or caring for their child personally. Both groups were also constituted by medium- or upper-class participants, for the same reason.

A questionnaire was used to collect sociodemographic data, the mothers' perceptions, expectations, sense of fulfillment, relational aspects (mother-father-child), lifestyle, among others. In addition, the mothers were interviewed using a pre-developed script based on the study objectives.

Data was analyzed qualitatively using the categorical content analysis based on Bardin. It gave origin to five categories of analysis, which will be described next. Quantitatively, data was analyzed via descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characterization

The mean age of the women who quitted working is 33 years and five months. They earn median earnings of \$2,316.66 reais per month. The mean age of their husbands is 37 years and two months, and their median monthly earnings are \$ 12,316.00 reais. With respect to the women's educational background, eight of them have a college degree, seven are specialists and one has a doctoral degree. Two men of this group have secondary education, 10 a college degree, three are specialists, one has a doctoral degree, and the others did not respond.

The mean age of the women who kept their jobs was 35 years and five months. The average monthly earnings of this group are \$ 8,515.88 reais. The mean age of the men in group B is 37 years and nine months. Their husbands' average monthly earnings are \$ 5,080.00. With regard to the women's educational level, eight have a college degree, four have a specialization degree, two have attended a master's course, and six a doctoral program. Regarding the men's educational level, it was found that one has a secondary degree; three has incomplete college education; six completed higher education; five have a specialization; one a master's degree and four have a doctoral degree. Table 1 shows these data.

Table 1. Distribution of means and standard deviation of women's and their husbands' earnings and age of their younger and older children

Participants	Age	Monthly Income	Husbands' age	Husbands' monthly income	Age of the younger child	Age of the older child
Women who QUITTED working (N = 16)	Mean 33.05 SD 3.04	Mean \$2,316.66 SD \$1,397.73	Mean 37.02 SD 4.03	Mean \$12,316.57 SD \$9,120.37	Mean 2.03 SD 1.03	Mean 6.07 SD 3.01
Women who CONTINUED working (N = 20)	Mean 35.05 SD 6.02	Mean \$8,515.88 SD \$4,637.00	Mean 37.09 SD 7.06	Mean \$5,080.00 SD \$3,572.75	Mean 5.09 SD 4.02	Mean 2.02 SD 1.07

WOMEN'S SHARE IN THE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

There is in Brazil today a sharp growing trend of family arrangements whose heads are women. Added to this, the number of women that is also rising is made up of those who are contributing more and more to the household budget and, not rarely, contribute sums of money higher than their husbands' (PNAD, 2015). This study confirms the importance of women in the financial support of their families, considering that the participants who did not quit work have average salaries higher than their husbands'. The result found with the participants is consistent with the shift of household's head in Brazil.

In addition to this new pattern in the family structure, it can be seen that the women who remained in the labor market after the birth of their children have a higher educational level than their spouses. In this group, 60% have a specialization or a master's or doctoral degree. This aspect confirms national data which indicate that the Brazilian women have a higher level of education than men (PNAD, 2015).

Besides being in larger number in traditional female professions, women have occupied areas that have long been considered male professions. These aspects are confirmed in this study by the longer schooling time of women and their professions: they are physicians, lawyers, and architects, which, according to Lombardi (2017), were once predominantly male professions.

AFFECTION TIES BETWEEN FATHERS, MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

The participants were asked to briefly tell their stories as children. It was observed in the four subgroups that a significant number of individuals were not completely raised by the origin family. In all groups, one of the parents was absent, either because of separation/divorce, adoption, parenting by relatives, death or due to the profession.

An analysis of the personal history of the female participants reveals that in both groups the categories deal with positive bonds established and maintained with the family, marked by love, unity, affection, etc., and incentives to study. Only the group of women who stopped working reported the presence of their mothers in the care of their children. During the interviews, it could be observed an ease, soothing relationship with the family and parents, emphasizing positive and affectionate ties, besides discipline and incentives to learning.

The participants of both groups revealed that expressions of love and caring are more common today due to more closeness and dialogue between mother and children. It is interesting to note that even those who decided to take a career break after the children's birth, also considered important the woman's personal development and investment in career, which they associate with well-being and quality of life.

