

# The relationship between work and family life. Comparative sociological research\*

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**Abstract:** *The changes that occurred over the centuries led to higher requirements regarding the family life and the professional activity. Frequently, these requirements produce tension at the individual level, generating a conflict between work and personal life and vice versa. The role conflict represents a psychological tension caused by the simultaneous apparition of two or more roles, so that engaging in a role makes it difficult to participate in others. The Role conflict theory sustains that having more than one role in the society, that are incompatible, will have as a result the conflict between those roles. This research focuses both on the relation between the family life and professional activity and the individuals' satisfaction level regarding the personal life and work.*

**Keywords:** *work; family life; gender equality; equal opportunities.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the latest decades of the twentieth century, major changes have occurred regarding gender roles within the family so organizational psychology has turned its attention to the conflict between work and personal life. If in the past it was reduced to the role of women household activities and child care and education, today, her roles have multiplied so that women contribute to the family income equally with men. Also, regarding the situation in the workplace, employee expectations and prospects have changed. With the development of societies, traditional eight-hour work day is no longer a rule so that individuals no longer have enough time to meet the demands. Romania, Malta, Luxembourg and England, are the European Union countries in which the number of hours worked daily, by an individual, is the highest. Changes over time have led to higher requirements as regards family life and professional activity. Often these requirements produce individually tension generating on the one hand a conflict between work and personal life and on the other hand between personal life and work.

Political perspective known under the name "The Third Way", developed by Anthony Giddens, emphasizes changing gender roles in the family, which it considers crucial update. One of the objectives formulated by Anthony Giddens in "Third Way" (Giddens, 2001) refers to "egalitarian distribution of family responsibilities related to growth, care and education, but no legislation can determine which behaviours are mandatory for a father like him to take over a fair share of parental duties relating to children" (Pasti, 2003: 65).

Women are considered to have a greater responsibility than men in terms of family responsibilities so, in case of any conflict

between work and family; they tend to feel guiltier than their partner.

This research focuses both on the relationship between family life and professional activity and the level of satisfaction of individuals with regard to personal life and work.

## 1. Conceptual definitions

### a. *Equal opportunities for women and men:*

"The equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women, means taking into account the capacities, needs and aspirations of different males, respectively women, and their equal treatment. Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU and a necessary condition for achieving the goals of growth, employment and social cohesion in the European Union" (Popescu, 2013: 159).

### b. *Gender equality:*

"We can say that there is equality between women and men when both sexes are able to share equally the power and influence; have equal opportunities in terms of financial independence through work and by building their own business, to enjoy equal access to education and opportunities to develop their skills and talents; to share responsibility for home and children and be free of any constraints, intimidation are related to gender violence at home and at work" (Guide to promoting equality between women and men in the labour market, p. 4).

Equality "between men and women is one of the fundamental values of the European Union which pre-date 1957" (European Commission, 2014: 1), as it appeared for the first time in the Treaty of Rome.

*c. The balance work-family:*

According to Marks and MacDermid (1996), the balance between work and family individual guidance above reflects the different social roles, a phenomenon of inter-role. The two sociologists balance the role defined as the tendency to be fully engaged in the performance of each role by carefully addressing the concern of any typical role. From another perspective, attention is an objective process called "mindfulness". This support the existence of two types of balance of role, a positive one in which the individual is fully engaged in role playing and its corresponding negative one individual does not fully assumes none of those roles.

The notion of "balance role" refers to the notion of equality between professional roles and family roles.

Studies have proposed three components of work-family ratio:

- a balance in terms of time for professional activities and those of the family.
- a balance in terms of the involvement of individuals; it is necessary that the psychological work involved is equal to that of the family.
- a balance on the level of satisfaction; job satisfaction to be equal to that caused by the exercise of roles within the family.

*d. Work-family conflict:*

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which the respective roles related to work and family life are those related to incompatible in some respects. "This means that participation in activities related to work-related role (family) is hampered by engaging in activities related to the role of the family (work)" (Dobriță et al, 2009: 97). The two specialists say there are three

forms of conflict: conflict based on time-based tension and conflict based on behaviour.

On the other hand we can distinguish between two types of work and family conflict aimed at: conflict arising from involvement in the family and at work, which is caused by family involvement in the work.

### **3. Sociological approaches**

Over time numerous theories arose that took into account the conflict between family and work, explaining: role conflict theory; the rational perspective; resource drain theory; scarcity hypothesis.

