

# Possibilities for conciliating work with family needs

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### Abstract

**Objective.** To identify the possibilities for conciliating work with family life. **Methodology.** Quantitative, descriptive study undertaken in 2008. Data was collected through structured interviews with 92 couples residing in a municipality in Rio Grande/RS who complied with the inclusion criteria: insertion of both members in the job market, having at least one child under seven years of age, and signing the terms of free and informed consent. **Results.** The possibility of working part-time for family reasons presented a difference between mothers and fathers; for the former it is a possible alternative, and for the latter, not. Flexibility in carrying out the daily hourly workload without having requested permission to the employer much time in advance was viable for both, when the reason was related to the health of their children. The couples indicated that employers did not take into account priorities for families with children to be free on holidays and have days available to see to the children's needs. Resignations, communicated not much in advance due to child health reasons, are possible for the mothers and fathers. **Conclusion.** There are difficulties in the support which employing institutions provide to the workers who have family needs, in particular those related to attention and care for their children.

**Key words:** employee discipline; family relations; nursing; parent-child relations.

## Posibilidades de conciliar el trabajo con las necesidades familiares

### Resumen

**Objetivo.** Identificar las posibilidades de conciliar el trabajo con la vida familiar. **Metodología.** Estudio cuantitativo descriptivo realizado en 2008. Los datos fueron recolectados mediante una entrevista estructurada a 92 parejas residentes en el municipio de Rio Grande/RS que cumplieran con los criterios de inclusión: inserción de ambos miembros en el mercado laboral, tener al

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menos un hijo menor de siete años y firmar el consentimiento libre e informado. **Resultados.** La posibilidad de trabajar tiempo parcial por razones familiares presentó diferencia entre madres y padres: para ellas es una alternativa posible; para ellos, no. La flexibilidad en el cumplimiento de la carga horaria diaria sin gran anticipación en la solicitud al empleador fue viable para ambos cuando la motivación estaba relacionada con la salud de los hijos. Las parejas indicaron que los empleadores no tenían en cuenta las prioridades de las familias con niños para, por un lado, poder disponer de los días festivos y, por otro, para apoyar la asistencia de las necesidades de los hijos. Las renunciaciones, comunicadas sin anticipación por motivo de salud de los hijos, son posibles para las madres y los padres. **Conclusión.** Existen dificultades en el apoyo que brindan las instituciones empleadoras a los trabajadores que tienen necesidades familiares, en particular las relacionadas con la atención y cuidado de sus hijos.

**Palabras clave:** disciplina laboral; relaciones familiares; enfermería; relaciones padres-hijo.

## Possibilidades de conciliar o trabalho com as necessidades familiares

### ■ Resumo ■

**Objetivo.** Identificar as possibilidades de conciliar o trabalho com a vida familiar. **Metodologia.** Estudo quantitativo descritivo realizado em 2008. Os dados foram coletados por meio de uma entrevista estruturada a 92 casais que residiam no município de Rio Grande/RS que cumprissem com os critérios de inclusão: inserção de ambos membros no mercado trabalhista, ter ao menos um filho menor de sete anos e assinar o consentimento livre e informado. **Resultados.** A possibilidade de trabalhar tempo parcial por razões familiares apresentou diferença entre mães e pais, para elas é uma alternativa possível, para eles não. A flexibilidade no cumprimento do ônus horário diária sem grande antecipação na solicitação ao empregador foi viável para ambos, quando a motivação estava relacionada com a saúde dos filhos. Os casais indicaram que não se tinham em conta pelos empregadores as prioridades para as famílias com crianças de poder dispor dos dias festivos e de apoio para a assistência das necessidades dos filhos. As renúncias, comunicadas sem grande antecipação por motivos de saúde dos filhos, são possíveis para as mães e os pais. **Conclusão.** Existem dificuldades no apoio que brindam as instituições empregadoras aos trabalhadores que têm necessidades familiares, em particular as relacionadas com o atendimento e cuidado com seus filhos.

