

Ensuring Work Family Balance: The importance of family-focused solutions The Perspective of Mothers in Europe¹

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THE EUROPEAN UNION FAMILY PLATFORM

The Family Platform was launched by the Research Directorate of the European Commission in 2009.³ The objective of the Family Platform was to generate a research agenda for the SSH research Roadmap 2012-2013 to provide scientific data for evidence-based family policy development in the European Union. The Family Platform involved twelve research institutes and family associations, including the European delegation of World Movement of Mothers (most frequently referred to by its French name, Mouvement mondial des mères Europe or MMM Europe)⁴.

Family Platform "reviewed contemporary knowledge of families and family research in the EU; critically reviewed existing research to develop questions for future research and to identify key policy questions; elaborated future scenarios of family life in Europe to identify challenges facing families and family policy in the future; brought results together and drew conclusions to propose a European research agenda on families."⁵ Conferences presented the consortium's reports to the public and solicited statements from family associations and other civil society groups, as well as government leaders. All Platform documents have been published on www.familyplatform.eu.

REALITIES OF MOTHERS IN EUROPE

A critical contribution of MMM Europe to the Family Platform was to report on the situation, priorities, preferences, and concerns of mothers in Europe. This report, entitled *Realities of Mothers in Europe*, was published in September 2010 (Stevens, *et al.*, 2010). Work on the report began in September 2009 with a series of exploratory interviews with persons active in counseling and working with mothers and children. Themes extracted from these interviews provided the framework for interviews with individual mothers, which in turn identified themes that were explored more fully in focus groups of mothers drawn from widely differing cultural and economic backgrounds. Using criteria identified in this fashion, a review of European research was undertaken, which in turn revealed that little attention has been given to mothers and even less opportunity was offered for them to speak with their own voice. Thus, even as the literature review continued, a survey questionnaire was developed to provide mothers in Europe with the opportunity to identify their concerns and priorities and to send a personal message to European policy makers.

The *Survey of Mothers in Europe* was launched with an online questionnaire in 10 languages: English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, Slovak and Finnish. Mothers in 16 European countries were addressed. Participating mothers learned of the survey through word-of-mouth, email, and links on the websites of MMM, its affiliated organizations, and other civil society associations which serve mothers and families in Europe. Responses were collected between February 1 and August 31, 2010, and the total number of mothers responding was 11,887.⁶

¹ The present paper is a contribution to the Expert Group Meeting in New York City, held June 1-3, 2011, convened under the banner of assessing family policies: confronting family poverty and social exclusion and ensuring work-family balance. The meeting was convened by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Division for Social Policy and Development in preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family 2014

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³ FAMILYPLATFORM (SSH-2009-3.2.2 Social platform on research for families and family policies) is funded by the EU's 7th Framework Programme (Euros 1,400,000) for a duration of 18 months (October 2009-March 2011) (www.familyplatform.eu)

⁴ MMM was founded in Paris in 1947 and is an international apolitical and non-denominational NGO which represents mothers and their families to national and international institutions, and has general consultative status at the United Nations. It also raises awareness of policy makers and public opinion on the vital role of mothers for promoting peace and contributing to social and economic progress. Its European delegation (MMM Europe) works to voice the priorities and concerns of mothers in Europe to institutions and policymakers of the European Union and raises awareness of mothers' impact on the educational, cultural, and economic development of their countries.

⁵ Family Platform, "A Research Agenda on the Family for the European Union", p. 3.

⁶ Full survey data are available to academic and policy researchers in databases formatted for SPSS and NVIVO analysis. Contact info@mmmeurope.org.

SURVEY FINDINGS RELATING TO WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

1. Distinctive perspective of mothers

Mothers were asked to describe the changes which occur when becoming a mother, and 8282 mothers responded. Mothers say that the birth of the first child irreversibly transforms her focus, priorities, and life-course. Mothers acquire an enormous love, commitment, and responsibility to mentor that child through life. To be a mother is worth everything it costs. Mothers see themselves as having acquired a clearly distinctive identity and perspective.

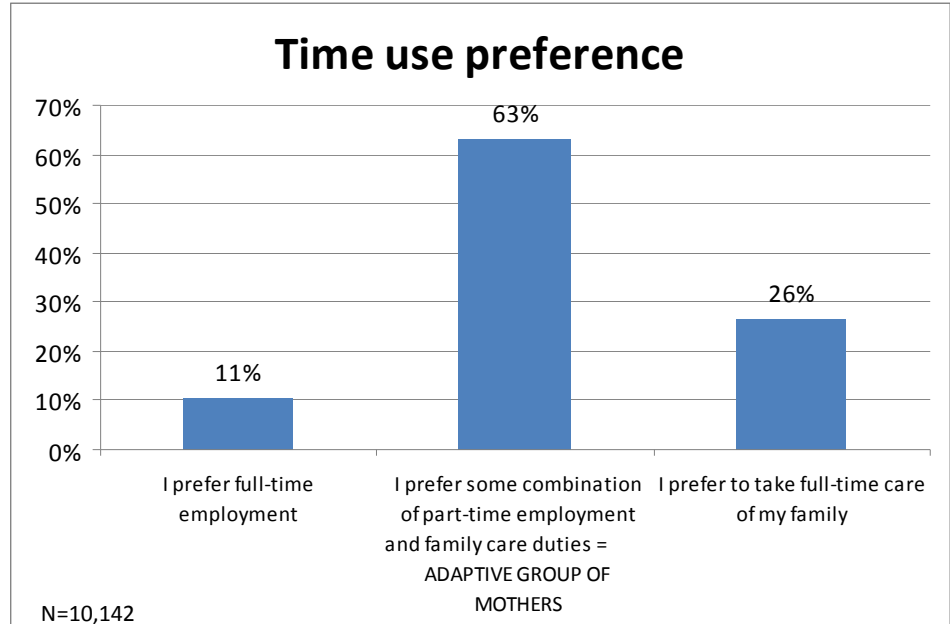
2. Time use preferences of mothers

Mothers were asked their time use preference with respect to employment and family care duties.

- 11% expressed a preference for full-time employment.
- 63% prefer a combination of part-time employment and family-care duties
- 26% prefer to take full-time care of family

Adding the first two columns, 74% of mothers want full or part-time employment, while 89% (columns two and three)

want high involvement in caring for their own child, full or part-time.



In summary: While some mothers focus on career and others on full-time care of family, most mothers want to combine employment and care for their own children. These findings are consistent with the results of other recent surveys.⁷

3. A mother's time use preference depends on the age of her children

"Adaptive" mothers who prefer to combine family care with part-time employment, were asked their time use preference according to the age of their child.

- Assuming an infant under 1 year of age, 80% of mothers expressed the preference to care full-time for their infant, while 20% wished to be employed part-time.
- Assuming a child 1-3 years, 50% of mothers want to care full-time for the child while 50% want part-time work.
- Assuming a child 4 years and older, the majority of mothers prefer part-time employment until the child reaches 18 years.
- Fully 84% of all mothers agree that adolescents must not be left alone after school.

