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Gender asymmetries in family and work spheres: strategies and conflicts of qualified women working in Portuguese State Administration.

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In Portugal, feminine activity rate of working mother is high but remains structural asymmetries of responsibilities between women and men in familiar spheres. Based on quantitative and qualitative data results are presented that show that, in spite of a global feminization rate of 58,6%, women workers in State Administration remains with major responsibilities in familiar/private lives than men. Women in technical and leadership functions have the same patterns of familiar and domestic responsibilities but different patterns of work-time. Women in technical functions tend to have a strategy of work-family time balance, despite less career opportunities, while women in leadership functions adopt a supremacy of work-time, just as men. Nevertheless, both women, in technical and leadership functions, feel a permanent conflict between career and family responsibilities, which is not felt by men. Gender roles define dominant models of work and family organisation which conduct to different professional strategies and career opportunities.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present some relevant findings of a research project carried out between 2004 and 2006, by the National Institute for Public Administration of Portugal, regarding the gender relations and gender equality at work in Portuguese State Administration.

The general objectives of the research were:

- To characterize the general work situation of men and women positioned at careers and/or functions of a superior level of qualifications - mainly regarding the access to, and the performance of, leading functions -
- To identify the most relevant characteristics of the time use in work and family spheres and interactions between them
- To understand the dominant cultural values and gender stereotypes and the impacts in strategies and career opportunities for men and women

The methodology of the research was quantitative and qualitative. The universe of the study was women and men working at state administration, with minimum academic degree of bachelor and working in high skilled functions - in technical or leadership/management functions. The number was around 267 000 workers.

At a first moment a general overview of the public workers – gender, areas of work and income level was made. Secondly a questionnaire was applied to 2205 public workers and public managers and at a third phase, semi-direct interviews were made with sixteen workers of all Ministries: 8 men and 8 women, half of them in leadership/management functions at the time of interview and four with children under fourteen.

The results presented address mainly the time use in paid work and non paid work (private sphere) - the organization of work time, the division of domestic and care work- and the work-life balance strategies and conflicts of women regarding career opportunities and functions – leadership or technical functions.

Men and Women, Work and Family

In 2006, in Portugal, female activity rate was 47,7% and the male activity rate was 58,7%. The female employment rate of women aged 15-64 years was 62,3% against 73,8% of men. For women aged 25 to 34 years the employment rate was 86,6% against 92,6% for men. For women aged 35 to 44 years was 84,7% and for men was 94,6%. Employment rate of mothers with children under 6 was, in 2007, 74 %.¹ Women participation rate in labour market in Portugal is one of the highest among other EU countries²

¹ All data are from National Statistics Institute (www.ine.pt)

² Eurostat, 2008

The legal working hours per week are, in private sector, 35 to 40 hours and in Public Administration 35 hours. 84,2% of women and 92,6% of men were, in 2007, working full time (defined as more than 35 hours per week), and 15,8% of women and 7,4% of men were working part-time.

The National Time Use Survey³ (2000) clearly shows that women workers work, a day, one hour less than men workers in paid work, but three more hours in domestic and care work. Comprehensive data about the division of paid and unpaid work (Torres et al, 2004), shows that is gender and not the working situation (employee/professional or not), age or academic degree that defines the division of work.

Women still have the major responsibilities for all the domestic activities – cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping. Taking care of children is the activity between the parents share more, specially if they have superior academic degree (Torres et all, 2004).

With regard to attitudes to the work and family life and gender roles, Portuguese women and men reveal a relatively traditional position. They think that both women and men should work in paid work but that children (little children) are somehow penalized for it, or that men should work full time and women part-time, in order to care of little children (Crompton& Lyonette, 2007; Wall, 2007). About domestic division of labour, in Portugal a traditional model based on the traditional gender activities is more likely a practice of less qualified workers, but it can be seen in all groups of workers (Wall, 2007).

Important factors for equal opportunities in carer advancements and work-life balance possibilities are the corporate culture, work organization and human resources policies (Acker, 1992; Newman;1992; Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007). In Portugal, in private organizations the awareness of the problems and the corporate policies are or inexistent or fragile (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007; Alexandre, et al, 2007). The long hours work model is a difficulty for parents that need to care of little children and cannot adapt to that model (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007; Alexandre, et all, 2007). Workers with family responsibilities often need to chose between having career/work opportunities or having time for those responsibilities (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007; Alexandre, et al, 2007) Maternity, more that paternity has a significant impact on circumstances and strategies of women workers (Acker, 1992).

