

# EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS IN BALANCING PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY AND FAMILY LIFE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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## Abstract

The article presents the results of the sociological study "Parents between the need to work and family responsibilities" (there were made: 1047 questionnaires with mothers with preschool children, 20 sociological interviews), conducted by the demographic Research Centre, NIER. The results of the study revealed that mothers showed a high level of motivation to be hired. Childcare services represent a determining factor in ensuring the balance between work and child care. The interviews conducted with parents have highlighted a series of problems connected to the activity of institutions of preschool education. Most children in preschool institutions are between 3 or 6 years old, this denotes the lack of the segment of childcare service under the age of 3 years. Many working mothers consider balancing family with work a major challenge. Often they are in a vicious circle: being at work they worry about family problems and are less focused on professional tasks, being at home with the family they worry about problems at work. The rigidity of the legal framework determines the impossibility of the employers to offer them some conditions that would allow them harmoniously to combine the family life with the professional one - flexible work programs, work from home etc.

**Key words:** family, labor market, professional activity, personal life, child, reconciliation.

**JEL Code:** J10, J13, J19.

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## Introduction.

At present, the problem of balancing between work and family is analyzed very actively as a part of family policy. The settlement of professional and family work is an important topic for sociologists. They study family and gender problems, also for those who are concerned about the work field. The problems connected to the balance between professional and personal life, maternity, and children care are interconnected. And it affects most employees at a certain moment in their life. Work and career represent important aspects of individuals' life beyond

all financial needs. Because the workplace often offers personal fulfillment and represents a social arena to develop relations and receive support.

Today the tasks to combine professional and family roles are the objectives of state social policy. The Republic of Moldova has a developed legislative framework and actively takes part in international treaties that prohibit discrimination in employment. In the National Strategic Program on Demographic Security of the Republic of Moldova (2011-2025) it is specified that are developed measures to solve family problems. It proposes to promote the father's broader involvement in raising children by granting paid paternity leave as well as leave for raising the child with special provisions for fathers. Establishing a flexible work program facilitates the raise process of children ensures equal payment / women and men remuneration.

## **1 Method of study**

By the term balance between personal and professional life, we understand the situation characterized by satisfaction, minimal role conflict, and optimal working of the employee, both personal and professional tasks and role at work.

The article is elaborated based on of the qualitative sociological study "Parents between the need to work and family responsibilities" carried out during August - October 2018 by the Center for Demographic Research, NIER, during which 20 sociological interviews were conducted with mothers with children of preschool age (up to 6 years). Also, the article is based on the data of the quantitative study "Parents between the need to work and family responsibilities" (1047 questionnaires with mothers with preschool children), carried out during February - March 2019.

The purpose of the study consisted in analyzing the particularities of reconciling the family life and the professional life of mothers with preschool children, in highlighting the difficulties they face in reintegrating into the labour market after child care leave and in determining the factors that contributes to facilitating balancing family with professional life.

The general hypothesis of the study refers to the fact that the relationship between the professional and family life of mothers with preschool children is conditioned by the accessibility of the preschool education services, economic and psychosocial resources of the family, individual resources (education) and the flexibility of work programs.

## **2 Research results**

Until the declaration of independence from the women's work, implicit of mothers, in our country, it was practically compulsory. At the same time there were diverse informal and formal

practices to help women combine the roles of employees and mothers (nurseries, kindergartens, medical services, summer camps available for parents and children). However, maintaining a balance between professional and family activity wasn't easy. Now, the majority of mothers continue working to maintain an acceptable standard of living for the family, but there is the problem of accessibility and the quality of the monitoring services and the children's education. Also, there are expectations for women to get involved and contribute significantly to both professional and family life. In this way, at the current stage, mothers have to call in babysitters and other forms of childcare (babysitters, private kindergartens etc.).

In the last years, the services of child's care have received more and more attention in all of Europe, as a remedy against natality decreased rate, as a tool for child development, support, and social reconciliation between work and family. The access to high-quality childcare represents the main condition that mothers return to the workplace after maternity or childcare leave. Regardless of the reason why parents choose to come back to their workplace, either there are economic or other reasons, the childcare is an essential element that parents take into consideration (United Nations Development Programme International Labour Organization, 2011). Childcare services are among the most important instruments facilitating reconciliation of paid work and family life. First, an improvement in childcare provision reduces the opportunity costs of parenting, which should lead to an increase in the demand for children. Second, better childcare provision leads to a reduction in the mothers' reservation wage and thus is expected to encourage women to return to the labour market earlier (Matysiak, Węziak-Białowolska, 2016).

