

Career and work-family relationship among academics: An exploratory study

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Abstract. Despite the increase, in recent years, of women's participation in the labour market, sex discrimination remains a reality in most work organisations. In this matter, academic organisations are no exception. Evidence of sex inequalities is well documented in the literature. At the individual level, inequalities are partly explained by family responsibilities mainly held by women. Having to spend a considerable amount of time in home and children related activities women are left with less time available for scientific work than their male colleagues. With the purpose of understanding how academics experience the relationship between work and family, 32 in-depth interviews were conducted among Portuguese academics of both sexes in one particular university. The findings confirmed that work-family conflict is stronger among female faculty than among their male counterparts. Additionally, the prejudice against maternity and the way it is compatible with a successful career appears to survive the new gender relations. Difficulties felt by female academics could be minimised by the introduction of «family-friendly» policies and the development of a positive organisational climate towards maternity and family issues.

Key words: Academic careers, work and family, gender discrimination.

Introduction

There is evidence of a considerable increase in the proportion of women in higher education in Portugal. By the turn of the century women already represented about 57 per cent of undergra-

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duate students and about 63 per cent of all graduates (Cabral-Cardoso, 2003). Overall figures for academic faculty also show a trend towards the raising proportion of women. But despite the growing number of women in academia, there is evidence that some degree of gender bias still takes place in selection and promotion decisions. As a result, women in Portuguese universities tend to stay in the lower ranks with only a few reaching the top management positions (Amâncio & Ávila, 1995). Women also present lower rates of publication, inevitably leading to a slower career progression than men. In fact, women are promoted more slowly than men and those promoted are slower to receive tenure (Amâncio & Ávila, 1995).

With the growing importance of work in people's lives, there has been a considerable effort in trying to understand the processes underlying career development and the ways in which family and work affect each other. Careers were traditionally conceptualised as a sequence of promotions inside an organisation in a work-related hierarchy during the course of a person's working life. However, this structural definition ignores careers' subjective and individual dimensions. In this study, we are interested in the concept of career as a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences (Hall, 1976). According to this definition, career represents the way the person experiences work and refers to the subjective dimension, that is, «the changing aspirations, satisfactions, self-conceptions, and other attitudes of the person toward his work and life» (Hall 1976, p. 3). Changes in subjective careers include shifts in women's and men's experiences, expectations and aspirations for their working lives.

Women are now entering in a wide range of professions that in the past were forbidden to them, while some men are experiencing disillusion with careers based only on promotion in the work organisation (Evetts, 1996). According to Larwood and Gutek (1987), women's career development does not simply lag behind that of men, but it proceeds in a completely different manner. Career has been traditionally understood as «an ordered sequence of development extending over a period of years and the introduction of progressively more responsible roles within an occupation» (Mavin, 2001, p. 184). Underlying this definition is the assumption of linear upward progression. However, this definition does not fit into the career development of women. There are many elements specific to women's experience that the male model of career does not easily accommodate. Larwood and Gutek (1987, p. 178) claim that an obvious difficulty with applying theories intended for men's career development to women's is the treatment of family life as something residual in men's lives. It is assumed, in the male career model, that men will continue to work after marriage and the birth of children. However, that is not always the case in women's careers. Larwood and Gutek (1987) argue that two aspects still divide men's and women's career. On the one hand, women are confronted with alternative courses of action. For instance, if a woman finds that her career has *plateaued*, she may decide to give up work and concentrate on the family and such an option is less viable for men. On the other hand, women are still discriminated against, a situation that leaves women with fewer career opportunities and slower advancement.

In short, the model of a successful career has traditionally been masculine, emphasising full-time career and the movement from a position of relatively low status, responsibility and salary to a higher position. However, women's careers do not conform to this model. It is admitted that

there is no single typical working pattern for women. A female career model requires a job that allows some flexibility, such as career breaks to have children and to care for the family (Larwood & Gutek, 1987; Mavin, 2001). This paper aims to examine what is specific about women's career in academia and explores the relationship between work and family among Portuguese academics.