Another relevant factor is the welfare state model. The Portuguese welfare state is a “familiaristic” type (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 2000) were families have the major responsibility for child and older care. Public childcare facilities are oriented for very low income people so families must support childcare strategies: support expensive facilities or, if it is possible, to use family support or other non formal solutions (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007; Torres et al, 2004; OECD, 2007)

³ National Statistics Institute, 2000, “National Time Use Survey” (www.ine.pt)

The dual earner model is a reality of Portuguese families. In Portugal the number of women working full time is high, even if they are mothers of little children. In spite of high presence of women in labour market, asymmetries in unpaid work persists in Western European Societies (Segalen, 1999; Crompton, 2006). The long working hours model and non-flexible organisational schemes characterize also Portuguese reality (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007). Many parents travel long distances each day between home and work and childcare facilities are expensive (OECD, 2007).

Portuguese State Administration – an overview

Portugal has a welfare state and a highly centralized administration. Education, Health and Social Security are provided by state administration. State administrations is the most important employer of highly qualified workers.

Regarding the number of people working in State Administration, 58,6% are women. Nevertheless, women work mainly in the “welfare Ministries” and men in security/army Ministries. This, we may state, is a structural gendered division of work/professions.

**Portuguese State Administration
Employees by areas (Ministries) and gender, 2006**

| Ministries | Men | Women | Total | feminization % |
|---|-------|--------|--------|----------------|
| CONCIL OF MINISTRIES | 1259 | 1718 | 2977 | 57,7 |
| MINISTRY OF DEFENSE | 882 | 813 | 1695 | 48,0 |
| MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS | 1614 | 1801 | 3415 | 52,7 |
| MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE | 5469 | 5252 | 10721 | 49,0 |
| MINISTRY OF HEALTH | 16357 | 47059 | 63416 | 74,2 |
| MINISTRY OF EDUCATION | 42493 | 156438 | 198931 | 78,6 |
| MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION | 7567 | 9343 | 16910 | 55,3 |
| MINISTRY OF JUSTICE | 12374 | 15616 | 27990 | 55,8 |
| MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS | 949 | 1323 | 2272 | 58,2 |
| MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY | 3097 | 12357 | 15454 | 80,0 |
| MINISTRY OF TOURISM | 221 | 424 | 645 | 65,7 |
| MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND WORK | 1508 | 2604 | 4112 | 63,3 |
| MINISTRY OF CULTURE | 684 | 1544 | 2228 | 69,3 |
| MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND UNIVERSITIES | 14340 | 17016 | 31356 | 54,3 |

| | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS, TRANSPORTS AND COMUNICATIONS | 1246 | 1375 | 2621 | 52,5 |
| MINISTRY OF CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT | 3878 | 2468 | 6346 | 38,9 |
| MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT | 653 | 891 | 1544 | 57,7 |
| SUBTOTAL WITHOUT MILITARY FORCES AND POLICE | 114591 | 27804 2 | 392633 | 70,8 |
| MILITARY FORCES AND POLICE | | | | |
| AIR FORCE | 7808 | 1976 | 9784 | 20,2 |
| ARMY | 22084 | 5615 | 27699 | 20,3 |
| NAVY | 14652 | 1604 | 16256 | 9,9 |
| NATIONAL GUARD | 25569 | 750 | 26319 | 2,8 |
| NATIONAL POLICE | 19897 | 2037 | 21934 | 9,3 |
| SUBTOTAL (MILITARY FORCES AND SECURITY) | 90010 | 11982 | 101992 | 11,7 |
| TOTAL OF STATE ADMINISTRATION | 204601 | 29002 4 | 494625 | 58,6 |