In summary: There is a season when child-rearing ascends to a high priority, leading a majority of mothers to desire to care for their children whenever the children are at home. But there are also many mothers who

⁷ Hakim, Catherine, 2009, "Should Social Policy Support Parenthood and Family Work?" <http://www.mpsv.cz/en/6391> ;

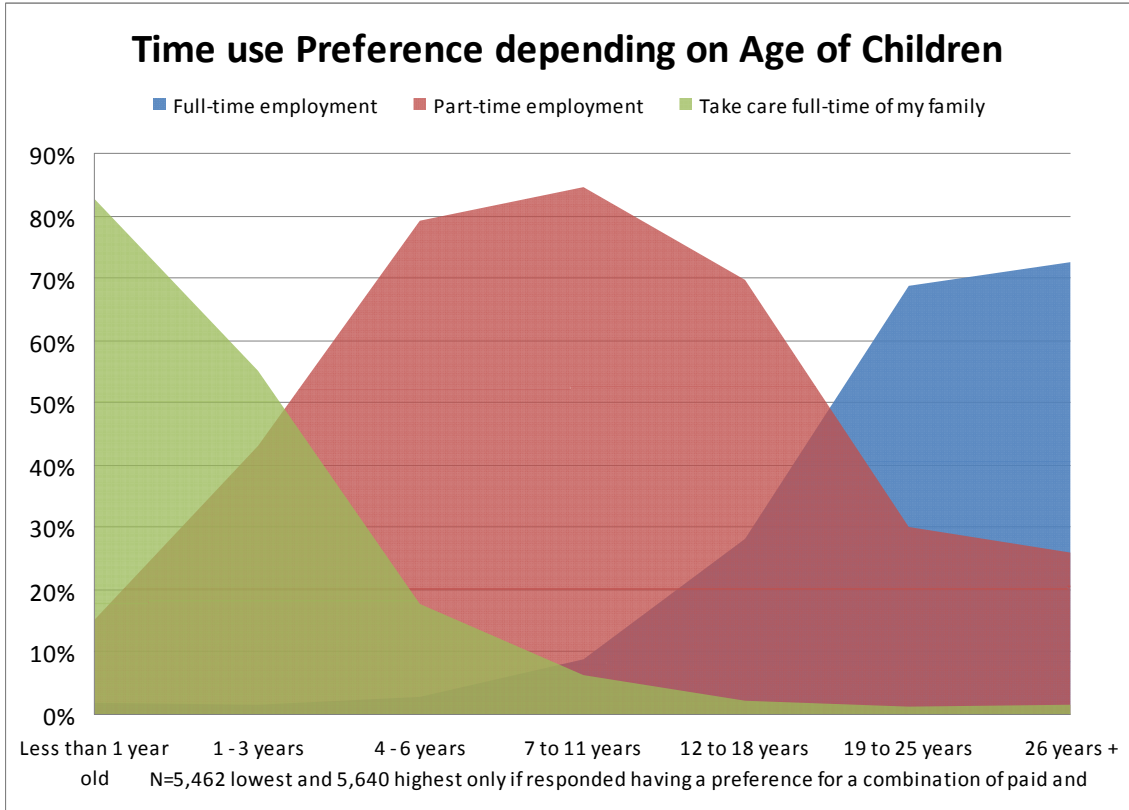
France: According to a TNS-Sofres survey 57% of mothers with children younger than 2 years stay at home, and 90% of mothers have chosen it (they are not on unemployment.) "Mamans à plein temps," 24 December 2009;

Germany: German Family Network, see www.familie-ist-zukunft.de ;

UK: "What women want", Cristina Odone, 2009, CEPS. http://www.cps.org.uk/cps_catalog/what%20women%20want.pdf ;

USA: "Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work, from 1997-2007", Pew Research Center, July 12, 2007, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/536/working-women>

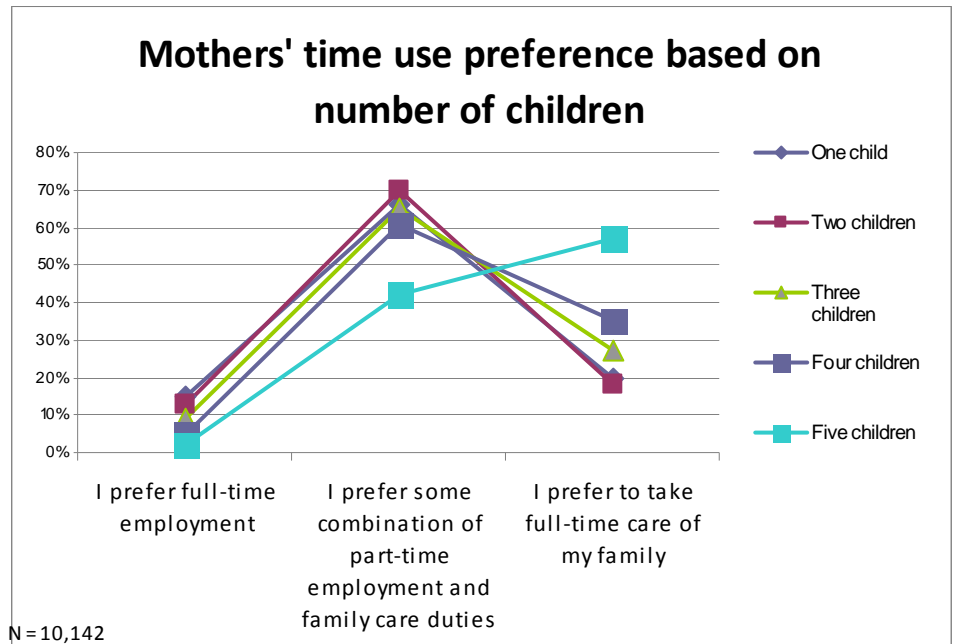
desire employment as well, predominantly part-time, until the child reaches 18 years, after which the preference for full-time employment becomes significant.



Time-use preference is both personal and subject to considerable variation, the particular needs of the mother’s children being among the foremost. Mothers prefer different arrangements at different times in their lives, and all mothers do not want the same thing at the same time in their lives. Some, even though a small minority, desire to return to paid employment rapidly after giving birth. Some, even after the children have grown, prefer only part-time employment.

4. A mother’s time use preference is further influenced by the number of her children.

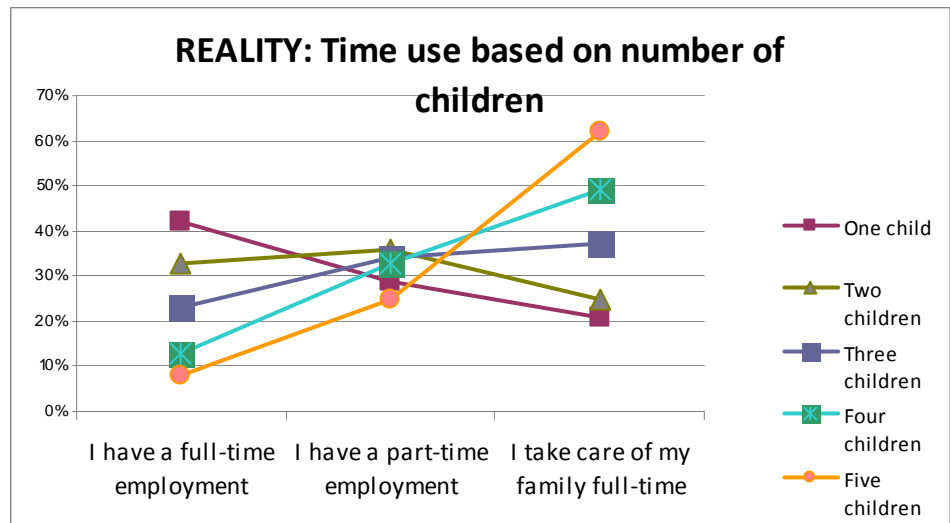
As the number of her children increases a mother's preference for full-time employment declines and the attractiveness of part-time employment rises. For mothers of five children the preference for full time care of family predominates.