Career and work-family relationship among academics

Lambert (1990, p. 241) presents three theoretical approaches to work and family linkage. The *segmentation* approach argues that work and home are segmented and independent spheres that do not affect each other. The *compensation* approach views workers as seeking satisfaction from their work to compensate for dissatisfaction from their family life, or the other way round. The last and most popular approach to work and family linkage is the *spillover* perspective. It states that «workers carry the emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviours that they establish at work into their family life and *vice-versa*». Spillover can be positive or negative. Moreover, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) define work-family conflict as a «form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect». According to the authors, there are three distinct sources of conflict: (a) time-based conflict, where time spent in one role (work) cannot be devoted to activities in the other (family), (b) strain-based conflict, when strain in one role affects performance in the other and, finally, (c) behaviour based-conflict, where patterns in role behaviour may be incompatible with expectations regarding behaviour in another role.

In academia, marriage and motherhood are widely accepted as an explanation for gender differences in career attainments. Several researchers have underlined the relative difficulty of women in combining career and family roles (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Lewis & Cooper, 1988; Carlisle, 1994). Therefore, many women experience conflict regarding their ability to play the role of the wife, the mother and the worker, simultaneously. Forster (2001), in a study conducted with women in a British university concludes that over 80 per cent of the participants believe that career breaks can damage future career prospects and over half of them report problems with job mobility. On the other hand, almost half of them believe that family responsibilities have interfered with their career progression and four out of five keep the primary responsibility for childcare. Specific factors also found to influence women's work-family conflict include the family climate, the lack of co-operation regarding domestic responsibilities, and the perceived lack of organisational commitment of married women with young children.

In this respect, Sorcinelli and Near (1989), in a study conducted with academics in a North-American university, reported a continuous conflict between the demands of personal and family life and the requirements of professional success and career development, though the study did not reveal significant differences associated with gender in the kind of spillover (positive, negative, ambivalent) reported for the work-family linkage. There were, nevertheless, significant differences associated with gender in the kind of spillover reported for the work-leisure linkage. Women aca-

demics were more likely to report negative spillover and to concentrate all their time and effort in family or work activities. In order to advance their career, women often have little time for social and leisure activities.

Likewise, Zuckerman and Cole (1992) conducted a series of interviews with successful academics to examine whether these scientists believed marriage and motherhood to be generally incompatible with a scientific career. According to these academics, marriage and motherhood did not reduce their scientific productivity, measured by the number of published articles. But the study also revealed that married women scientists with children had paid a price to remain scientifically productive. They report having had to eliminate almost everything but work and family, particularly when their children were young. Other studies reveal that the scientific productivity of married women lowered as the number of children increased (Cole, 1987; Long, 1990). Additionally, several studies show that having young children significantly reduces women's opportunities for collaboration or career advancement. However, this effect is not detected among their male counterparts (Finkel et al., 1994; Finkel & Olswang, 1996; Long, 1990; Long & Fox, 1995).

According to Shauman and Xie (1996), married and single women academics are less mobile geographically than men and married women's decisions to move are often affected by their family obligations. Since promotions and pay increases are sometimes tied to a change in employment, women's limited geographic mobility may, in part, account for gender differences in career development (Zuckerman, 1992). A study conducted in a North-American university showed that when asked about the reasons for leaving an academic career, women were three times as likely to interrupt their careers for a spouse's employment than for maternity. Among women who left academia for at least one year, the great majority (76%) listed spouse's employment as the primary reason for doing so (McElrath, 1992).

In sum, women's family obligations are not the single explanation for gender differences in career attainments since, in many respects, married women fare as well or better than single women (Zuckerman, 1992). Nevertheless, gender differences in family roles remain almost unchanged, with women assuming the primary responsibility for domestic and parental roles. The prevalence of sexual division of labour undoubtedly interferes with women's ability to pursue academic work, and sometimes leads to career decisions that benefit women's families but damage their careers.