**Palavras chave:** disciplina no trabalho; relações familiares; enfermagem; relações pais-filho.

## Introduction

The present study is constructed based on the interest in relating the organization of work with family life in the context of couples with newborn to pre-school age children. For this, the work is presented as an exercise for individuals' dignity.<sup>1,2</sup> The dignity referred to translates into a constitutional Brazilian right involved in widely differing environments, from work to the family.<sup>3</sup> It stands out that the family as an institution of rights precedes the organization of work in Brazilian society,<sup>4</sup> such that the family is determined and determines the movement of individuals in

the playing-out of the historical process which consolidates social changes<sup>5</sup> and its own identity as an institution representative of a collectivity or an individual.<sup>3</sup>

The family, as an institution of contemporaneity protects the privacy of the interactions produced in the physical environment which assembles the routine of the actions among its members, thus safeguarding the autonomy in the context of its home togetherness.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the physical environment constitutes a significant

characteristic for defining the family institution though evidencing the structure which protects the intimacy of the individuals who occupy this space. Besides this, the confluent interactions in this environment permit one to identify the different members' roles, whether in a nuclear family or an extended family in which relatives live, particularly maternal parents.<sup>6</sup> The existence of the roles of the different members of the family institution is not dependent on the links that unite its members, whether they are biological-blood links or social-affective links, in relation to the responsibility for the education and health of the children.<sup>7</sup>

This responsibility extends beyond the clear limits present in the interactions of the members of the family institution, such that these make implicit limits comprehensible, based on knowledge of the family rituals and routines. The rituals are characterized by punctual and periodical situations which may be linked to a phase in the life cycle of some member of the family institution, such as a child of pre-school age, and the routines link to the daily actions of the members of the family institutions, such as the shift of the children to school or the times for eating,<sup>8</sup> among other actions aimed at maintaining the human social condition. The human condition of the members of the family institution imposes the conciliation of work, as a source of economic resources, and the family routines, as a way of maintaining survival and family interaction.

Based in the context presented, the present study was constructed to identify in the organization of the work the possibilities for conciliating it with family life for couples with children up to six years of age. It is differentiated through seeking the reciprocity of work conditions, that is, through focusing on the work environment rather than on the family environment.

## Methodology

This exploratory-descriptive research is inserted in the macro-project: "Family and professional life – between the responsibilities and demands faced

by parents in contemporary society",<sup>9</sup> the origin of which is found in the work of a group of researchers from the University of Porto/Portugal, and which covers other groups in different countries, including Brazil. The municipality of Rio Grande/RS was set as the scenario of this macro-project through the sample investigation of 92 couples, regarding how couples with children aged up to six years conciliated family and professional life. The inclusion criteria for the selection of the subjects were: residence in the municipality where the study was undertaken; insertion in the job market of both parents; to have at least one child aged up to six years, and to agree to participate in the study through signing the Terms of Free and Informed Consent. In 2006, the male and female versions of the questionnaire prepared by researchers from the University of Porto/Portugal in 2003<sup>9</sup> were adapted to the context of Rio Grande, so as to reduce divergences in the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. The questionnaires in question were made up of the following topics: profession, division of tasks, family life, conciliation strategies, personal life, living together, and socio-demographic data.

To identify in the organization of the work the possibilities of conciliating it with family life, in the preparation of this article, two variables were used: *Temporal relationship in the Organization of the Work and Family in the Organizational Dimension of the Work*, which respectively present two and three simple options: *Part-time work* – Is it possible to work part-time for family reasons? *Flexibility* – Is there flexibility in your period of daily work? *Priority* – Is there priority for families with children in booking holidays? *Time off* – Is there time off, in certain circumstances, even if these are informed about at short notice? *Help* – Is there support for help with the children?

The interviews were held in the homes of the research subjects, following previous arranging of date and time, with most being held at weekends, in 2008. Prior to the data collection, training of scholarship students was carried out, to instruct them in accomplishing the activity. For processing and analyzing the data, with frequency distribution, the statistical program Statistical Package for

Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used. In accordance with the precepts of Resolution n.º 196/96, the macro-project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the institution involved (Process n.º 23116.003244/2008-16).

## Results

This study's data is presented in two stages, arranged below.

### Temporal relationship in organization of the work.

The results obtained indicate that the majority of mothers identify the possibility of working part-time for family reasons, and that the majority of the fathers do not. In parallel, the majority of both fathers and mothers emphasize the existence of flexibility in accomplishing the daily hourly workload at work. The flexibility in achieving the daily hourly workload was confirmed by both,

that is, mothers and fathers have the freedom to determine the period of work and not the total hourly workload as a result of family matters.

### Family in the organizational dimension of the work.

The investigation of the work-family relationship indicated that the organization of the work prioritizes, according to the family, the accomplishment of the activities, that is, the workload. The possibility of leaving work at a moment's notice is viable in specific circumstances involving issues of family health. This exemption very shortly in advance of the request refers to the need to take the child to a pediatrician, participate in parent-teacher meetings, or take the children to school on the first day of class, among other possibilities.