#### *3.1. The role conflict theory*

Role conflict is a psychological tension caused by the simultaneous occurrence of two or more roles so that engaging in a role makes it difficult to participate in others. Role conflict theory argues that individuals engaging in several incompatible roles will result in conflict between those roles. According to this theory time spent in the family cannot be dedicated to professional activity between roles and activities that an individual holds a competition often arises about the time he devotes to each such participating in a role that will make it impossible compliance requirements of another role.

In conclusion, the conflict between family and work often occurs as a consequence of the fact that individuals do not have the ability to delineate the two spheres.

#### *3.2. The rational perspective*

The underlying assumption of this theory is: The more an individual will spend more time working and family activities will occur even more conflicts between work and family. With other

words, the longer an individual granted the professional activities he was unable to allocate specifically for the family.

Frone, Yardley and Markel (1997) argue that excessive involvement in a role can lead over time to a high commitment in this role. "Therefore long-term commitments in one area will lead to diminishing resources (e.g.: time, energy) required to achieve performance in another area" (Lieberman, 2012: 17).

### 3.3. *Resource drain theory*

This theory argues that "the transfer of personal resources from one domain to another such as time, attention and energy (physical and mental) is exhaustible" (Lieberman, 2012: 17). The concept "resource drain" was used to suggest a negative relationship between the two spheres: work and family.

Small and Riley (1990) state that work and family are two areas that interfere by three distinct processes: time, mental and physical energy. These three processes are considered to be exhaustible resource because of the amount used in an area not available to be used in another leading to a negative correlation between the two fields. For example the time that an individual uses for household activities and childcare grants will not be used to perform duties related to work.

### 3.4. *Scarcity hypothesis*

Similar depletion theory, this hypothesis argues that individuals have a limited amount of resources and engaging in multiple roles diminishes the resources available to satisfy other requirements of the role, provoking a conflict between work and family. Thus, work-family conflict is a consequence of the fact that there are insufficient resources to accomplish the all obligations related to the professional activity and family. Rarity hypothesis states that individuals make compromises in terms of

work and family to be able to use their time and energy in both areas.

### 3.5. *European statistical data*

In the EU, 64.2% of the population has a stable job, of which 19.2% are employed part-time. Work-family conflict is widespread across Europe, and it is estimated that more than a quarter of Europeans have been involved in such a conflict:

- 27% of those working, argue that they spend too much time at work;

- 28% believe that they spend too little time in the family;

- 36% say they do not have enough time to spend with friends or other social activities;

- 51% consider that they have not enough time for their hobbies and interests.

A significant number of workers have great difficulty in fulfilling family responsibilities, difficulties are caused by intense professional activity: for example, 22% believe that work asks too much to be able to perform housework, 10% claim that time spent at work affects family responsibilities (European Agency of Safety and Health at Work).

Statistics show that both men and women are prone work-family conflict. An international study shows that 70% of employees are balanced life in terms of work and the private sphere (Galinsky, Aumann, Bond, 2011: 24).

## **4. Results of the research**

### **4.1. Background. Facts about Romania**

The study "Women's Situation. Socio-Professional Perspective", developed within the project "Promoting the woman", in the period 2010-2011, showed that the woman is

responsible for resolving domestic problems being supported where appropriate by their parents or in-laws and less by the partner. The only activity that man carries, mostly refers to the repair of household objects. Although women are engaged heavily in household activities they are involved to the same extent as men in administrative activities so that: 81.7% of women are in charge with the cleaning, 50.5% earn revenue in the house, 35.7% care for the children, 74.8% do the cooking. Regarding men, 8.4% are in charge with the cleaning of the house, 52.6% earn revenue, 18.9 care for the children and 6.1% cook (The situation of women- Socio-Professional perspective. Qualitative and quantitative research report, 2010-2011).

#### **4.2. Research hypotheses**

In the research that we realized we started from the following assumptions:

1. The individuals pay more attention to the business activities it provides, so family time is reduced.
2. Women pay more attention to household activities and caring / educating children than men.
3. The higher the education level of the individuals, the more varied are the activities undertaken during leisure.

#### **4.3 Research Objectives**

1. We intend to find out which of the two spheres: the family or working life would benefit from more time from individuals.
2. A second objective refers to the decision that individuals should take if a professional activity would affect family life.
3. With the ultimate goal we hope to find out whether individuals have enough time to meet all the proposed activities.