The results of the study denote that the most accessible form of childcare is the public kindergarten—85,2%. Only 15,8% of interview parents mentioned that their child has started to attend the kindergarten since he or she was 2 years old. Therefore, the majority of children attending the preschool institutions are from 3 to 6 years old, which shows the lack of segment service for childcare until the age of 3. According to the statistics in 2019, the ponderosity of children until the age of 3 in the preschool institutions represented 11,2%. The enrollment rate of children of young age is an indicator in the Objectives of Sustainable development that constituted 23% in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Compared to other European countries, the enrolment of children with the age of 3 is bigger, for example in Belgium – 98%, Iceland – 97%, Norway – 96%, Sweden – 92%, Italy – 91%, Czech Republic – 77% etc (OECD, 2020).

The interviews conducted with parents have highlighted a series of problems connected

to the activity of institutions of preschool education. The issues are: insufficient staffing in the kindergartens, overcrowded institutions, lack of qualitative conditions (hygiene, food), collecting of unofficial financial resources. Also, the work schedule of preschool institutions doesn't coincide with that of the parents. Another problem is the reduced-hour schedule of kindergartens during summer period. In this context, we underline that some interviewed employees mentioned "we have many mothers that take unpaid leave". Since spring 2017, based on the Ministry of Education decision, it has started the unsuccessful practice of 42 days of vacation in kindergartens, offered in the first's interval of June and thirty - first of August, under the conditions that employees with children have a standard leave of maximum 28 calendar days per year. All these things denote that almost all parents face problems with the access to proper and accessible care that meet children and parents' needs. The European practice offering childcare services under the age of 7 focuses on preventing the overcrowding of nurseries and kindergarten. This way it is possible to ensure good care, education, health and accident prevention.

Because of the reduced financial possibilities, only 3,4% of parents have mentioned that their children attend private kindergartens and 3,5% the private ones. 6,5% are obliged to leave their children with friends or neighbours. 27,8% of respondents declared that they applied to the help of grandparents and other relatives. Out of the total number of respondents mentioned that grandparents don't involve in grandchildren's education, only 1,8% mentioned that the husband and wife don't allow this thing to happen and the same percent say that grandparents don't want to do it. In other situations, this thing doesn't occur because of some objective factors like: grandparents are far away (they live in other city/country) - 49,7%; they continue to be employed: 15,5%; they can't take care of grandchildren because of old age or health condition - 15,5 %; the grandparents are not alive – 7,7% and other reasons - 3,7%. The studies in this field emphasize that grandparents play an important role in preschool children's life, for efficient integration of children in preschool institutions, for establishing friendships, communicating with other children and their teachers etc. Moreover, the relation between grandparents and grandchildren is deep, based on unconditional love, respect, acceptance, empathy, help and psycho-emotional support. Grandparents play an important role in personal identity assertion of the child, the feeling of membership and solidarity (Simcenco, 2015).

14,5% of total amount of participants to the study underlined that they applied to the service of babysitters/nannies. From the fact that this service is expensive, 29,7% didn't apply to it, because the money earned at work wouldn't be sufficient for paying babysitter/nanny's

services. 45,4% don't trust strange people and the rest of respondents gave other reasons. From the amount of 62,3% who applied to service of babysitters/nannies were very satisfied or just satisfied of the service, 14,5% neither satisfied nor unsatisfied and the rest were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied (23,2%). The babysitters/nannies' activity is not regulated properly in the Republic of Moldova, this is possible as patent holder, and getting this patent doesn't require any certain set of conditions necessary to be verified by the state.

Most frequently, the women with small children from Chisinau face the problem with necessary flexible schedule at work (46,1%), so to speak, to adapt the program to the family needs. The flexible work schedule is crucial for employees' ability to combine work and family, it is beneficial for young parents. They are the ones who face the most difficulties in balancing work and family.