Design and method

This paper reports some findings from a research project carried out in a public Portuguese university aiming to examine perceptions of discrimination against women in academic careers and to understand the nature and grounds of such discrimination. The particular university selected to conduct this study can be described as a 'typical' university since it ranks close to average in most indicators. This university is located in the north of the country offering degrees in most academic disciplines to almost twenty thousand students, both undergraduates and postgraduates.

The nature and goals of the study recommended the use of in-depth interviews and a qualitative research methodology. The research strategy followed the grounded theory as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and the data obtained through interviews were submitted to a content analysis. Concepts were generated from both the data analysis of each interview and the literature review. Each interview (case) contained stories related to a particular subject. These stories were identified and then categorised by theme. The process followed was the same for each interview. Theory emerged from raw data through a systematic, redundant and cumulative categorisation of the data by a particular theme (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Thirty-two interviews were conducted, 15 among men and the remaining 17 among women. Table 1 shows the sample composition according to rank and gender.

Table 1
Sample according to rank and gender

	Men	Women	Total
Junior academics	6	10	16
Senior academics (assistant, associate, and full professors)	9	7	16
Total	15	17	32

Almost all academic disciplines were represented, though most interviewees were from management, economics, sociology and psychology. Nine interviewees were single and twenty-three were married. Among the latter, ten women and eight men had children (in most cases, dependent children). In terms of age of the participants, it ranges from 25 to 64, with the mean of 37. Efforts were made to include people with different academic and family backgrounds though the sample was not intended to be statistically representative of Portuguese universities.

This data analysis explores the perceptions and expectations of this small group of academics, both women and men, concerning their careers and the work-family relationship. The first section describes individual perceptions about the work and family relationship and the implications of having children for academic careers. While both women and men saw this as an important issue in their lives it was women, more than men, who felt their career advancement had been affected by that. The perceptions of the gender division of domestic work are also discussed. In the second section we try to identify some subtle gender discrimination mechanisms, particularly those

derived from the supposedly lack of organisational commitment of married women with young children. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Perceptions of the work-family relationship

In this study, both men and women expressed concern about the effective combination of an academic job and family life. This was an issue of particular concern for the women who currently had young children or were decided to start a family in the near future. Their concerns were reinforced by the organisational culture in which motherhood seems to be equated with less commitment to a career. In this context it is not surprising that during the interviews women frequently expressed the view that motherhood meant slowing down their career progression. Both women and men questioned the notion that women can play the role of the traditional wife, the traditional mother, and be a productive scientist, simultaneously!

The work-family conflict and the traditional division of gender roles

When questioned about the relationship between work and family, both women and men experienced some type of work-family spillover. However, the negative spillover and the situations of work-family conflict were more evident in the case of women. Three women in the sample described familiar situations where the husband's lack of support emerged as one important source of conflict. During the interviews, a female professor described her experience of work-family conflict:

«... I did not want to go abroad to get my PhD. because I had a young child at the time and I didn't want to leave her behind. My husband also said that if I went abroad for my PhD, our marriage would collapse because he had not married me to stay alone. (...) It's a more or less conflicting relationship. My husband thinks that I shouldn't work in the first place and, therefore, I don't see myself as the ideal woman for my husband (...). I have my work, and obviously I want to be married, I think that I have already made some sacrifices, namely, I didn't go abroad to get my PhD, as I think I should have done.... (...) And there were times when I needed to work hard, and I didn't give up my work, and I had to repeatedly hear my husband say, «you don't need to work, you shouldn't be working today». I often work Saturdays and Sundays preparing classes for Monday and I sometimes have to deal with very unpleasant situations created by my husband. I don't have his support as I think that I should have. (...) I end up not being the wife that he wanted me to be, he wanted someone totally devoted to him, and I don't accept that role!»

In other cases, despite the husband's support, the work-family conflict is associated with time constraints resulting from taking care of their children. For most women in this sample the fact that they still retain most of the responsibility for the care and well being of their children is

viewed as detrimental to their careers. This was particularly true in the case of women with young children, as in the case of a female junior assistant who observed:

«It's obvious that my option for having children and having a family is a constraint in my career progression. (...) For instance, recently I had to choose between two different themes for my PhD thesis and I have chosen the second theme, that I like less and doesn't attract me much, because the first choice involved frequent travelling (...) and absences from home during long periods of time. And that is incompatible with the other choice that I made, the choice of having children. In this kind of situation having young children works as an important constraint to your career. It is also an inhibiting factor to the participation in scientific congresses and seminars. You have to manage very well your absence from home because while away you still have to support and look after the family, particularly the children. When I had no children that problem was never raised...»