5. A mother's time-use reality is likely to differ from her preference

Many more mothers are working full-time and fewer mothers are working part-time than would like to.

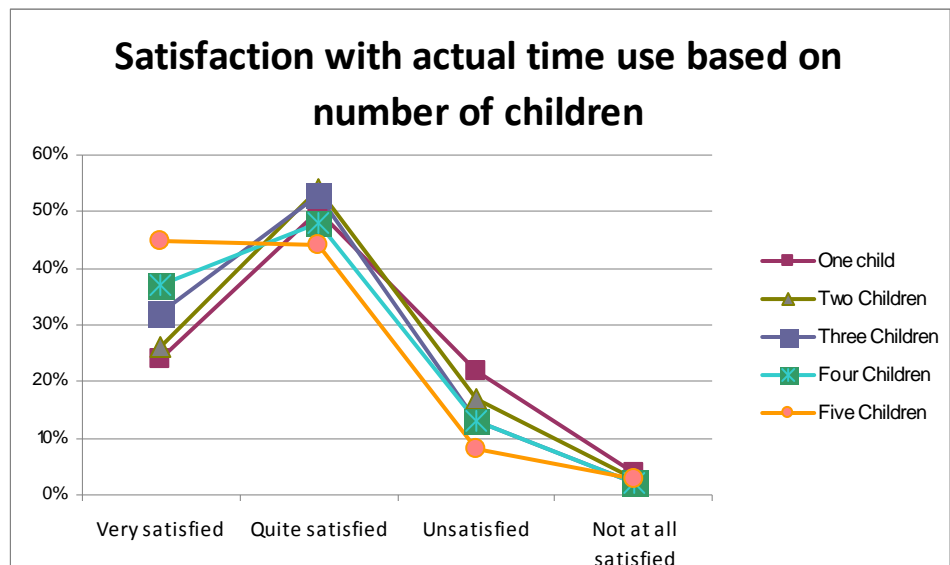
Note also that mothers having 3 or more children are half as likely to be employed full-time and twice as likely to be home for full-time care of the family. The actual percentage of full-time home carers is slightly higher than the expressed preference. The gap between actual and preferred time use may indicate that suitable part-time work is hard to find, and that mothers accept full-time employment or full-time care more than they would prefer.



6. Satisfaction with actual time use

Half of responding mothers, with any number of children, are "quite satisfied" with current time use. For those responding "very satisfied" the spread is larger, with mothers of 5 children being more satisfied than mothers of 1 child. Other observations may be noted:

- For those mothers responding "unsatisfied," there is also a spread with a higher percentage of mothers of 1 child being unsatisfied than the percentage of mothers of 5 children.
- Other factors include:
- Those employed full-time are less satisfied than those working part-time.
- Mothers who are in married or partner relationship are more likely to be satisfied than single, divorced or separated mothers.
- Mothers on maternity leave and stay-at-home mothers are more likely to be satisfied, followed closely by self-employed mothers.
- The most satisfied mothers are those between 56 and 70 who are no longer in the "rush hour" of motherhood.



In contrast, within the group of very young mothers (aged 19-25) there are the greatest extremes--nearly 40% are very satisfied, while 6% are very unsatisfied.

7. Factors which impact satisfaction with work/family balance

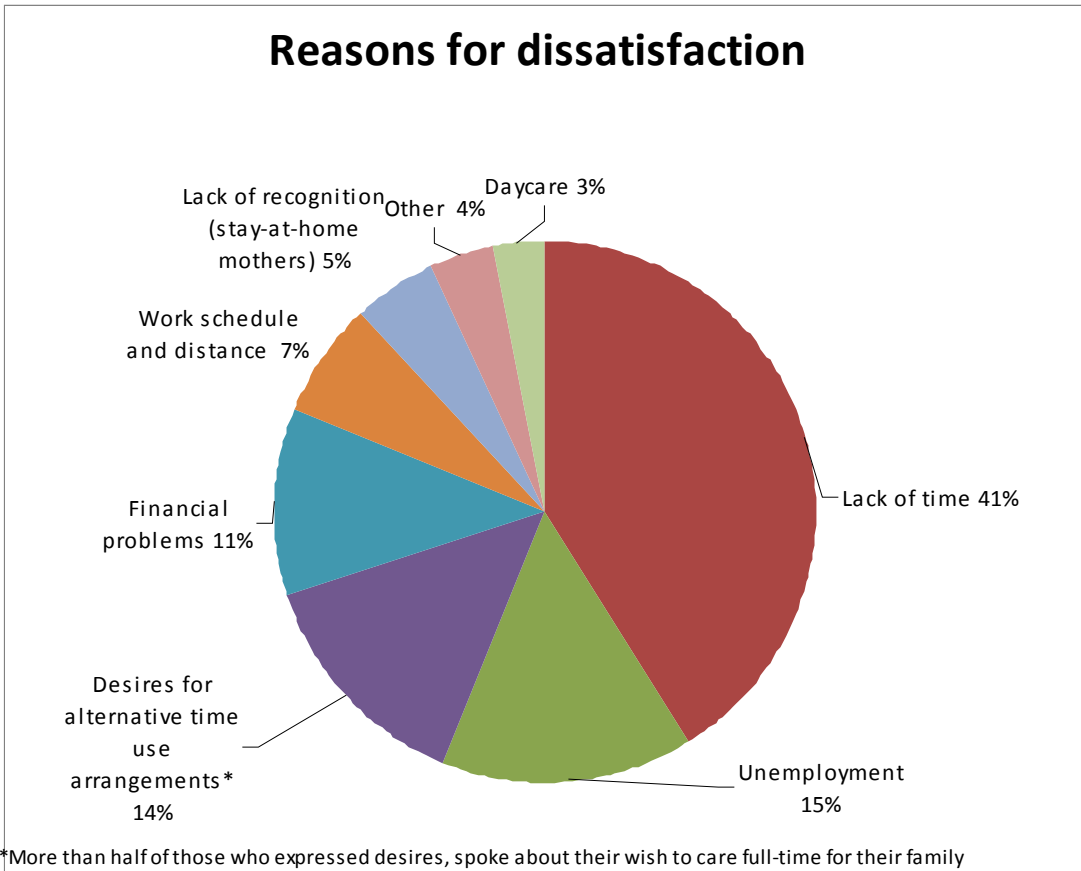
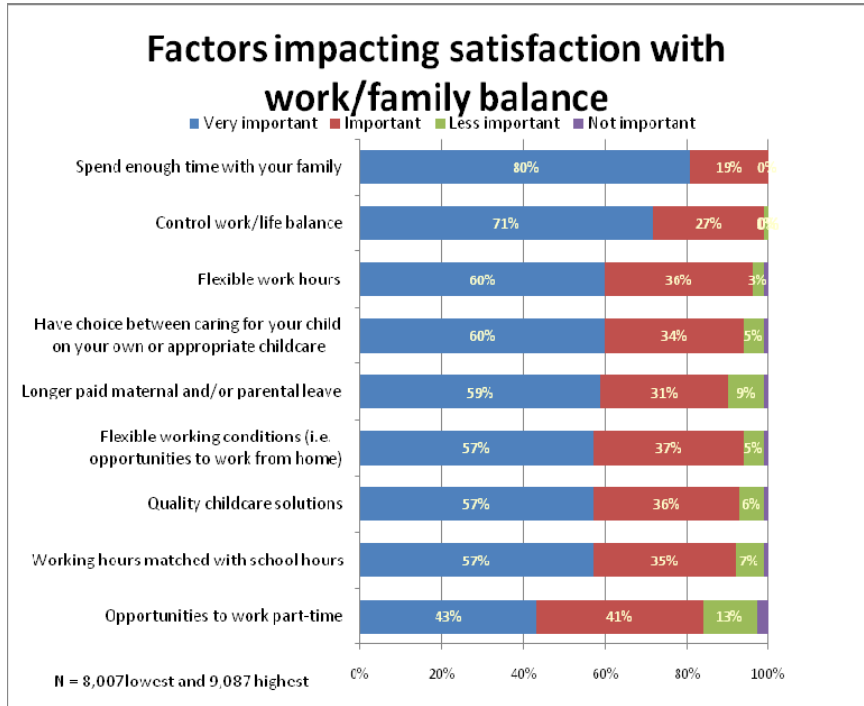
Expanding on our study of satisfaction or lack of it we gathered together the time-related questionnaire items which mothers rated. Mothers were asked to express the degree of importance of each factor in reference to satisfaction with work/family balance. Note the universal importance of having enough time to spend with family, as well as the ability to control work/life balance.