**Tab. 1: The situations that mothers always or often confront at workplace (in %)**

	Public	Private	Other	Total
Necessity to have a flexible work schedule	41,9	50,4	39,4	46,1
Impossibility to go on business trips	21,6	30,7	36,3	26,9
Dissatisfaction of employers regarding the necessity to take a sick leave	30,6	30,2	35,8	30,8
Impossibility of taking your vacation when you want	30	30,8	27,2	30,3
The necessity to work overtime	31	34,9	39,4	33,3
The technological process at workplace can't be interrupted	29,2	24,8	45,4	27,7

Source: The study "Parents between the need to work and family responsibilities" (NIER, 2019).

The large volume of work but also the insufficiency of the staff in certain fields of activity determine the need to work overtime. In this way, 33,3% of the total number of interviewed mothers mentioned that they had the same situation, 34,9% were from private sector and 31% from the public one. In this context we underline that in various studies (Buelens, Broeck, 2007) it was found out that the workers from the public sector confront fewer conflicts between personal and professional life than those from the private sector. Also, they have a higher level of family satisfaction life and more free time.

It relates the most acute problem of mothers with preschool children to the care of the child in situations where he becomes ill. More mothers have admitted that it is necessary to allot time for the diagnosis and child treatment. 31,1% from interviewed mothers have underlined that they confronted the dissatisfaction of the employer at the workplace to take medical leave to take care of their sick child. 49,5% of respondents have mentioned that they have had to work in the last 3 months, although they should have taken sick leave because of the child health conditions.

According to the data of studies, 22,8% of mothers with children of preschool age declared that they work over 8 hours a day. Also, according to the statistics 310, 3 thousand of

people work over 41 hours per week. This thing denotes that these parents have to reduce the time spent with child/children and involve less in the educational activity of them. The interviewed parents admitted that, in particular, shift work has some negative implications. “*The night work is suitable neither for children nor for me*”. Those who work in shifts, at night, find it difficult to juggle with a lot of responsibilities. Sometimes, however, parents by themselves opt for non-standard work schedules because they can be a means of meeting their child’s care needs or a strategy in which they provide care while one spouse is at work.

On the other hand, another category of mothers highlighted the problem of limited part-time job opportunities for mothers, in the sense that the market does not offer too many options. Thus, in some situations mothers wanted to integrate into the workforce from an early age of the child, opting for a partial work schedule, but in the absence of its possibility they have to work full time or not at all. “*From the beginning, I wanted to work part-time, 4 hours, but I could not. I was told either full time or not at all*”. According to statistics data in 2017, out of 67.4 thousand people who had a part-time program, 35.9 thousand were women. In some situations, part-time work helps women to balance their family life with their professional life. Some studies have shown that women who work part-time report a higher level of happiness at home and greater satisfaction with their children than women who work full time (Higgins et al., 2018).

At present, fathers have an important role in providing support to their wives in the care and education of children, the ideal of the modern father represents to be caring and active in the child’s life. At 70,6% the husband agreed to return to work, at 65% the husband gave the wife the help to return to work, and at 12,5% of the respondents the husband considers that the service influences negatively the fulfillment of family responsibilities. This denotes the predominance of traditional values, according to which women should give priority to family responsibilities, while men should fulfill their role as family income earners.

Although men’s involvement in household chores has strengthening role in the family, the progress in dividing the tasks is slow. In most cases, the partner who earns the least from paid work is the one who makes the largest share of unpaid work, while the partner who earns the most will specialize in the labour market to maximize household income. Despite the increase in the average monthly earnings of both women and men, the gender disparity persists in the Republic of Moldova.

The study data showed that the problem of balancing work and family life is more pronounced in single parents’ family because they are more constrained by the lack of time and

financial resources than with entire families. The lack of quality and affordable childcare services makes single mothers face more challenges in the labour market. Single parents avoid working long hours, which is an additional disadvantage in the labor market and can lead them to accept low or unsecured jobs to meet the needs of childcare.