Only three men described situations of work/family conflict, but they were mostly feelings of guilt for spending little time with family especially with children. On the other hand, for most men the relationship between work and family is depicted as a supportive one, with their wife's understanding of the high demands of an academic career. The following quotation from a male professor illustrates this point:

«My family is very supportive, there is a lot of understanding (...) On the side of my family I never had any kind of constraint, on the contrary... My daughter is now seventeen and sometimes I need her to do some work for me in the computer, I ask her, and she does it.»

The interviews show that although both men and women experience work-family conflict, they do it differently. For men it was basically a question of regret for not being able to spend more time with their children. For women, it was exhaustion from trying to play and to adjust to two different roles. In this sense, these women viewed time required by children as a serious barrier to their career progress.

The findings also show that little has changed in society in terms of who is responsible for looking after the children and for household chores. Even when hiring domestic help the ultimate responsibility for children and domestic tasks invariably seems to rest with women. In this study, thirteen of the married participants (six women and seven men) stated that the women (the interviewees or the interviewees' wives) kept full responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks. The following quotation from a female assistant illustrates how the traditional gender division of roles at home remains unchanged:

«I'm the main responsible for the family sphere. In practise, I have to divide my efforts by multiple tasks, taking the kids to school, get the kids at school, give them lunch, take them again to school, bring them again, and they are at home around four o'clock and, from then on, I don't do anything else...»

In sum, women still bear the burden of domestic responsibilities. As Arber and Ginn (1995, p. 21) underline, «western societies have achieved some progress towards gender equality in the public sphere of the labour market, but gender inequality in economic roles in the household may be more resistant to change». Such a resistance to change in the private sphere helps keeping gender inequalities and patriarchal structures in society. These patriarchal structures are, nevertheless, not only sustained by men but also by women that are socialised to believing that domestic tasks are women's work and not men's work. A senior female professor observes:

«Women were raised to know how to support all the family responsibilities. Thus, they are more skilful than men for doing these tasks. On the other hand, women know how to be multifunctional and men don't. Women are able at the same time to hold a child, fry an onion, pick up the telephone, but if I tell my husband that is reading the newspaper to see if the onion is burning, it definitely ends up burned. In my perspective, men don't have the ability to be multifunctional...»

In sum, the socialisation process in childhood has continuous effects in adult behaviour. Both men and women help to perpetuate a social system where women still remain in disadvantage in the private/home sphere. Inevitably men and women are still socialised to perform traditional roles and as long as this situation perpetuates, gender inequalities in work settings will remain.

Contradictory evidence of the centrality of family to women's identity

An interesting aspect raised by female interviewees is the importance of the family to women's identity. Basically, while some women viewed the family as a central and prevailing aspect of women's identity, others argued that the importance of the private sphere for women's identity is weakening. Schwartz (1989, p. 69) distinguished between two types of women, one she called the «career-primary woman» and the other the «career-and-family woman». According to the author the «career-primary woman» is prepared to make sacrifices in their personal lives in order to advance their career opportunities. This decision implies, in most cases, that women remain single or at least childless. On the other hand, «career-and-family women» wish to pursue serious careers while remaining active in children's education. According to Schwartz, the latter are willing to trade some career advancement for more free time to spend with their families. They refuse to comply with a work culture that praises above all the long hours of work and the absence of family weekends.