Priority in booking holidays, and the support of the work institution in meeting the needs of children aged up to six years was indicated as absent by the couples.

**Table 1.** Frequency distribution of the variables studied

| Variable   | Mothers (n=92) |         |            | Fathers (n=92) |         |            |
|--|----------------|---------|------------|----------------|---------|------------|
|  | %<br>Yes       | %<br>No | %<br>Doubt | %<br>Yes       | %<br>No | %<br>Doubt |
| <b>Temporal relationship in organization of the work</b>                 |                |         |            |                |         |            |
| Possibility of working part-time   | 48.9           | 39.1    | 12.0       | 38.0           | 55.4    | 6.5        |
| Flexibility in fulfilling the daily hourly workload                      | 66.3           | 29.3    | 4.3        | 55.4           | 41.3    | 3.3        |
| <b>Family in the organizational dimension of the work</b>                |                |         |            |                |         |            |
| Respect of the priority of families with children in booking holidays    | 9.8            | 63.0    | 27.2       | 10.9           | 70.7    | 18.5       |
| Respect of the possibility of time off at short notice                   | 60.9           | 25.0    | 14.1       | 54.3           | 39.1    | 6.5        |
| Respect by the employing institution of support for the care of children | 20.7           | 66.3    | 13.0       | 18.5           | 67.4    | 14.1       |

## Discussion

This study focuses on the strengthening of scientific production which highlight the influences of work on family relationships and of these on it. In addition, it is recognized within

family relationships that work is potentially more than simply a source of economic subsistence, being a source of satisfaction and pleasure for individuals.<sup>10</sup> Such a source exceeds the limits of

the environment of interaction itself, because it constitutes the singularity of the subject-worker. This, on moving to different environments, brings the feelings touched upon daily to the new interactions.

The present study has, in the working couples, the object of interaction between the work environment and the family environment. The perception of these reveals that the majority of mothers interviewed arrange the meeting of their children's needs by adjusting their work schedule to fit family activities. In contrast, the fathers prioritize their work lives to the detriment of the relationships with their children. The reduced time which parents and children spend together adversely affects and/or prejudices the children's cognitive construction, due to the absence of stimuli at home.<sup>11</sup> The combinations of performance of home and family activities with those of work keep the mother-women as the principal caregivers of the children.<sup>10,12,13</sup>

This accumulation of functions on being denied by the wife in the ambit of family care activities produces an aggressive reaction both from the spouse and children. Even though the members of the nuclear family institution recognize and value the work of the spouses as more than a source of economic return, but as a source of gratification and growth.<sup>10</sup> The relationship of conciliation of the work with family life presents peculiarities as to the insertion of young people into the world of work, leaving school, and the decision to become a father or mother. In this perspective, it is evidenced that men and women enter the job market after leaving school and, the greater the time spent studying, the easier it is to enter the working environment.<sup>12</sup>

This time spent studying also influences the decision to have children, as this decision is coupled with the economic stability made possible by the exercising of professional activity. Thus, on average, unless an unplanned pregnancy occurs before the age of fifteen, young men and women prefer to complete their studies and enter the job market so as to become parents later.<sup>12</sup> Another significant aspect is in the productivity of the woman inserted in the job market, as she works

performing domestic activities to a greater extent than those who do not exercise professional activities outside the family environment, proportionate to the time available to both.<sup>13</sup>

The affection between parents and children has a direct relationship to the parents' level of schooling. Age is also directly related to paternal economic resources, thus affection may be mediated by schooling and economic stability,<sup>13</sup> which makes the parents decide to have children later.<sup>14</sup> On learning the result of the part-time work issue in the time aspect of the organization of work of the 92 couples, it may be observed that the work is carried out to the detriment of maintaining interaction time in the family environment.

The exercising of work by the couple harms the quality of sleep of school-age children – from 7 to 14 years of age. The group of students in whom this issue becomes most relevant is those who study in the morning period, due to the irregularity in the possibilities of interacting with their parents, which is accentuated by different routines on weekends.<sup>15</sup> Generally speaking, the routines translate the organization of the family collective<sup>8</sup> and knowledge about them can be transformed into an instrument for analysis and intervention concerning the health-illness aspects of its different members.