ROLES PERFORMED

The women who quitted work highlighted the importance of a balance between the family and professional roles, a gradual reduction of the number of children and the increasing presence of the fathers in the care of children. The women who were still working raised the issue of the women's overwork and new possibilities in replacement to motherhood.

Both groups of men greatly emphasized the strengthened affective and physical closeness of fathers with their children. The husbands of women who quitted work emphasized the increasing father's contribution in childcare both in daily routines and educational issues. The husbands of women who haven't quit work mention that nothing or little has changed in the household routines. The others state that the changes in the families' way of living is a result of changes in the world (technology and possibilities of choice).

The results of this study support the viewpoint that in present days women have other possibilities of self-fulfillment besides motherhood (Smeha & Calvano, 2009), which does not release them from the double- or triple-shift work, still considered their obligation (Kanan, 2010; Maluf, 2012). However, it is necessary to mention that in the families where women kept their jobs, four men out of 20 participants reduced their working hours to stay at home with their children during the school counter-shift. Thus, it can be seen that in biparental families, fathers are participating more and more in the care of their children, something that has been proven to be necessary. According to data of the National Household Sample Survey - PNAD in 2017, the participation of men in the housework is growing in Brazil, but

women are still responsible for the household activities and caregiving of children and other family members, the so-called double-shift workday. In other words, despite the important social changes that occurred in recent decades, women are still overburdened with work, because it is up to them, in addition to the job activities, the household ones, which undoubtedly are less supported by men (D’Affonseca, Cia & Barham, 2017).

CARING FOR THE CHILDREN OR CAREER?

Among the conscious reasons that led women to make one or other decision, it was found that for the women who stopped working aspects related to integral childcare, followed by work dissatisfaction and the desire to enjoy life with the child prevailed. The women who continued active in the labor force mentioned financial needs, work satisfaction, and life planning (in the case of lifetime civil service). In this regard, we can cite D’Affonseca, Cia and Barham (2017), who mention that despite the difficulties that women who play multiple roles have to keep a paid work, this is something important for most of them and their families, as well as it represents advantages and benefits. Four women have never considered the possibility of staying home with their children.

According to a study conducted by Smeha and Calvano (2009) with women who decided for non-motherhood, reduction of social impositions, financial independence, desire of freedom, and the little important meaning of motherhood conveyed by the previous generation are factors that contributed to the women’s decision of not having children. From the very moment that women began to enter the labor force, other possibilities were presented in substitution for motherhood and this could justify the importance of career expressed by the women of the group that remained active in the labor market (Diniz Neto & Féres-Carneiro, 2005). In other words, deciding between the job or staying home to care for the children represent investments and satisfaction in favor of the “illusion of the woman’s sense completeness and, so, if obstacles appear on one way, at the other side there is another one, offering different experiences with similar achievements” (Smeha & Calvano, 2009, p. 216).

The women who interrupted their career consider positive in their decision the strengthening of positive ties with the children. They justify the fact with arguments about the importance of following the child’s development and learning, caring for their physiological and psychological needs, the foods they eat, respecting the needs of each one, promoting the development of moral values, educating and conveying security, all those child-related values.

Differently from the first group, for the women who kept their jobs, the positive points of having returned to work after maternity are mostly related to their professional and personal context. It is related to personal achievements, self-fulfillment, followed by independence and satisfaction of financial needs. In the personal dimension, they highlight the maturity achieved for being distant from children, in addition to more self-esteem.

The husbands of the women that stopped working mentioned that when a woman herself takes care of her children, all family members benefit from it: for the child, the importance of mother-child connection in education; the strengthening of ties and more quality of life for the child; for the woman, not feeling guilty for leaving the child with someone she barely knows and for being less tired due to other problems; and for the man, who feels more secure to leave home to work.

On the other hand, for the husbands of women who did not interrupt their career, positive aspects are: financial (independence and help/support of the house); emotional issues (the woman’s bad mood and irritability when doing housework; improved self-esteem), and possibilities for the child’s development (socialization and independence). The men said that women must learn to reconcile their professional activities with the household chores.