Both types of women were detected in this study. A group of eight women interviewed could be described as «career-and-family women». They try to combine work and family demands the best way they can, and for them work and family are both key dimensions of feminine identity. But despite the commitment to their careers, these women clearly stated that their family would always remain as the top priority and fundamental source of satisfaction and well-being. For these women, work commitment cannot be developed at the expense of lower involvement in the family. The following quotation from a female professor illustrates this orientation:

«I changed job for familial reasons, once again. (...) I'd love being there, I loved to teach there, the work climate was great, but I had a child, she was very young, two years at the time. I used to leave her with a housekeeper and I found out one day that the housekeeper was working at a garage at the same time and was leaving my daughter alone with two of her children. I felt very bad about this, as if my child was abandoned... (...) And I thought that I loved my career but my children will always be in the first place, and I still think that way today. If a child of mine has some problem and I have a very urgent work to do, I first attend to my children's problem.»

A second group of «career oriented» women was interviewed. This group was made of four single women and two married women without children. For the single woman, marriage and motherhood are considered very distant realities and important constraints detrimental to their career prospects. It must be underlined that these women single and without children, still hold a very traditional image about the gender division of roles in family. For them, little has changed in terms of gender stereotypes and gender roles and attitudes. Likewise, the two married women in this group reported that careers influenced their decision to postpone having a child. All single women included in this study have decided to postpone marriage and motherhood – but not the single men – because they considered almost impossible to combine work and family responsibilities. As a female junior assistant observed:

«It is not a very frequent thought, but when I think of getting married and have children, I wonder when it will be the right time because there is a need to combine different demands. Most of the professional demands are faced in the beginning of the career when you are expected to make an impact and prove you are competent and need to make a stand. Personally I'm thinking of doing my PhD abroad, it's a project that I wish to do for a long time now, and that makes you postpone any project of that kind [having a family], of growing roots... Anyway, that kind of project, of having a family, it's a project that I would like to assume, sooner or later. I think that I would be able to reconcile both things, but at the moment that perspective stays in the future because at present, in the short-run, that project is not possible.»

Most women in this study try to combine family and work but give priority to their family. Single women do not refuse the idea of having a family. However, they have decided to primarily invest in their career development. Thus, we can simply conclude that a corporate policy that forces women to choose between family and career may fail to retain their best human resources risking to lose competitive advantage in the long run.

Subtle gender discrimination mechanisms

Discrimination processes have been part of women's career in one way or another. Discrimination occurs when decisions concerning the selection, performance evaluation, promo-

tion or distribution of rewards are based on individuals' demographic characteristics such as age, sex or race, instead of objective standards like productivity or skills (Gutek, Cohen & Tsui, 1996). An important obstacle to women's career advancement, and that remains related to sexual discrimination, is the «glass ceiling» effect. Morrison and Von Glinow (1990, p. 200) describe it as a «barrier so subtle that is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy». The findings in this study show the prevalence of subtle gender discrimination mechanisms that hinder women's opportunities for career advancement. While maternity leave is a legal requirement in Portugal (Maternity leave allows for a period of four months full paid), all women in this study who had taken maternity leave felt pressured to return to work soon after childbirth and felt that they would not be taken seriously had they left their positions for too long. The findings showed that none of the women faculty who had given birth recently took the full paid leave available to them. The following quote from a female assistant is representative of this problem:

«Anyway, I try to combine things, for instance, I can say that I have only taken a month of maternity leave. (...) It was a choice that I made because I was working on my PhD, I had a scholarship and I wasn't teaching, and that's a unique opportunity in your career, and time was passing, so I choose to work at home and go to the department right after a month I gave birth. I started to go for two or three hours a day, not for very long... I had to leave my child to go because time to complete my PhD thesis was running out... I didn't felt pressured by anyone to go but consciously I felt that it was better to go even if just for a few hours...»

This quotation shows that women felt that going on maternity leave would somehow hurt them professionally. It also shows that the discriminatory attitude toward maternity is not deliberate but rests on the fact that the university does not correctly supports maternity leaves. Thus, there is a significant disparity between what is in the law and what faculty and university believe and do concerning the critical issue of caring for children. Finkel, Olswang and She (1994) also found in a study conducted in a North-American university that faculty was in favour of liberal childbirth and childcare leave policies. Although the support for childbirth leaves was strong in that study, among the women who gave birth while working at the university, only 30 percent took the full amount of paid time off allowed by university policy, 30 percent took less paid leave than the university policy permitted, and 40 percent took no paid leave at all.