#### 4.4. Research Methodology

This study was conducted on an exploratory group composed of 50 persons including 24 men (12 with secondary education, higher education 12) and 26 women (13 with secondary education, higher education 13). Participants in this research were aged between 18 and 50 years. As inclusion criteria we selected: *age* - questionnaires were applied to persons aged, at least, 18 years; *engagement in a couple relationship*; *the existence of children*- have been selected people who have at least one child; *the existence of a job*. The instruments chosen in the study were exploratory questionnaire applied to a batch of 50 persons and two interviews, applied to persons with higher education: a lawyer and a man with poor education, locksmith. Questionnaires and interviews were applied during 16 to 19 April 2015 in the city of Craiova, Dolj County.

#### 4.5. Analysis of quantitative research results

1. *Do you have enough time to satisfy all the proposed activities?*

		Percent
1.	No	94,0
2.	Yes	6,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C1. 94% of respondents believe that the time available is not enough to do all the proposed activities; while only 6% are satisfied with the time they have to conduct those activities.

2. *If you had to choose between a children celebration and a work meeting, what would you choose?*

		Percent
1.	Child Celebration	90,0
2.	Working meeting	8,0
3.	DK/NA	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C2. Giving them the opportunity to choose between the celebration of the child and a meeting at work, 90% of respondents chose the first option and only 8% of them were in favour of the job meeting. From this, we conclude that individuals tend to put family first, to the detriment of employment.

3. *While attuned professional activities a day?*

		Percent
1.	Eight to ten hours	44,0
2.	Over 10 hours	30,0
3.	Six to eight hours	26,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C3. A 44 percent of respondents are working from eight to ten hours a day, 30% more than ten hours a day and 26% work six to eight hours a day.

4. *To what extent are you satisfied with the work that you have?*

		Percent
1.	Largely	42,0
2.	In small measure	30,0
3.	To a very large extent	22,0
4.	Very small extent	4,0
5.	Not at all	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C4. Trying to find out the level of satisfaction of individuals in terms of work we found that: 42% are satisfied to a large extent on the work that they have, 30% said they are satisfied to a small extent, 22% are satisfied to a very large extent, 4% believe that the work brings them very little satisfaction, while only 2% are totally dissatisfied.

5. *Are you satisfied with the time you spend with the family after cessation of professional activities?*

		Percent
1.	No	56,0
2.	Yes	44,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C5. After the cessation of business activities, 56% of respondents are not satisfied with the time they spend with the family, while 44% say that the time spent with their families is enough.

6. *How much time you grant the following activities during the day? \_  
Housework activities*

		Percent
1.	Little time	52,0
2.	Long time	20,0
3.	Very little time	16,0
4.	Very long time	10,0
5.	Not at all	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C6. Asked how much time they spent doing household activities during the day, individuals responded: 52% give little time, 20% long time 16% very little time, 10% very long time and 2% not at all.

7. *How much time you grant the following activities during the day? \_  
Care / education of children*

		Percent
1.	Little time	40,0
2.	Long time	38,0
3.	Very long time	10,0
4.	Very little time	8,0
5.	DK/NA	4,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C7. For care and upbringing of the children, 40% of respondents grant little time, 38% long time, 10% very long time and 8% very little time.

8. How much time you grant the following activities during the day? \_  
*Shopping*

		Percent
1.	Little time	44,0
2.	Very little time	38,0
3.	Not at all	10,0
4.	Long time	4,0
5.	Very long time	4,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C8. Regarding shopping, 44% of respondents said they grant this activity little time, 38% very little time, 10% no time at all, while only 8% dedicate to this activity long time and very long time.

9. How much time you grant the following activities during the day? \_  
*Seating-Relaxation*

		Percent
1.	Very little time	42,0
2.	Little time	42,0
3.	Not at all	14,0
4.	Long time	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C9. For those surveyed, the time for relaxing activities is relatively short: 42% allocated very little time to those activities, 42% little time, 14% have no time for relaxation and only 2% of the respondents spent a long time relaxing.

10. *What activities you carry out on weekends?*

		Percent
1.	Domestic activities	28,0
2.	Family activities	14,0
3.	Walks	12,0
4.	Agrarian activities	10,0
5.	Activities with friends	6,0
6.	Job	6,0
7.	Reading	4,0
8.	Entertainment / Recreation	2,0
9.	Sport	2,0
10.	Movie	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C10. A percent of 28% of the respondents claim that weekend is for domestic activities, 14% spend time with the family, 12% spend time outdoors. The rest of the respondents are concerned about reading, sports, films, recreation.

11. *If you have more time, to whom you allocate it?*

		Percent
1.	Family	98,0
2.	Job	2,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C11. If individuals would have more time, 98% of them would spend it with their family, while only 2% would choose work.

