



And now woman?

An analysis of the career and family of university women from A Public University

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Abstract

The study investigated the main obstacles and/or opportunities that women students from a public university experience when reconciling career and family. For data analysis, inferential statistics were used. The

population comprised women students from the last year of the Administration course at the State University of Paraná – UNESPAR/Campus Paranaguá. The sampling was of the simple random type. In order calculate the sample size, a tolerable sampling error of 10% was used. Most of the interviewees work outside the home, are aged between 18 and 29 years old, they are single, do not have children and their income is between one and three minimum Brazilian wage. The multiplicity of simultaneous roles often assumed by some women (mother, housewife, student, wife among others) requires an effort, sometimes undervalued, to reconcile and adapt the demands of the family, social, professional and academic environment. Despite the existence of a support network, the challenges as a woman in reconciling the various activities make us reflect on whether such support actually is materialized in practice.

Keywords: Woman, University, Career, Family, Challenges.

1. Introduction

The conquest of women for their space in society has been growing significantly, especially in the professional sphere. Once inserted in the job market, women seek, like men: opportunities, better salaries and management positions. In this scenario, it is not difficult to find women seeking, through their effort and dedication, to reconcile work and private life; and when observing the family environment, in many cases, the lack of support from family members is perceived.

The choice of the theme that involves gender and career is justified, although many studies have already been carried out, due to the fact that society is constantly changing. The beliefs, habits and customs that change throughout history, and that are reflected in the work environment (or is it the opposite?), relegate women to a supporting role in a patriarchal world. Therefore, understanding certain nuances hidden in gender discourse is beyond the simple claim of gender equality. Since equality denotes, among others, the freedom to want or not to play, for example, certain culturally masculine roles.

Therefore, the present research sought to answer the following problem: What are the difficulties and/or opportunities that women students from a public university experience when reconciling career and family? Therefore, researching the career from the female perspective can corroborate the studies already carried out and encourage others researches.

2. Theoretical framework

The presence of women in the labor market was marked by equality struggles for their rights. The woman had no space to perform any function other than that of raising a family. Woman was seen as a sexual object for men. There was no opportunity to occupy prominent positions, always being harassed and suffering prejudice. (CALIL, L.E.S, 2000, p. 22).

According to Ferreira (2013) women suffer inequality in all social classes and at work this is no different. Women were considered, and still are, by someone, as the weaker sex and without much use for most jobs, and their workforce was so scrappy in terms of value that it barely provided for the basic necessities, and what was left for her was to be dependent on her husband.

This inequality between the sexes has shaped society, going through times of slavery, feudal periods and capitalism. According to Reed (2008) male domination was perpetuated, where the woman served and was inferior to the man, having only the purpose of serving him. And it was believed that man was superior to woman.

In the corporate environment, according to Crompton (2006), women were deprived of exercising functions and occupying positions above men. However, when they needed unique skills that women had, they were requested because they had different abilities from those of men who were favorable to them at that time. Then in the second half of the 20th century women began to seek and obtain their space in the labor market.

The participation of women in the labor market has been growing since the 90s, representing an advance in history, where women leave their home to conquer their space. According to Bruschini (2007), from 2005 onwards, there was an increase from 28 million to 41.7 million women in the Brazilian formal labor market. In 2021, the participation of women jumped to 46.4 million, representing 52.3% of the workforce (DIEESE, 2021).

The women are the majority in Brazilian Higher Education. In 2020, 838,152 women entered in the university and 518,339 completed their undergraduate degree against, respectively, 668,996 and 359,890 men. The data, released in February 2022, are from the Census of Higher Education 2020, prepared by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep) and the Ministry of Education (MEC, 2020).

Despite the advances, the challenges imposed on university women amid the myth of male supremacy justify the present study when trying to understand the relationships among career, family and power.

3. Materials and Methods

As for the type of the research, considering the nature of the study and objectives, its development was through a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive characteristic. For Minayo (2008), the commitment of the qualitative research is to understand and explain the dynamics of the social relationships, which come from beliefs, values, attitudes and habits, without worrying about numerical representation, statistical generalizations and linear relationships of cause and effect.

As for the field research, it was developed at the State University of Paraná – Unespar/Campus Paranaguá, Paraná State, Brazil. Paranaguá a port city located 90 km from the capital of the State of Paraná, Curitiba. With an estimated population of 157,378 people and a population density of 169.92 inhab/km², with an HDI (Human Development Index) of 0.750, ranking in the 32nd place in the State and 551st in Brazil. (IBGE, 2022). The State University of Paraná - Unespar is a public institution maintained by the Government of the State of Paraná and it has seven campuses. The Campus of Paranaguá has ten undergraduate courses: Mathematics, History, Portuguese Languages, Portuguese/English Languages, Biological Sciences - Bachelor, Biological Sciences, Pedagogy, Accounting Sciences, Production Engineering and Administration. In addition to lato sensu and stricto sensu courses.