Reasons for dissatisfaction with current time use.

To understand the reasons for dissatisfaction, mothers who answered that they were dissatisfied with their current time use were asked in an open-answer question to explain why they are dissatisfied.

Explanations were received from 1,857 mothers.

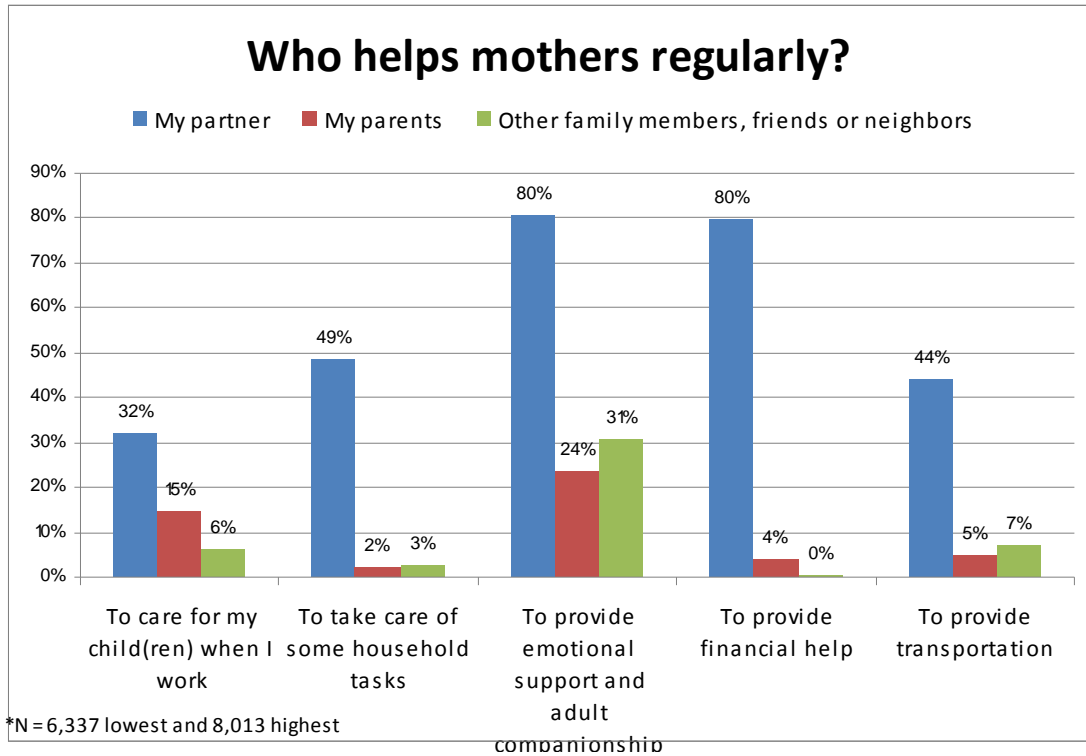
- Most explanations were linked to lack of time.
- Many expressed despair and frustration over inability to control the use of their time due to the demands of work, commuting, and transporting children to schools and day care.
- Job stress was mentioned far less than the stress of rushing to and fro to distribute and gather children and commute back and forth to work.



- Many thoughtful mothers explained that relationships with children take time and interaction to develop. Commuting means leaving early and returning late, causing all interactions to be rushed and to take place when everyone is tired.
- Many voiced regret at missing key moments in their child's development.
- Many expressed worry that their lack of time at home negatively impacted children's school work.

- Some commented that no allowance is made for parents' realities; whatever their situation they are held responsible for the misbehavior and failures of their children, yet they feel limited by conditions that require them to work away from home and to leave the fate of their children largely to others.
- Not infrequently mothers blamed taxation that leaves too little money to bring up children.

8. Who helps mothers regularly?

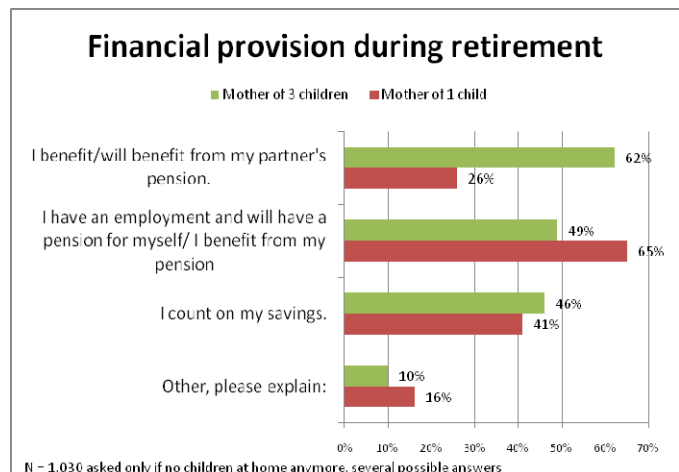


Across the board, mothers perceive spouse or partner as the main source for help and support, particularly as financial providers and sources of emotional support and companionship, two factors to which they give very high importance. Help with child care and household tasks both figures lower in importance and in frequency. The frequency of help in both child care and household tasks was found to be proportional to the amount of time the mother is employed. Among mothers having at least one child at home and working full-time, 58% get regular help and 33% occasional help; while mothers who stay at home report receiving 42% regular help and 46% occasional help.