The women who quitted work have sentimental concerns (emotional ties, safety, guilt relief, tranquility), while for the women of group B the concerns were of material nature. In the other group, the women’s earnings are higher than the husbands’ in 11 of the 20 families. It is clear that this is one of the reasons for the decision made.

Weber et al. (2006) found that the feeling of guilt appears more in mothers who have the power of making the decision than in mothers who have to work because of financial needs. D’Affonseca, Cia and

Barham (2017) mention that even when there is a refusal to take full responsibility for the maintenance of family relationships and homecare, women often feel guilty for not doing what society claims to be their obligation.

The negative aspects for the women who quitted work are related to the woman's social relation. This is because they feel that staying at home limits contacts with other people, in addition to feeling worn out because of repetitive, boring housework.

The low participation of men in the women's decision to take a career break (less than a third of the total) demonstrates the autonomy of the female participants, even if the decision interfered with the household budget. Those who shared the decision argue about the importance of the mother's presence in the first years of the child's life to teach family's values. They also mention insecurity for leaving the child with someone else and that the woman's salary was not significant to the point of making difference in the household budget.

About the desire to quit the job, only five of 20 women who did not stop working considered to reduce the working hours to devote more time to the children. The other mothers said that they did not think of this possibility.

As the number of men, in the women's group that did not stop working, who did not interfere in the wife's decision is greater than in the other group, it can be assumed that there is more independence in the couples' decision. It was also observed that decisions relating to financial issues are made together by more than half of the couples of this group and almost half of the other, in which only the husband contributes money in the house. For some couples whose total income comes from the husband's salary, he is the one who manages everything, a demonstration of traces of the patriarchal model.

CHILDREN AND DECISIONS

One third of the husbands of women that took a career break do not see negative aspects in this decision, provided that it is made in the first years of the child's life. Those who perceive it underline the low mental demand required by the household chores and lack of social interaction. For most of the husbands of women who did not stop working, there is nothing wrong with their decision to keep their jobs. Those who see some negative aspects mention fatigue for working double shifts, the lack of time for children, and the insecurity that comes by placing the children's education on the hands of someone else.

The question about the influence on children caused by the presence or absence of the mother at home resulted in different perspectives for each group. The women who quitted their job mention the children's development, that their children are calm and secure, and that they teach what is right or wrong, besides strengthening family ties and learning.

As a positive aspect of being absent from home, the women who maintained their jobs emphasize that the child's independence and responsibility are well developed, but in contrast, some negative feelings caused by their absence appear in some statements: the child misses their mothers, expresses revolt, anxiety, irritability, insecurity, and needs reassurance.

In the opinion of the husbands of women who decided for a break, it was highlighted a healthier relationship between mother and kids, a stronger, positive bond, favoring similarity of attitudes and an easier educational process. In the other group, the majority of men believe that the children do not suffer influence from the mothers' absence, and those who perceive negative aspects mention the need to spare some time with the kids and manage routines.

It was also reported that a positive influence is also possible, even having a career; what matters is how parents deal with the situations. And, from this view, there are benefits for everyone when women express interest, help and participate actively in their children's achievements. This is because they provide cultural stimuli and fun to the children, with significant contributions to their development (D'Affonseca, Cia & Barham, 2017).

As a positive aspect of absence from home, the women who continued to work emphasize that the child's independence and responsibility are much better developed. However, science already recognizes that the roles played by father and mother are equally contributive to the child's development. In other words, the quality of the relationship with the children, considering their personal characteristics, has a

significant influence on their social development (Kanarek, 2014).

The negative points of working a double shift were raised by women who kept their jobs: difficulties are related to lack of time to do what they like (to be with their children, time for herself); tiredness; do not succeed in achieving better performance either at home or at work; and child-related aspects, such as reduced breastfeeding time, time to spend together, and guilt.

The productive and reproductive aspects are considered by Nogueira (2010) and Bilac (2014) as ways of categorizing work according to an exchange-value, defining as a result of the expansion of capitalism. According to the production system, only those who produce exchange values can be considered assets, and, therefore, the use-values (household work), produced by "housewives" cannot be considered a productive activity. According to Bilac (2014), scholars in this area do not consider the importance of housework in the family organization, the emotional and physical nurturing of the family members that it represents.