As for the study subjects, all women students from Unespar/Paranaguá were considered as the research population. As a sample of the population, all interviewees met the following inclusion criteria: being a student at the Paranaguá Campus; be enrolled in the last year of graduation; academic link with Unespar at the time

of the research; be attending classes; and agree to voluntarily participate in the study, by signing the informed consent form (TCLE -Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido).

The contact with the participants happened in the first half of June 2022. In order to start the research with the interviewees, communication applications, e-mail and telephone contact were used, first with the representatives of the fourth-year groups and then with the aforementioned women students.

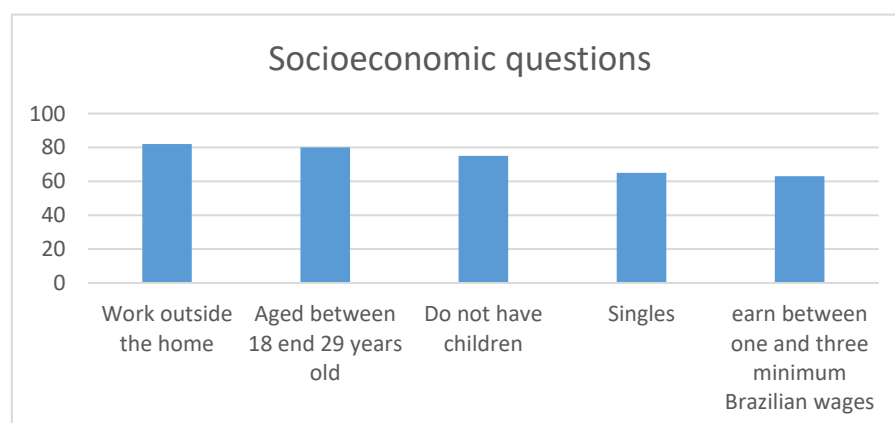
For data collection, a structural interview was developed through a virtual questionnaire, using Google Forms platform, containing questions sent by a communication application. In order to contribute to the problem, the interview questions were based on the following specific objectives: to identify the socioeconomic profile; to survey the existence/absence of a support network; and to analyze the challenges of students as a woman in reconciling academic, professional and personal life. In order to obtain greater collaboration, it was decided not to identify the respondents.

For data analysis, inferential statistics were used. As for the mediation scales, the nominal scale was used. The population comprised 105 women students, enrolled and attending classes in the last year. The sampling was of the simple random type. For the calculation of the sample size ($n = 49.26$) it was used a tolerable sampling error of 10%. At the end, the research had 51 participants.

4. Discussion and Analysis

In order to understand the difficulties/opportunities of the academics when reconciling career and family, 08 (eight) key questions divided into four blocks were elaborated. In the first block (socioeconomic profile), as can be seen in Graph 01. The vast majority of the respondents were students who work outside the home (82%), are aged between 18 and 29 years old (80%), they do not have children (75%), they are single (65%) and they earn between one and three minimum Brazilian wages (63%).

Graph 01 - Socioeconomic questions



Source: by the authors

The fact that those women interviewed (82%) combine study and work reflects the profile of students in night courses and that follows the trend of university women students who need to contribute to the family income

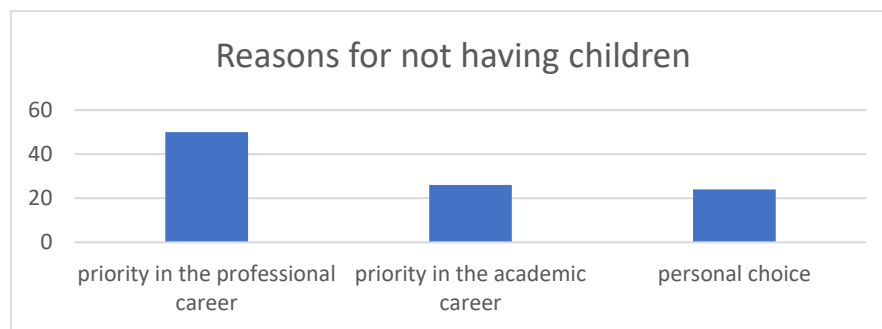
or even maintain themselves and, therefore, need to work.