In summary: A mother's preference to care personally for her child, whether part or full-time, is enabled by the financial and moral support of the child's father. Complementary parental roles are the dominant pattern of mothers' expectations. In contrast to mothers living in couple, single mothers revealed heightened reliance on neighbors, extended family and institutional support of all types.

9. Financial provision during retirement

Mothers who do not have children living under the same roof were asked several questions related to their retirement. Regarding financial provision, the more children a mother has, the more she depends on her partner's pension. When asked about preferred lodging in retirement, the vast majority preferred to keep their own independent housing as long as possible, and the second choice is a retirement facility if their health becomes difficult.



10. Mothers' messages to policy makers.

All respondents were given the opportunity to write a personal message to policy makers. Nearly 9,000 messages were submitted, many of them written with evident emotion and considerable wisdom. Fully 48% called for recognition by State and society of the role and investment of parents. Of these more than half called for increased respect for mothers devoting full-time to their children. The second most important topic (at 32% of total messages) related to work-family balance. Together these themes accounted for 80% of all messages of mothers to policy makers.

These two quotations suggest the richness of mothers' messages to policy makers⁸:

- *“Realise the importance of the mother’s role for the well-being of society in general. It is through her that the value of peace, respect for others, the giving of self for others, and all that goes into living peacefully with one another, starts in the home.”*
- *“Don’t saw off the branch on which you are sitting.”*

CONCLUSIONS

1. At the birth of the first child, mothers experience a transformation in focus, priorities, and life-course and develop a distinctive perspective. The 11,887 mothers who responded to the Survey of Mothers in Europe voiced a strong preference to care for their children whenever the children are at home. Seventy-four percent also expressed interest in employment. The combination of childcare and employment is personal and thus highly variable. The time use preference of mothers is strongly associated with the age of the child and also the number of children she has; the younger the child and the more numerous the children, the less time she wishes to devote to employment until the children are 18 or older.

2. Satisfaction for mothers depends on the fulfillment of their desire to raise their children. Mothers want to organize their own reconciliation of work and family according to their time-use preference; employment options; age, number, and needs of children; spouse and family support or care needs; and other circumstances. At the same time, a large number of mothers would prefer employment, predominantly of a part-time nature facilitating their effort to accommodate the demands of work and of family care. Lack of opportunity for part-time employment or financial necessity can also cause mothers to enter full-time employment when it would not be their preference. Working more than they wish and not having enough time for child rearing and couple relationship is associated with dissatisfaction, fatigue, stress, and fear of poorer outcomes in family stability, children's behavior and scholastic success. Dissatisfaction is expressed most poignantly by single mothers with children at home who also lack the time they wish to spend with them. On the other hand responses from unemployed mothers at home who desire employment manifest signs of depression and discouragement.

3. Mothers who want high involvement in care of their own children depend on the father for financial and moral support. Mothers expressed anxiety about poverty in old age. In countries where no pension credit is given for home carers, mothers depend on their spouse's pension, and if he disappears, they face a life of poverty. Therefore, mothers desire pension credit for unpaid care work for family members.

4. Mothers voice their over-arching priority and preference in raising, in partnership with fathers, the next generation to be responsible and productive laborers upon whom all the population will depend. In the context of democratic governments, the right of citizens to choose how they balance their work and family life must be recognized. Mothers claim the right to have their preferences and needs considered in the making of policy.

⁸ A first level analysis of mothers' messages to policy makers is reported in the Family Platform report titled *Realities of Mothers in Europe*. The complete compilation of messages in 10 languages is posted at www.mmmeurope.org. A searchable database is also available from the same site for academic and policy study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the messages of 11,887 mothers responding to the Survey of European Mothers.

-- CHOICE AND OPTIONS - Family policies should accompany the desires of mothers/parents and not make a choice for them. Family policies should not be incentives but facilitators that allow mothers and fathers to make their own choices according to their preference, circumstance, and opportunity. Mothers have asked that they be given the choice of how to organize and control their own work/family balance, rather than be coerced by "incentives" designed by government policy makers to keep them in the labor force in order to satisfy quotas or other policy objectives. The State's role should be to offer options, including support for leaves, childcare, and tax relief.

-- SEASONS - Policy seeking to ensure favorable work/family balance must take into account the mother's season of child-bearing and child rearing when the large majority of mothers want to care for their own children whenever the children are at home. Recognize and acknowledge the difference in needs and requirements which parents (mothers and fathers) have at different seasons of their life, and promote the existence of options from which they may choose to accommodate working arrangements accordingly. For the many mothers on the European labor market, the highest career pressure usually coincides with the season of childbearing and family care, which is sometimes called the "rush-hour" of life. At the conclusion of these childbearing and child rearing years, mothers have up to 20 years to devote to a career and bring to it much useful experience. It is difficult for a mother to follow a linear career path; it would help to allow flexible time periods in the working life of a mother.

-- TAX POLICY - Make it possible for families to survive on one full-time wage earner or one full and one part-time earner to accommodate the periods when mothers want to provide care for their children. Special adaptation is needed for single mothers.

One mother wrote this message: *"Create a family-friendly tax and social security system that takes into account the substantial additional costs of raising a family, as compared to childless couples. Eliminate the exploitation of mothers who work without pay to raise and educate the children who will support the pensions of people who have not raised children."* Taxation systems could be made more family-friendly by allowing income splitting, by increasing deductions for dependents, and reducing VAT on child-care services and goods.

-- PART-TIME WORK and FLEXIBILITY - Encourage employers to offer more part-time work opportunities and to find creative ways to increase flexibility in the workplace which could accommodate parents' need to follow school hours and holidays, such as job-sharing, tele-commuting, time savings accounts. These "family-friendly companies" would not penalize parents in terms of future career opportunities or salaries.

-- UNPAID FAMILY CARE WORK - Recognize the unpaid care of family members in the home. Allow time spent at home caring for family members to be included in calculation for pension and other social benefits.

-- EQUALITY - Ensure equal opportunities and salaries for women and men, parents and non-parents, according to education, experience, and responsibility.

Understand that equality does not necessarily mean "same-ness." While involvement of both parents is essential in the family, different contributions are equally valued and to be encouraged in a complementary sharing of responsibility. The idea of "gender equality" (sameness or interchangeability) in the home remains largely theoretical. Family policies which focus on gender equality should be studied to be sure there are no unintended consequences, such as increasing gender segregation and increasing gender pay gap.

-- RETURNING TO THE LABOR FORCE - Mothers' entry/return to the labor force should be facilitated. An innovative EU funded project has generated and tested a practical means of assessment and facilitation which should serve as a reference point (See www.famcompass.eu). Opportunities for retraining and higher education should be made available for returning mothers.

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COMMENTS REGARDING PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
Session 8 Work-Family Balance, DESA EGM, 1-3 June 2011, Joan T. Stevens, World Movement of Mothers

1. Work-family conflict

Working mothers made the following points when responding to our survey:

- Not enough time to spend with children when they are at home.
- School hours and calendars do not correspond with work schedules.
- Government emphasis on earning a wage tends to overlook important social values, especially those taught in the home; and mothers who wish to care for their own children feel devalued.
- Fatigue and stress from full-time employment can interfere with family care.
- Shift work, shift rotation and overtime work make family life difficult and more stressful.
- Most home repair, medical appointments, business transactions take place during business hours when people are at work. (Every full-time wage earner needs a spouse to manage these details.)
- When employment preference is not realized, (either by working too much or not enough), the reported dissatisfaction is associated with stress and depression.