RESUME WORKING?

Only with the group of women who quitted their jobs, possible negative relations with the job were investigated to verify the possibility that their decision had the main purpose of breaking the job bond rather than the desire of parenting. Half of the women of this group described their jobs with a neutral approach, will return or have already returned to the same field of work or with some changes (workday shift or workplace). One-fourth of the participants had a negative perception of their previous work, but only two women intended to pursue another career. They have interest in the same field, restarting work in the same area or with some adaptative changes aiming to good quality of life with the family.

It seems that the women of this study and other ones, in general, wish to continue studying, would interrupt their career to live outside the country or to take care of the children, abandon their initial career and pursue another one. Hall, Arthur and Lawrence (1989) believe that women have an advantage in this new order because they are more likely to adapt to new situations. According to this new perspective, the concept of success consists of a psychological fulfillment with regard to personal and family achievements, and a sense of pride in what we do.

Only for the men whose wives quitted work for childcare, a question was prepared about their return to the previous job. The majority considers positive this restart (of sixteen participants, only two were against it). The factors that made most of them believe that the return can be positive are related to personal and professional satisfaction, earning her own money, and more independence of the child.

On this regard, Bertolini (2002) argue that women who stay home taking care of the house and children feel less fulfilled than those who work outside the home. However, this author also found that the women who work few hours a day feel more fulfilled, because they can manage better the diverse roles that they themselves and others impose on them.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study had the purpose of investigating the relations between motherhood and work and the factors that lead professional women to prioritize their career or family. According to the results, it was possible to confirm aspects already cited by other authors and identify new and significant changes in behavior, e.g., the fathers' decision to take care of their young children. Men have increasingly participated in the children's education, and, in this study, we found fathers that reduced their working hours to take care of the kids, a fact that predicts a paradigm shift and a progressive change of the roles traditionally performed by men and women.

Other factor that emphasizes this change was that this study identified women who earned more than their husbands, in some cases up to seven times more. Both the women who decided for a career break and those who kept their jobs also have a higher education level than their husbands and this helps find well-paid jobs and good salaries throughout life. They are women who had autonomy to make decisions and who envisage other possibilities of personal fulfillment besides motherhood.

It was found that of 36 participants in the study, 35 are contented with the profession chosen and the work they have performed since graduation. It was also found that some women who decided to quit

working (n=05), when returning to the workforce they adapted their works, working hours and places in order to dedicate more time to their children while they were still young. So, they seek more balance between the roles assigned to them aiming to achieve more satisfaction in their lives.

With respect to the demand relating to the diverse roles performed, contrary to what would be expected due to tiredness that is common in such condition, two women were promoted after maternity. This confirms that women are prepared to face new challenges and demands in the labor market due to their greater management flexibility, which was developed by performing diverse roles.

However, housework is still perceived as being chiefly a female obligation, something that appears in both groups. This theme deserves attention and care because for a long time media has depreciated housework and valued the importance of consumption of material goods. The neoliberal discourse classifies work according to its exchange-value, and as housework is a use-value, it is, therefore, depreciated. This culture promotes devaluation of housewives and considers the activity as of minor importance.

This difference can be perceived in the participants' discourse when the women decided for a break in their careers and live without their own money for a certain time. They prioritized aspects related to quality of life, affection ties, children's tranquility and well-being. On the other hand, when women decided to keep their jobs, their priorities were related to financial aspects, even though they were concerned with the children's care and well-being.

With respect to the children's development, it was clear that the amount of time that parents spend with them is less important for the establishment of good ties than the quality of the relationships in the family setting. Mothers perceive that their presence in childcare contributes to calmer and more tranquil children, while the presence and participation of the fathers favor an even healthier development. The mothers who remained employed report negative behaviors in the children, probably resulting from their absence, confirming what the attachment theory had already stated.

The largest focus of this survey was on the woman's process of choice when deciding to follow their career or have a break to fulfill the needs involved in motherhood. Both life projects require specific demands and much dedication, since they are not simple roles, as well as both decisions involve significant losses. However, motherhood and career are not necessarily exclusionary factors, since it is possible to reconcile the tasks harmonically.

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