Briefly, the findings in this study show that this university does not effectively create the necessary conditions to support childbirth and childcare leave policies. Additionally, despite the changes in attitudes towards women academics, they are still hampered by the existence of gendered values and attitudes towards their non-work responsibilities. The work culture in some departments emphasises the need to work long hours and weekends and to be competitive if someone wanted to be successful. Therefore, it seemed to implicitly «condemn» maternity and the option for having children. Taking a maternity leave was seen as counter-productive appearing to reduce women's career advancement opportunities because women with children were viewed as

less committed to building a career. The following quote from a male professor illustrates this point:

«I think that the most difficult part it's when people are exempted from teaching work and they have a limited time to complete the PhD. Being a woman and having a child it's obvious that it is a significant constraint. I don't see, for instance, the opportunity of going abroad to complete the PhD and leave the child with the father, of going to study abroad for two or three years. Now, I know couples in which both went abroad. And I also know couples in which, clearly, the academic careers have been built at the expenses of the women that have to support it. *I don't know if you are married, but I give you an advise, you should only get married after you complete your PhD or, at least, have children only after your PhD.* It's very difficult to reconcile both things, it is already very difficult for a man and it is even more difficult for a woman. It's more difficult for the women, I think... In that situation, the woman can see her career progression delayed or damaged.»

In sum, the negative way in which maternity is viewed leave us to consider it as a subtle sex discrimination mechanism particularly harmful to the career advancement of women. This type of discrimination – very subtle – drives many women in academia to postpone their personnel projects fearing that if they don't comply with the dominant ideology their career prospects will be hampered.

Discussion and conclusions

The data show that some of these women have had to make very difficult decisions about balancing their work and family lives. Despite the progresses that women have made in the last decades, a major barrier to women's achievement of equal opportunities «both in the labour market and the domestic sphere is the influence of the normative ideology of gender roles in marriage» (Arber & Ginn, 1995, p. 26). Thus, it's not surprising that men had different expectations from women about their involvement in childcare. For most men in this sample, be they single or married, they had the choice to combine having children with a career. Invariably, this would mean a limited involvement with their family. In contrast, women were in some cases uncertain about it, and did not have the same control over their choices. For women, be they married or not, the decision to have a family was viewed as having enormous consequences to their career prospects. Especially in the case of married women with young children, the family was referred to as one of the major factors inhibiting higher scientific productivity. The lack of support from the husbands, and keeping the ultimate responsibility for managing housework and childcare were constraints pointed out by women in this study, but not by men. Men, in contrast, told stories of family support, both emotional support and the more direct instrumental support.

The working culture in some departments assumed that women had no ambition or commitment to build a career if they had a child. Women received a range of messages saying that if they

choose to have children, their careers would suffer. In spite of this, most married women in this sample choose to combine work and family, which in some cases meant doing enormous sacrifices and losing specific career opportunities (restricted job mobility, limited choice in PhD programmes, among others). Subtle discrimination mechanisms were detected. They took the form of negative comments about the women who decided to have children, or comments stressing the difficulties in reconciling work and family responsibilities. They basically assumed that every (normal) woman would want to have children and, sooner or later, would give them priority over work. In the end, the message that women were left with, particularly clear in the case of the young women, was that for those without a single-minded commitment to career academia was not their place...

According to some of the women interviewed women are required to get involved in both family and work. They feel they have to be excellent mothers and wives and competent and ambitious professionals at the same time, to become some kind of «superwoman». However, in the case of men it's allowed and socially accepted to remain focused in only one sphere, the professional one. A discrimination mechanism emerges when the career model that women are expected to fulfil is a masculine one characterised by long hours of work and comprising a set of continuous and uninterrupted stages to the top of the organisation or career (Larwood & Gutek, 1987). Where this is seen as the dominant model, women who attempt to build a career are either seen as 'masculine' (in the sense that they put career before family) or risking the prospect of a «not very successful career». Therefore, women who decide to combine work and family, and they were the majority in this study, feel divided between contradictory demands required by both roles. As a female professor puts it:

«Usually men in academia as in other careers, have much more family support... People are prepared to sacrifice their family for their husband's career. Because they have to do it, they have to work hard! However, I don't find this type of logic on the other side... Women with an academic career and a family with children have to give the same support to the family... Therefore, it's obvious that you are dealing with a time management and availability to do things very differently... (...) Women's careers, academic careers, are also valued by their families, what doesn't go through their minds is that women have to give up family support to build a career. What I think is that people expect women to combine everything very smoothly and nobody expects that from men, that they combine both roles very well, it's enough that they are good professionals! Women have to be good professionals on the one hand, but, on the other hand, they cannot harm their children. When men don't give much importance to their family, they are not seen as harming their family but taking care of their lives! If women are taking care of their professional lives they are seen as harming their children, do you understand the logic? The problem in our society is that now women have to handle both roles, not just one, they have to deal with both!»

One must underline that the dominant view of career has been questioned by changes in the

organisation, such as the moves towards flatter organisational structures, which facilitate career advancement or the introduction of more flexible work arrangements. For Gallos (1989) and Marshall (1989), careers should be interpreted as a sequence of jobs within and between organisations rather than as a steady climb up one organisational ladder. This demands the reinvention of the career concept allowing women and also men to take career breaks whenever they feel necessary. However, what comes out very clear from this study is that many gendered aspects of the traditional view of career still remain in organisations and need to be re-negotiated.

Surprisingly, when asked about equal opportunities in their work organisation, both men and women referred that the university rated very positively on that. They accept discrimination is restricted to the private sphere and to the unequal distribution of domestic work inside the family. Even the women that previously told stories where they felt constrained about their option for having children considered that the discrimination was limited to the private realm and that the university did not discriminate against women. A female professor observed:

«I think that in the academic context the situation of gender discrimination do not exist, at least I don't see it happening. This school is an example of that since it has many women. (...) Now, I think that subsists some inequality of opportunities because tasks outside paid work, at the level of home responsibilities, are not equally shared. So, I think that in spite of women pursuing an academic career they still have less available time to invest in that career than men.»

Most women and men in this sample believed that the strategies to reconcile work and family should be initiated at the individual level, in the private sphere, and that the university had no responsibility in promoting equality between the sexes. As a female professor pointed out, «the university does not have to do anything about it, it's people who have to resist to this ideology that attributes to women the family responsibilities and try to change things. It is people who have to change...»

This reasoning may be connected to the specific cultural and social aspects of the Portuguese context. In fact, as explained by Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel (2000, p. 64) «in most Mediterranean states compatibility of family and employment only became a policy objective in the 1990s, under pressure from EU». Traditionally, in Portuguese society, families, and often the multigenerational family, have been responsible for the care of their own children without support from the state, while gender role divisions have gone unquestioned. The authors call it «the Mediterranean family-based model» and it helps to explain why in Portugal the state and institutions, in general, are excused from their responsibilities. Even today, most Portuguese women are only able to combine paid work and family with the help of the extended family, mainly grandparents.

In sum, the dominant ideology is not identified as a generator of gender inequalities remaining, therefore, as an invisible mechanism that helps to perpetuate it. Thus, the gender discrimination processes are not explicit but assume very subtle forms. The majority of women and men in this sample still believe that equal opportunities between the sexes can only be achieved through

individual solutions. They seem to ignore that it is impossible to achieve equality as long as the gender division of roles remain. As underlined by Ferreira (1997), the creation of equal opportunities between the sexes remains confined to the private realm through the confrontation between women and men, while the institutions also responsible for the promotion of equality between the sexes remain absent and take no responsibilities on this matter. However, as Arber and Ginn (1995) underline, if women are to achieve equality with men, it must be in both the labour market and the domestic sphere and changes have to be carried out in both realms and not just in the private sphere.