**Tab. 2: The rate of employment in 2018 (in %)**

	Total	Males	Females
Total	48,4	47,8	49
Persons who don't have children at preschool age	48,8	44,3	53,8
Persons who have at least one child at preschool age	47,6	55,6	40,9

Source: www.statistica.md

The data presented in Table 2 show that the appearance of children contributes to a greater employment of fathers in the labor market and, on the contrary, "removes" mothers from the labor market. Thus, all the difficulties described above contribute to the employment rate among mothers with pre-school children to be 13% lower than among those without pre-school children. In the absence of sufficient solutions, women choose to leave the labor market after the appearance of the child, for a longer period, than to face working conditions that do not allow them to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

The data in the table 3 below reveals that the younger the children are, the higher the proportion of mothers who want more time for family life is, who want to dedicate more time to the family, but the financial situation does not allow them. The fact that only 27,9% of women stated that they can combine work with family life, shows that it is still difficult for women to be a good employee, wife and mother at the same time.

**Tab. 3: Mothers opinion related to the reconciliation of family and professional life (in %)**

	Total	The presence of children from 3 to 7 years old	The presence of children by the age 3
I manage very well to combine work and family	27,9	22,4	29,3
I would like to devote to children but the financial situation doesn't allow me	31,5	30,5	35,5
I want more time for my family	40,6	40,2	42,1

Source: The study "Parents between the need to work and family responsibilities" (NIER, 2019).

In this context there are necessary policies in balancing the work and family life at workplace, for all parents to lighten their burden pressure experienced in combining work with family life. However, some researchers in the field consider it difficult to support employees in ensuring a work-life, because it is individualized and it can be complicated for a person to understand what kind of balance will be optimal for him (Исупова, 2019).

Employers have also realized the need to develop and implement reconciliation policies in enterprises, pointing out various obstacles they face:

- it is impossible to develop flexible work programs due to existing restrictions in the legal framework. *"If an accident happens during working hours and he is not inside the company, it is considered a work accident. We are responsible for the life and safety of the employees, for this reason, he must be in the institution during working hours". "The law does not allow or prohibit work at home, it is very ambiguous"*.

- it is difficult to respect hygiene and safety rules in the situation of performing work at home. *"We have to make sure the room is bright, the cables are ok. But we will not go and check in his house"*.

Although employers have limited capacity to support parents in balancing work and family life, they are interested in developing measures to support employees to this end. Thus, the issue of the harmonious combination of family and professional roles no longer remains private only for parents. Employers have a key role to play in creating parent-friendly jobs, acting as an intermediary between the state and the employee.

Analyzing at European level, in 2015 in the European Union about 1/5 workers had access to flexibility and other 6% to the autonomous work. There is a rather big national variation in all Europe. Workers from the North European countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Holland have the majority access to the flexible appointment. Workers from the south and other countries from the East Europe like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania have at least less than 10% access. The comparison of data of 2015 with 2010 established a slight growth in this sense. (Heejung, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study showed a high level of motivation of mothers to work, especially to earn money, but also the need to develop flexible work programs to access. Flexible work schedules are essential for employing the mother (full time) after birth, reducing the work-family conflict and improving the use of time (Lott, 2018).

Women need support in order to be employed and good mothers at the same time, because they are put in a position to somehow fit the motherhood in their professional activity, or, on the contrary, to make the work convenient to the fulfillment of parental obligations. Moreover, the national context in the Republic of Moldova further defines childcare as a predominantly female responsibility and a way of self-realization.



The rigidity of the legal framework determines the impossibility of the employers to offer them some conditions that would allow them to harmoniously combine the family life with the professional one - flexible work programs, work from home etc.

The conciliation between professional activity and private/family life remains in the Republic of Moldova at the desired level, its lack continuing to be a factor of indirect discrimination of women on the labor market. The lack of conditions to successfully combine work with family responsibilities conditions that employed mothers experience fatigue and stress, which can become both causes of inefficient work, but also of family problems. Also, due to the imbalance between work and private life, society suffers considerable losses: vulnerable families, overworked parents and less performing at work.

In conclusion, we find that the costs spent by parents from the Republic of Moldova for maternity are significant. They are determined by the prevalent situation from the childcare system, by regulating the work market and this gender relation. Studies in this field have highlighted that these costs are bigger in the countries with rigid labour market and don't have family policies oriented to the support of successful reconciling of maternity and paid work (Matysiak, Vignoli, 2009).

To ensure a better balance between family and professional life, for parents with children of preschool age from the Republic of Moldova it is imposed the necessity for improving the condition of preschool institutions (to increase the number of workers and offer a decent salary to adapt the activity program of children to the schedule of parents); fast regulation in law concerning the work schedule, work from home and gender equality promotion.

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