Since to the full-time students, who can dedicate themselves exclusively to studies, regardless of the period (day, full or night), as they are economically supported by the family, it was not possible to accurately identify the student that works and worker that studies. The student that works is the one who works, but continues to be partially supported economically by the family. The worker that studies, on the other hand, has no financial dependence on the family, and may even contribute to the household budget. In general, the family does not have the resources to maintain this kind of student, or else, in some cases, the family does not consider the higher education something important.

The fact that most respondents (75%) do not have children is related to the age group where most respondents (80%) are up to 29 years old, following a national trend. According to the IBGE (2019), the number of women who decide to become mothers after the age of 30 years old is increasing. From 1998 to 2018, the percentage of births whose mothers were younger than 24 years old dropped from 51.8% to 39.4%. In the age groups over 30 years old, there was an increase from 24.1% to 36.6%.

Postponing motherhood is a consequence of changes in the social, economic and cultural context and the new roles that women have been assuming over time. Such changes can produce bivalence between to have or not a baby and when to have this baby (LOPES et al., 2014). As can be seen in Graph 02, half of the interviews claimed that the biggest reason for not having children is the priority in the professional career (50%), followed by academic career (26%) and personal choice (24%).

Graph 02 - Reasons for not having children



Source: by the authors

For Badinter (2011), the desire to have children is neither constant nor universal. Some women want to have children, others do not and others never wanted to have children. Every choice presupposes a reflection on reasons and consequences. Bringing a child into the world is a long-term commitment that implies giving priority to them. For the author, motherhood is no longer the only way of affirming a woman. The desire to have children can conflict with other imperatives, for example, those who seek a hierarchical rise in their professional career. What extent will the child weigh on her professional career? Will they be able to simultaneously handle a demanding career and the responsibility of having a child?

Balancing work, study and children remains a major challenge for most women. Such difficulties are heightened when prejudice arises in the work and academic environment and even in the family. It is not

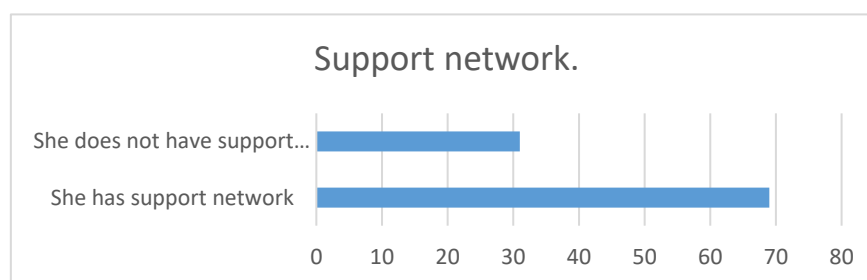
uncommon for bosses and co-workers to doubt the ability of women to dedicate themselves as much to work and studies as they did before becoming mothers.

In the social imaginary, men are expected to be individuals without a family, women are required to have the family override their personal desires and accomplishments. Thus, society expects women to prefer motherhood to academic life, and this is the first challenge faced by these students (TORRES, 2000).

While maternity leave was a great advance for mothers to dedicate themselves better to their children in the first months of life, on the other hand, the lack of conditions of “post maternity leave”, for example, generates a lot of stress and anguish for women workers and students. The insufficient number of places in public daycare centers is one of the numerous concerns and reveals the lack of public policies with attention to women's health. In the case of the corporate environment, in which the number of companies that have daycare centers is small, in the university environment, such spaces are practically non-existent, except for some very rare cases. Some initiatives that could be implemented in universities to collaborate in improving the physical and emotional health of university mothers, including: welcoming programs in the university environment, maintenance of scholarships and infrastructure such as daycare centers and baby changing facilities. For this, institutional initiatives are needed in constant dialogue with the women's collective, taking advantage of the plurality of ideas to ensure access and permanence in the university.

In all cases, whether mother or not, especially the first one, a support network becomes fundamental so that university students can actually make the most of their academic potential and thus, in the future, seek more prominence in the job market. The support network, which is different from help, includes family members, spouses and friends, who in one way or another support women in their different stages in order to reconcile the demands and the various roles played in academic and professional life. As can be seen in the Graph 03, the vast majority of respondents (69%) said they had a support network.