Recent research on stress and health of working mothers deserves attention and may suggest areas for more extended research focus. Starting points are suggested by these recent studies:

- stress and ill-health and early withdrawal from the workforce on grounds of disability.
- Erickson and Holmes (2009), using an extensive NICHD-SECC database, show that the gap between preferred and actual employment of young mothers is a strong statistical predictor of depression.

2. Work place and working parents

Surveyed mothers stated that:

- Part-time jobs are hard to find.
- Mothers need help to re-enter the labor market after an absence.
- Employers hold back salary and career advancement of mothers returning from maternity leave.

3. What are the elements of an effective work-family balance policy?

- Effective policy will provide options and allow families to resolve their own work/family balance as a function of their priorities and their situation. The policy will not assume that all families are alike.
- The recognition of seasonality in lives and different preferences and circumstances will result in flexibility of policy options.

4. Private sector and work-family balance solutions

- Encourage self-sustaining innovations and initiatives which have no drain on the tax base.
 - An example of a private sector initiative which facilitates work-family balance is the *Federation des Particuliers-Employeurs de France (FEPEM)*, which administers the employment of nearly 2 million household helpers and in-home carers of children and elderly. FEPEM manages contracts, ensures conformance with all social and fiscal regulations, and provides professional credentials, initial and continuing training, and placement services.
- Encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment. In this connection micro-lending is most successful when it involves mothers.
- Encourage the development of service based employment which mothers can do at home using telephone and computer. As an example, for years one U.S. based airline has handled all its telephone reservations and ticket sales in this fashion.
- Encourage online services such as banking and shopping as a convenience for those employed full-time.

5. Investing in parenting

- Encourage by way of preparation the inclusion in secondary school curriculum of a course in human development covering the whole life-course. A concrete proposal to this effect is under discussion in Finland.⁹

⁹ Contact Professor Lea Pulkkinen, University of Jyväskylä., lea.pulkkinen@psyka.jyu.fi for status of re research and proposals.

- Encourage civil society organizations, including associations and churches, to offer preparation classes on couple relationship, family life, and parenting. Notable examples of civil society initiatives are
 - *World Movement of Mothers France*¹⁰, which organizes mothers for discussion groups. Offers training workshops, and forms groups of mothers to work with local mayors to monitor and resolve neighborhood youth problems.
 - *Gezinsbond*¹¹, a family association serving over 200,000 families in Belgium. Gezinsbond distributes free parenting guides to parents of new-borns and organizes a vast array of family support services and activities..
- Encourage local communities to sponsor parenting courses and discussion groups moderated by professionals.

6. Child care provision (family, employer, government, private)

- In discussing this issue, the French experience should be considered. Since the 1970s France has offered a variety of forms of childcare and a choice of options to parents including:
 - Community crèches or daycare centers
 - Maternal assistants (a person who cares for up to 3 children at her own home)
 - Help to care for the child in his own home by a nanny
 - Assorted subsidized parental leaves (the parent ceases work with the right to resume his position after the leave) plus a subsidy to replace part of the lost salary.
- Childcare tends to be considered as "tending" the child, or performing actions to provide for the child's needs. But child-to-caregiver relationships are personal and specific. Research increasingly draws attention to the importance of the quality of relationship between child and caregiver and to the child's perception of the engagement, nurturance, constancy, and trustworthiness of the caregiver. Certain conditions may enable a child's trustful bonding to be shared with a non-parent, but the high ratio of children to caregiver in public facilities, staff rotation, and absenteeism render a developmentally sound relationship difficult to create and maintain. Further, competition of many children of the same age vying for the attention of the caregiver may further increase child stress levels and slow developmental processes.
- With the criterion of a developmentally sound child-caregiver relationship in mind, the choice of a maternal assistant or in-home nanny has long been preferred by many working mothers.
- Childcare facilities at the place of employment offer the advantage of less travel time for parent and child, thus diminishing the stress and fatigue of both. The opportunity for the child to be with the parent at intervals during the day would have additional benefits.
- A big conundrum which working mothers complain of is what to do for adolescent children after school and during school vacations while parents are employed.

7. Work-family policies that are best for children

- a. Birth leaves: For employed mothers, birth leaves permit physical recuperation of the mother and also breast-feeding of the baby. European maternity leaves vary from 3 months to 3 years. Salary support and job security also vary according to the country and are conditional upon employment. Numerous studies show that breast-feeding and consistent nurturing care by the mother during the early months are vital to the infant's physical, emotional, and neurological development. Maternity/paternity leaves designed to permit parents to care for their child during the first year at least will have the best result. (UNICEF Innocenti report card, 2008, 6; Penn, 8; "The State of the World's Mothers 2009..")
 - At the conclusion of the leave, what is best for children? The length of leave and the age of the child make a difference. Under the age of 3 years, the majority of mothers would prefer maternal care or some form of in-home care by extended family or personnel which results in less interruption of the biological rhythm of the infant, less exposure to infection, and consistency in care-taking.
 - As the child matures and parents judge the readiness, authorities such as UNICEF-Innocenti (Report Card 2008) assert there is potential good in attendance at a high quality pre-school, especially when a child comes from a disadvantaged home of persistent poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, maternal depression, or low parental education. In addition, when parents do not speak the local

¹⁰ <http://mmmfrance.org/index.php>

¹¹ See <http://www.gezinsbond.be/>.

language, the center-based care will improve the child's language and cognitive ability, enhancing also later scholastic ability.