Therefore, measures aimed at reconciling work and family should be considered by work organisations. Work-family arrangements can be defined as conditions or arrangements that facilitate the combination of paid and unpaid work (Dulk et al., 1996). Flexibility in working time includes a variety of arrangements such as part-time work, flexi-time, job sharing and career/employment break schemes. Leave arrangements (maternity and paternity leaves) and childcare provisions are also important work-family arrangements. According to Papalexandris and Kramar (1997), the trend to flexible work arrangements has important economic and social benefits. Not only does it improve productivity and competitiveness because it assures the retention of the best human resources, but it is also an important tool for reconciling work and family. However, as noted by Mavin (2001, p. 190), «organisational initiatives relating to family-friendly policies should be directed at both men and women in organisations in order to facilitate culture changes and stereotyping relating to women as the main domestic carers». Thus, work-family arrangements should be designed to be used by both women and men. If encouragement is not made inside organisations for men to benefit of those work-family arrangements as women do, then the trend towards flexibility will have failed its purpose of achieving equal opportunities between women and men.

According to Schwartz (1989, p. 71), if organisations want to retain the women who wish to combine career and family the key issue is to provide flexibility and family support. For the author the price that organisations must pay to retain these women is threefold: «they must plan for and manage maternity, they must provide the flexibility that will allow them to be maximally productive, and they must take an active role in helping to make family supports and high-quality, affordable child care available to all women.» Other authors have detailed family-friendly policies (Forster, 2001; Hall & Richter, 1988; Lewis, 1994; Norrel & Norrel, 1996), such as:

- Introducing more flexible work arrangements in terms of work schedules and encouraging job sharing or part-time work.
- Provide workplace facilities such as childcare services. The capacity of working mothers (and fathers) to function effectively and without interruptions depends on the availability of good childcare;
- Creation of eldercare services;
- Adopting a women-friendly concept of what constitutes «a career» (not linear but discontinuous) that takes into account women's needs and adopt a new career model that allows for a balance between work and family;

- Change organisational cultures by promoting a more family-friendly work environment with supervisors being supportive of worker's family responsibilities.

Work organisations can no longer ignore the private sphere of individual's life or else they risk losing their best human resources. The promotion of work-family friendly policies will contribute to a better human resource management viewing them not as a cost to minimise but as an essential factor of competitive advantage (Beaumont, 1993). If this perspective remains ignored by universities more women students will reject an academic life style in which raising children is excluded. There is a need to incorporate the experiences of women into the existing «male» model of career. Therefore, more research is needed in this field for further understanding women's career experiences. As pointed out by Mavin (2001) if organisations wish to retain and use the full potential of their human resources it is necessary to address family issues and redesign careers and career management.

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Resumo. Nas últimas décadas tem-se assistido à crescente participação das mulheres no mercado de trabalho. Apesar disso, a discriminação sexual permanece uma realidade em muitas organizações. Neste sentido, a organização académica não constitui excepção e as evidências de desigualdades entre os sexos estão bem documentadas na literatura. Ao nível individual, uma das explicações para essas desigualdades relaciona-se com as maiores responsabilidades familiares das mulheres, o que teria consequências negativas em termos da disponibilidade de tempo para dedicar à investigação. Neste sentido, foram realizadas 32 entrevistas em profundidade com académicos de ambos os sexos, numa universidade pública portuguesa, com o objectivo de analisar a forma como a relação trabalho e família era vivida por homens e mulheres. Os resultados confirmam que o conflito trabalho-família é mais evidenciado pelas mulheres académicas do que pelos homens. Acrescentar a isto, as mensagens «subtis» transmitidas pela universidade de que a opção pela maternidade é difícil de compatibilizar com uma carreira académica de sucesso, e a prevalência de uma cultura organizacional que ignora as questões familiares e as remete exclusivamente para a esfera individual, deixam prever as maiores dificuldades enfrentadas pelas mulheres na prossecução de uma carreira académica. Coloca-se, assim, a ênfase na necessidade de alterar a cultura organizacional existente o que só poderá ser conseguido pela introdução de medidas concretas de apoio à relação trabalho-família.

Palavras-chave: Carreira académica, relação trabalho-família, desigualdades de género.