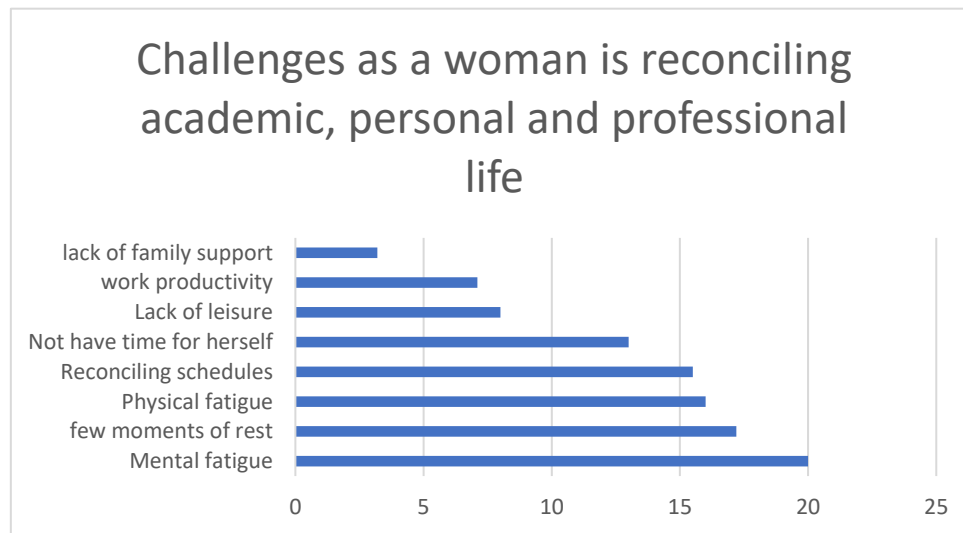
Graph 03 – Support network.



Source: by the authors.

As can be seen in the Graph 04, the main challenges as a woman when reconciling academic, personal and professional life are: mental fatigue (20%), few moments of rest (17.2%) and physical fatigue (16%). The following appear: reconciling schedules (15.5%), not having time for herself (13%), lack of leisure (8%), work productivity (7.1%) and lack of family support (3, two%).

Graph 04 – Challenges as a woman in reconciling academic, personal and professional life.



Source: by the authors.

The challenges imposed on women when reconciling academic, professional and personal life are, in part, a consequence of the differentiated treatment between men and women that still permeates the education system that is now articulated with the principle of the sexual division of labor, despite equal opportunities of student access and permanence.

The five biggest challenges pointed out by the interviewees (mental fatigue, few moments of rest, physical fatigue, reconciling schedules, not having time for themselves), make us question the percentage of 69% of the interviewees, when they declared having a support network. Such questioning leads us to reflect: do family members, spouses and friends effectively support university women in order to reconcile the demands and the various roles played in academic and professional life? Perhaps the present study cannot answer the question, however, discussions like these have never been so necessary, which should, in turn, give rise to other studies. The challenges imposed on women are even greater when a considerable part of society and representatives of the executive and legislative powers try to guide public policies on women's physical and mental health, not on gender equality, but on conservative discourses of a religious nature. In recent years in Brazil there has been an imminent danger of regression of female conquests due to the maximization of authoritarian, doctrinal and moralist discourses of women, as is the case, for example, of the “guardian of the home”. Such discourses carry the disciplinary function of patriarchal society, that is, that women, as a stabilizing element within the family, must devote themselves to the services of mother and wife.

5. Final Considerations

The history of women in Brazil is marked by advances and setbacks in social, teaching and work spaces historically of male domination. The search for a professional career occurs, among others, through the postponement of motherhood in a significant portion of university women.

Most of the interviewees work outside the home, are aged between 18 and 29 years old, are single, do not

have children and the income between one and three minimum Brazilian wages.

The multiplicity of simultaneous roles often assumed by some women (mother, housewife, student, wife, professional...) requires an effort, sometimes undervalued, in order to reconcile and adapt the demands of the family, professional and academic environment.

When there is a support network, the challenges as a woman in reconciling the various activities make us reflect on whether such support actually is materialized in practice.

As limitations of the study, it can be highlighted that in the item "not having children", it was not possible to detect some trends, as is the case, for example, of the so-called "NoMo Generation" (not mothers). The NoMo generation is a counterpoint to the patriarchal society that, historically, places motherhood as a feminine ideal. The choice of not having children is numerous and range from priority to a professional career, spending on children among others.

Regarding Brazilian legislation, being a woman is limiting from the point of view of the freedom of own body. In Brazil, according to the Family Planning Law (Law No. 9,263, of January 12, 1996), tubal ligations and surgeries of this type can only be performed after the age of 25 years old or by women who already have two children. For those who are married, sterilization (sterilization or vasectomy) can only happen after the consent of both spouses has been proven.

Therefore, taking into account that most of the interviews are single, have no children and are up to 29 years old, it remains for that portion of the NoMo Generation to be lucky not to get pregnant, because if it depends on the current legislation, they will be forced to give birth. and comply with her parenting obligations. And the university? It stays in the background.

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