- In EU circles it is frequently maintained that in a poverty-stricken home, group child-care will facilitate maternal employment, which may additionally benefit the child; but in order to have the optimum effect on a child, this effort is best combined with other efforts, such as improving parenting and other essential life skills.
 - Non-maternal childcare, however, has been associated with decreased parental sensitivity to the child. Obviously there is less time spent with the child, but it may also be linked to a disinvestment on the part of the parent (Jacob 2007). It takes time, interest, and inter-action to develop close relationships. Without the necessary parental time and strength, the child's attachment to parents may be replaced by the child's attachment to peers, which can grow to compete with or replace attachment to parents, with serious consequences for later receptivity to being taught by or to taking cues from adults (Neufeld, 2006). Furthermore, an increase in aggressive and disruptive behavior has been linked to a child's attendance in center-based care at an early age and for long hours (UNICEF-Innocenti, 2008, 12).
 - Because of the diversity of circumstances and the controversial nature of the question, the appropriate age for any particular child to enter pre-school is best left to the judgment of the parents who are in a better position to decide what is best for their child in the framework of their family needs and desires; the role of the State should be that of providing options from which parents may choose.
- b. Cash transfers
- Child/family allowances exist in every EU country, and are effective in reducing child-poverty. The levels differ, and some countries make allowances conditional upon family resources. As a point of interest, France's "allocation familiale" or family allowance is given to any family residing in France having at least 2 children, and without condition of resources. The amount varies according to the number of children.
- Cash for childcare is a currently proposed option in EU countries. There are two main variants: cash to purchase non-maternal care or cash instead of daycare. Some question the kind of care a child gets in a poverty-stricken home whose parents want the cash instead of daycare; some also question the wisdom of allowing mothers to leave the labor market. However, the freedom to choose from several options is of high value to mothers and would seem appropriate in a democracy.
 - I believe that attention should be given to the system which is employed in France, because it has four benefits to welcome the young child, (PAJE, prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant) which include:
 - a payment during the pregnancy, conditional upon resources (80% of parents are eligible).
 - a monthly payment during the first three years of the child's life, conditional on resources, (80% of parents are eligible.) This allowance pays for expenses related to the care of the infant (formula, diapers...)
 - a payment for free choice of parental activity is a benefit paid to a parent who ceases work to care for the infant. This sum may be paid to either the father or the mother, but in fact it is almost exclusively (97%) the mother who takes this benefit. Parents working part-time can benefit from a part of this payment.
 - a monthly payment of free choice for childcare. Parents using crèches, maternal assistants, or nannies get a subsidy each month to lessen the final cost for the family. Low-income families get a higher level of help so that they can afford the childcare they wish.
 - Some countries also count the time spent in home care of family members for purposes of pension calculation.
- c. Tax Benefits
- Some countries permit joint taxation while others have separate income taxation of spouses; some countries also take into account the number of children or other dependents in the household, which lowers the tax to be paid on family income.
 - Individualized taxation, social benefits, and pensions which are dependent on earned income are felt as coercive by the mothers for whom providing unpaid home care of children and elderly are a high priority but for which there would be no State recognition or social benefits such as a pension.
 - What effect does State tax policy--joint or individualized taxation--have on the couple's decision to marry or to cohabit? Is a married couple's relationship more stable than a couple united by a civil union or cohabitation? Keeping in mind that a rupture in the couple relationship of mother and father

has a profound effect on a child, both financially and emotionally, it would seem reasonable to write tax policy to support family stability.

8. Unpaid work

- Mothers responding to the MMM survey spoke strongly on this subject:
 - A mother runs a significant risk when bearing a child, that she will be abandoned by the father and left to support both herself and the child.
 - A mother also runs significant risk of poverty in retirement because of lower salary due to gender pay gap and to periods of caring for family members when she was not employed, to the extent the periods of unpaid care work are not included in pension calculation.
- Mothers need security and protection. The value to society of the investment in unpaid care work to European society was expressed by EU Commissioner Andor: *“In all Member States, women are more likely to be carers. They are more likely to provide physically intimate, emotionally demanding, and longer-term care. The value of this work in human, social and economic terms is enormous, and we would not be able to cope without it (Andor, 2010).”*
- In regard to these matters we note the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 (20) which states: *“Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.”*
- Mothers ask Governments to:
 - Recognize the value of child-raising and care work provided by parents as carrying important social, economic, and cultural value for society. If the general public, you and I, acknowledge the importance of a mother’s role, employers and policy makers will follow. Societal recognition of the value of unpaid family care work will encourage fathers to be more active in it.
 - Include the unpaid family care work in the calculation of GDP to better recognize its importance.
 - Include career breaks for family care purposes in pension calculation.
- In her message to policy makers, one mother pointedly asked: *“In a time of financial crisis, asking the question: does a parent at home full or part-time caring for others cost or save public money???”*
- When unpaid care work is not valued enough to receive recognition and consideration for social benefits, disengagement may result. Referring to this condition, one mother wrote: *“Let the State raise the children and take care of the elderly.”*

9. Assessing work-family policies

Three examples may suggest elements of an assessment framework.

- Sweden: the state makes the choice for the parents, keeping both parents engaged in fulltime employment by means of birth leaves with time limits, subsidized institutional daycare for employed mothers (at very high cost to the State), and individualized taxation and social benefits. There are few benefits for stay-at-home mothers.
- Netherlands: the recognition and availability of part-time work for both men and women make the work/family balance easier and less expensive to tax payers. In addition to easing the work-family reconciliation, but the additional parental time with children may also result in better outcomes for children. Is it more than coincidence that the 2007 UNICEF report card on child well-being ranked the Netherlands in first place?
- France: the variety of policies allows parents to make and modify choices according to their desires and circumstances. (As a point of reference for the current discussion, Marie-Laure des Brosses of the Mouvement mondial des Mères has provided an assessment of the French system. See attached Annex.)

10. Impediments to effective work-family policies

Impediments to effective work-family policies take many forms. The most insidious impediments are those unintended consequences which accompany family policies. As an example we draw attention to the need for research to identify what unintended consequences accompany birth leaves. Here are suggested questions to be researched:

- a. Does the requirement that a woman work before obtaining a maternity leave become a factor in the postponement of the mother's first birth and thus reduce the window of opportunity and the number of children she will bear?
- b. Because of the cost and inconvenience of hiring a temporary replacement for the mother during her birth leave (and in some countries paying salary support for the mother on leave) do employers take

defensive action by not hiring women of child-bearing age or if hired, hold them back in career advancement and salary? (Comment and suggestive evidence are found in Hantrais 2006, MOCHO 2004, and Hakim 2008.)

- c. Does the birth leave system contribute not only to greater gender pay gap but also to gender segregation in the labor market? Statisticians writing for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) noted that in countries with high numbers of women in the labor force, the gender pay gap is greater and called for further research. (UNECE, 2010) In Sweden the pay differential between men and women is greater now than it was four decades ago before the well-developed leave system was in place, and employment tends to be more segregated with more women working in lower-paying public sector jobs and more men employed by private companies at higher salary levels. (Plantenga, 2006, 30; Hakim 2004)
- d. 4. Does the individualization of pensions and social benefits exert pressure on mothers to work full-time over the life-course, causing them to experience high levels of stress and burn-out, leading to early retirement or addiction? [Orth-Gomer et al, 2005, in *Läkartidningen* Medical journal, reported that baseline assessments of stress at work and in the family were more important determinants of ill health than were life-style (smoking, alcohol intake, and exercise) and standard risk factors (lipid and hemostatic profile, blood pressure and obesity.) Fatima Bouvet de la Maisonneuve, psychiatrist, who treats alcoholism in women says that "burn-out" is the final stage of stress in women, who "over-invest in work and suffer a lack of recognition in return." Three women for every two men suffer from it. The business world sanctions life-choices, hours are not compatible with family life, and career advancement is frequently denied them, in <http://madame.lefigaro.fr/societe/en-kiosque/3066-40-ans-femmes-au-bord-de-la-crise>)
- e. Where there is government policy support for institutional childcare and paid maternity leave for mothers in the labor force, is a higher rate of women in the paid labor force a causal factor in a higher birth rate? And is it a reason for policy-makers to push more mothers into the labor force and thus "encourage a higher birthrate"?

ANNEX

State Family Policy: the case of France

Marie-Laure des Brosses, president of World Movement of Mothers France¹²

1. Having and raising a child is expensive. In France the State takes care of a large part of this cost in four ways:

a) Family supplement ("allocations familiales")

The French State gives to each family, whether French or foreign, residing in France and having at least two children, a monthly supplement intended to pay for part of the cost of rearing the child, without condition of resources. The more children parents have, the more they receive. For families of meager resources this sum is not insignificant.