*12. Professional activity affects your family?*

		Percent
1.	No	74,0
2.	Yes	22,0
3.	DK/NA	4,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C12. A percent of 74% of respondents claim that work does not affect their family life, while 22% believe that work affects their family. A percent of 4% are undecided.

*13. If the professional activity would affect the family you would be willing to give up work?*

		Percent
1.	Yes	68,0
2.	No	24,0
3.	DK/NA	8,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C13. More than half of respondents (68%) say that they would give up work for the family, 24% put work above family life and 8% have not answered.

14. *If you were offered another job with a higher salary, but also longer working hours, you would accept?*

		Percent
1.	No	52,0
2.	Yes	36,0
3.	DK/NA	12,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C14. 52% of respondents would not leave the present job for another that would require longer working hours for higher wages, 36% would accept that job and 12% were undecided.

15. *If you were offered a well-paid job, outside the city / country and would have to go alone, you would accept?*

		Percent
1.	No	72,0
2.	Yes	16,0
3.	DK/NA	12,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>100,0</b>

C15. A percent of 72% of the respondents said that they would refuse an offer for a well-paid job outside the city/country, which involves moving one, without their families, 16% said that they would accept such an offer and 12% declared themselves undecided.



#### 4.6. Analysis of the qualitative research results

In our research we applied two interviews: the first respondent was a 30 years old woman, definitive lawyer in the Dolj Bar (CD). The interview aimed to discover the level of satisfaction at work, the time spent for activities with her family and how it influenced her professional work and family life.

Following the interview we found out that C. D. is satisfied to the work she performs while working more than 10 hours a day and sometimes on weekends, but only in exceptional cases. While she is satisfied by professional part, she considers that there is not enough time for family. However, after the end of the program, CD spends the time mainly with her child.

When asked how she spends the weekend replied: "A real weekend? Saturday morning after I drink my coffee (I have a habit, I like to drink coffee quietly), I am doing general cleaning, cook until lunch. Meanwhile the child goes out with his grandmother to play, the husband comes home from work, we eat, and the rest of the afternoon we walk in the park or out to visit relatives. On Sunday we relax and then prepare for the next day. "

Having a petitioner job the woman feels the need to spend more time with the family: "I want to spend more time with my family during the week, but when I get home I'm so tired that I cannot do anything."

Respondent said that in terms of effects of professional activity on the life of the couple and on the financial part: "The gains are not as expected. Because it is normal to have misunderstandings between me and my husband.", but not in the relationship to the child: "My girl even sees me as an example and I think she will choose the same profession as me although I do not want her to become a lawyer."

In terms of priorities both in personal life and professional life as she replied: "The family is the most important, after that is career, and then finally, me. I am my last priority."

Following the interview applied to the lawyer, we concluded that there is a conflict in terms of professional life and family life caused by the big amount of time for professional activity, limiting the time spent with family.

Role conflict theory finds its application in this case because there is a competition regarding the time given for the two spheres of activity (work and family), so intense involvement in professional activity makes it difficult to comply with the requirements roles within the family. In spite of the work-family conflict, C. D. tries to find ways for the two roles to work together, which leads to satisfaction in terms of work and family life.

The second interview was applied to a 50 years old man (VV), with secondary education, a locksmith, mechanic. The level of satisfaction with work is reduced, by working more than 10 hours a day and having an unsatisfactory salary: "I work a lot for very little money". The interviewee claims that time spent with family is not enough.

Asked how he spends his weekends interviewee answered us: "Usually after the work, if I do not go to work on Saturdays I go in the countryside. There I do housework. I intend to build myself a house, but I have no time to take care of this. I'm still at the stage of building the fence. I work too much and do not have time for anything".

The respondent revealed to us that he wants to spend more time with his family but he has no time, because of his professional work: "I would like to stay longer with my wife and child and it hurts so bad when I get back home, and all I can do

is to put myself to bed to sleep. I am so tired, that sometimes I do not even eat".

As regarding the couple life, he revealed that it was influenced by the work: "My wife told me that I bring home too little money, that I stay all day at work and I do nothing in the house". As in the previous case, there is a labour- family conflict that has the same causes: reduced time spent with family is time for professional activity. Since the study is average for the respondent, he is unable to find a satisfactory job and the current job does not thanked him in any way.

In conclusion, we can say that there is a work-family conflict caused by too much time dedicated to the career part and obviously, individuals reduce the time dedicated to their family.

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