Another aspect investigated by the study in the organization of work which is presented here corresponds to the flexibility mentioned as present by the majority of the workers interviewed, whether men or women, mothers or fathers. The positioning of the interviewees in stating predominantly that in their work environment there are intervals and interruptions during the day may be associated with the respect for legal norms on the part of the employer, and articulated by the Consolidation of Labor Laws in Brazil. Based on Brazilian labor legislation, the exercising of work in the form of a paid employment relationship for a period of twelve consecutive months in the same institution concedes to the worker the right to obtain one month off (holidays).<sup>15</sup> This period is for the worker to release tensions accumulated through his or her own interactions in the work environment, to care for his or her individuality,

whether this is in a family context or in individual pursuits, to seek to undertake leisure activities which are incompatible with the daily dynamics of the workplace.<sup>16</sup>

Some workers' lack of an employment relationship renders unviable or limits the guarantee of the right to holidays. This work condition hinders the coordination or professional life with family life, and may cause health problems through the de-structuring of eating, sleeping and relaxing routines.<sup>17</sup> These problems result from long, unpredictable workdays undertaken so as to accumulate economic resources so as to survive in a consumer society. Irrespective of the worker's sex, the present study can assert that there is no prioritization for booking time off for workers who have children. This evidenced the predominant organization of work in the Brazilian productive market, in which unstable work conditions is consolidated.<sup>18</sup>

The changes in the job market have imposed new conditions, for both sexes, which are characterized by competitiveness for entrance, for social recognition of performance and for the workers' rise in the hierarchy of the employing institution.<sup>19</sup> These alterations have been reflected in the interactions between parents and children, provoking a prolonging of the time spent living together, as the family is configured as an environment of confidence for the children, where there is stability in the relationships, contrasting the instability of life at work.<sup>20</sup> Even though time off at short notice is mentioned as present in the organization of work for both sexes among the 92 couples, family conflicts resulting from the absence or reduced presence of the parents, due to work, are constant in the Brazilian context.

The dynamism of worker-employer interactions in the work environment is mediated by the latter's organization.<sup>21</sup> Parents who work at night articulate the desire to change their timetable to share more effectively in caring for their children in the family and social environment, despite obtaining greater support from colleagues and the employing institution in this period, whether through reduction in demands at work, or through arrangements among colleagues to extend the

interruptions during work time.<sup>22</sup> Institutions which are concerned with their workers' health and which as a result institute support actions for the conciliation of family matters with the exercising of work present a better productive performance of the collective.<sup>23</sup>

The absence of institutional support for caring for one's children while at work was predominantly reported by the interviewees. One study with Chilean workers evidenced that the greater the institutional support provided to the worker, the greater the worker's commitment to the growth of the company, as a result of the explicit or implicit desire to progress in the professional career.<sup>24</sup> The institutional support for workers allows them to dedicate themselves more intensely in the process of family interaction to reduce the tension and stress reflected by the competitiveness of the job market, which contributes to the same workers improving their productivity as a result of their own control over family matters and their own work.<sup>25</sup> The analysis of the relationship between sex and work organization for conciliation with the needs arising from the family environment highlights the male interest in obtaining social prestige, diverging from the female interest in professional self-realization. Thus, the vocational development of the children is more influenced by the parents the younger the children are, although there are other subjects who transmit the value of the work-family links, such as teachers, friends, religion and the media, among others.<sup>26</sup>

The world of work takes up the time and energy of the workers who aim to progress professionally. This objective's link with the paternal role in the family environment produces bidirectional interactional conflicts arising from the strain of the work or family problems. Within this perspective, workers who carry out managerial functions point to dialog as the problem-solving instrument for conflicts in both environments of interaction.<sup>27</sup> Another limitation in this text is referent to the relation between the type of work, whether formal or informal, the couple's monthly revenues and the workers' gender with a view to envisaging the potential of work organization in its conciliation with family life and dedication to child care and

children's needs, that is, the gender issues that have been frequently discussed.

The advance of the production of this text is in the identification of the absence of links or support for meeting parental needs in the organization of the work in different productive sectors. Thus, the relevancy is emphasized of the insertion in nursing work of not only attending the needs of workers, but of their children too.

**Conclusion.** The organization of work in varying productive sectors in the context of working couples in the municipality of Rio Grande/RS/ Brazil still does not cover or provide support for the needs for more intense interaction of its workers in the family environment, in the specific area of attention to and care of their children.

This study does not intend to exhaust the potential for investigation that exists in the work-family relationship for the construction of alternative ways of maintaining production and pleasure in exercising work in the various Brazilian social segments, but only to promote the desire for change.

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