For 2 children: 125 euros a month.

For 3 children: 287 euros per month.

For each addition child: 161 euros a month.

For the sake of comparison, the minimum salary is a little more than 1000 euros a month, and the average monthly income per household is 2500 euros.

b) Social benefits

In France there exist many social benefits designed for people with low resources. Most of them take into account the number of children one has. The more children one has, the more social benefits one receives.

Examples include:

The housing supplement (money to help pay one's rent),

The minimum revenue, RSA (*Revenu de Solidarité Active*), a sum paid to people without revenue or with very low revenues so that they can survive.

In addition, some social benefits are specifically directed to families with children, such as the supplement for the beginning of the school year to help parents buy books and school supplies for each child.

c) Calculation of family income tax

Income taxation of families is a function of the "family ratio" (*Quotien familial*) determined by the number of people in the fiscal household.

1 single unmarried person = 1 part

1 couple = 2 parts

1 couple with 1 child = 2 parts ½

1 couple with 2 children = 3 parts

1 couple with 3 children = 4 parts

+ ½ part for each additional child

Total family income is divided by the number of parts to determine the amount upon which the tax is applied.

Thus, the more children a family has, the less the family will pay in income tax. While subject to a cap of 2,336 euros for each ½ part excluding that of the spouse which is not capped, the result is that many families with low to average incomes having many children pay little or no income tax.

d) Health insurance

In France most medical costs are paid by national health insurance for residents of the nation. Thus, costs relating to pregnancy, birth, and health care given to small children are covered almost completely by the State.

2) A small child needs to be cared for. France supports the parents' freedom to choose the kind of child-care they wish to use.

Since the 1970's France has worked very hard to develop a variety of forms of childcare and offers several solutions to parents :

--- establishment of community crèches or daycare centers

--- establishment of maternal assistants (a person who cares for up to 3 children at her own home)

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- help to care for the child in his own home by a nanny
- assorted subsidized parental leaves permitting the parent to cease work with the right to reassume his or her position after the leave, meanwhile receiving a subsidy to replace part of the lost salary. Since 2004, these benefits have been reorganized under a system called PAJE ("*prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant*" or benefits to welcome the new child). These benefits include:
 - a payment during the pregnancy, conditional upon resources (80% of parents are eligible.)
 - a monthly payment during the three first years of the child, conditional on resources (80% of parents are eligible.) This allowance pays for expenses related to the care of the infant (formula, diapers...)
 - a payment of free choice of parent activity : this benefit is paid to a parent who ceases work to care for the infant. This sum may be paid to either the father or the mother, but in fact it is almost exclusively (97%) the mother who takes this benefit. Parents working part time can benefit from a part of this payment.
 - a monthly payment of free choice for childcare. Parents using crèches or maternal assistants or nannies get a subsidy each month to lessen the final cost for the family. The low-income families get a higher level of help so that they can afford the childcare they wish.

This policy is successful because :

- a) ... it does not impose a pre-conceived model. The parents may choose according to their couple relationship, their financial means, the number of children, the help that is possible in their circle of family and friends, their convictions, etc., and they are free to organize child-care to best meet their needs. Options include care by a parent (more than 50% of families make this choice), part-time care during part-time work, or full-time alternative child-care. Parents are also free to choose the type of non-maternal child-care. Options include maternal assistants (18% of infants), crèches (10% of infants), in-home nanny (2% of infants), care by extended family (grandparents, etc.), employment crèches, parental crèches, and more.
- b) ...it lowers the out of pocket cost of child-care in a major way, especially for lower income families for whom the cost is always very important.
- c) ... it permits parents to achieve the work-family balance they choose.

The parental leave and salary support is an enormous success, surpassing all government hopes. It is not a costly system because the parent is paid only 380 euros a month to care for an infant (and eventually several children). If the infant were cared for by a maternal assistant, the subsidy would cost the State around 600 euros a month. For infant care in a crèche the cost is 1200 euros a month above the investment to establish the crèche. By offering this variety of options, the State enables both mothers who so desire to care for their own infants, and mothers who so desire to continue to work, both without excessive financial cost.

Finally, one must remember that schooling is free but not mandatory from the age of 3 (and in some places from the age of 2). School availability and choice also contributes to making life simpler for parents to economize on child-care costs.

3) Additional measures concerning retirement

While retirement options may have limited influence on the decision to have children (short-term measures are probably more effective), it is necessary to note that in France there is a generous system of retirement for parents.

Since the 1970's France has put in place a policy which permits parents who stop working and who have at least 3 children to benefit from pension payments as if they had worked and earned the minimum wage. Thus, those mothers who have stayed home for many years to provide unpaid home care have the right to receive a small payment during their old age. This system (conditional on financial means) concerns about 2 million homes every year.

For all mothers France also grants an additional bonus of trimesters of retirement :

- 2 years (or 8 trimesters) to those who are employed in the private sector
 - 1 year (or 4 trimesters) for those who are employed in the public sector
- Since 2010, a portion of these benefits can be transferred to fathers, under certain conditions.

4) The general atmosphere

Motherhood is valued in France, and the birth of a child is generally seen as the manifestation of mutual love

in couples. Women are proud to display their motherhood; the media speak well of future mothers and of young mothers; and the desire to have a child is not seen as a handicap. There is no disrespect for those mothers who resume paid employment, nor is there disrespect for mothers who take leave to care for their children. However, motherhood is not necessarily seen in the traditional way: 50% of births take place outside of marriage. Fathers who care for their small children are not numerous, but the phenomenon is increasing among fathers under 35 years of age.

The French complain about many things, but they have enough confidence in the future to form families and to have children. The more the State enables mothers to align their situation with their desires, the easier it is to have the number of children mothers wish. More than one recent study says that European mothers wish to have one more child than they actually have. In France a large proportion of mothers have been able to have that additional child, and that makes a difference in the birth-rate.

Some say that the sustainable birth-rate in France is not as high as it seems:

--- the average age of the mother at first birth has increased over the last 20 years causing the birthrate over the last 15 years to bump higher because women who didn't have a child between 20-35 years are at last suddenly acting upon their desire.

--- the high immigration population in France boosts the birth-rate because many foreign born mothers have 4 or 5 children, whereas the native French bear fewer than 2 children on average.

There is room for improvement:

--- Not all mothers can find the kind of child-care they wish because available spaces in crèches seem insufficient. Some take parental leave by default, even if the majority of mothers take leave because they desire it.

--- Numerous mothers take advantage of a lull in their professional career to have a baby. For these mothers who, before the birth, are on unemployment, have a fixed term employment contract, or are in temporary employment, the return to work is not always easy after parental leave.

--- Certain heads of companies or directors of human resources scarcely appreciate the time that mothers spend caring for their children and have the tendency to hold back the progress of their careers.

--- While equality between men and women is progressing in France, there remains a significant difference in salary (20%) and in the rise of women to leadership positions, especially in the political world.

In the framework of the budget deficit in France, one worries that certain benefits advantageous to families may be called into question after 2012. It will be even more important to be able to justify how well-founded each measure is.