SOURCE : Ministry of Finance and Public Administration , 2006

**Feminization rate of Ministries and of the tow highest income levels,
2006**

| Ministries | Total N | feminizat ion % | feminization of income (month) % | |
|--|------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | | | >€ 5200,00 | €3400, 01 - €5200, 00 |
| | 2977 | 57,7 | 22,6 | 31,3 |
| DEFENSE (WITHOUT ARMY) | 1695 | 48,0 | 0,0 | 6,5 |
| MINISTRY INTERNAL AFFAIRS (WTHOUT SECURITY FORCES) | 3415 | 52,7 | 30,8 | 39,1 |
| MINISTRY AGRICULTURE, FISHING AND FLORESTS | 10721 | 49,0 | 40,0 | 47,9 |
| MINISTRY OF HEALTH | 63416 | 74,2 | 39,0 | 60,6 |
| MINISTRY OF EDUCATION | 198931 | 78,6 | 80,0 | 64,7 |
| MINISTRY OF FINANCES | 16910 | 55,3 | 12,1 | 33,2 |
| MINISTRY OF JUSTICE | 27990 | 55,8 | 30,7 | 47,6 |
| MINISTRY OF FOREING AFFAIRS | 2272 | 58,2 | 64,0 | 53,8 |

| Ministries | Total N | feminization % | feminization of income (month) % | |
|---|------------|-------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | | | >€ 5200,00 | €3400, 01 - €5200, 00 |
| MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND CHILD | 15454 | 80,0 | 0,0 | 45,4 |
| MINISTRY OF TOURISM | 645 | 65,7 | 0,0 | 7,6 |
| MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND EMPLOYEE | 2604 | 63,3 | 42,9 | 36,8 |
| MINISTRY OF CULTURE | 1544 | 69,3 | 50,0 | 53,3 |
| MINISTRY OF SCIENCE; TECHNOLOGY AND UNIVERSITIES | 31356 | 54,3 | 12,4 | 38,5 |
| MINISTRY OF PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION | 2621 | 52,5 | 22,7 | 21,8 |
| MINISTRY OF CITIES A LOCAL GOVERNMENT, | 6346 | 38,9 | 50,0 | 35,2 |
| MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT | 1544 | 57,7 | 0,0 | 22,2 |
| STATE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (WITHOUT ARMY AND POLICIES) | 392633 | 70,8 | 34,5 | 48,5 |

SOURCE : Ministry of Finance and Public Administration , 2006

The data above shows that, in most cases, in spite of superior feminization rates, in the superior income levels (also leadership functions) women are underrepresented.

Gender asymmetries in professions and in income/leadership functions characterize Portuguese State Administration.

Results

The results address mainly the strategies and conflicts of women and men working in all ministries, regarding the relation between work and career opportunities and the interaction with private life.

Quantitative data

Sample

59% of workers are women and 41% are men, 45% are positioned in leadership functions, and 78% have children under fourteen years old.

Women are 60% of the workers between 26 and 45 years old and 37% between 46 and 65. 53% of men are in leadership, against 39% of women. If we look for the number of women and men in leadership functions, between 26 and 45 years old, with children under fourteen, 30% are women and 47% are men.

Working hours

People work mainly – 83% - in normal schedule (35 hours a week) but only 34% have flexible solutions.

Portuguese law allows that workers (male or female) with children under twelve may have a formula of two hours reduction a day (without consequences in income or other rights). This is called *continuous journey*.

In *continuous journey* work only 5% of all workers but, taking gender, 20% are women and 5% are men. This formula is often called “*mother schedule*”. Although this is a work-life balance allowance, women and men in leadership functions don’t use it (1% of men and 2% of women). But 15% of women in leadership functions reported that they would like to use *continuous journey*, against 4 % of men.

Domestic division of labour – practices and perceptions

Regarding domestic division of labour the evidence is of important asymmetries based on gender, despite the exercise of technical or leadership functions. Household activities (cleaning, laundry, etc.) are the more asymmetric – 55% of women work in it every day from 1 to 3 hours, against 20% of men. Playing with children is the more symmetric activity.

When asked about the perceptions of men’s participation in domestic work, 70% of men reported that it is increasing but 53% recognise that domestic work is still women’s responsibility in their own house. The same opinion reported 82% of women. There are no differences related to the exercise of leadership functions. Men’s practices are more conservative than perceptions regarding domestic division of labour with their spouse.

The majority of women and men work full time. Nevertheless, the use of work-life balance solutions is more likely women’s than men’s decision and strategy. Even so, the exercise of leadership functions is an important variable. Women leaders develop strategies according to the *dominant “masculine” model* of long hours work, even wishing to be able to have better work-family balance.

Regarding the domestic division of labour, the dominant model is conservative, based on gendered roles and responsibilities. Women and men in leadership functions have the same practices of working hours but different realities regarding the domestic division of labour. It seems that it’s easier to women in technical functions to use more friendly work-life allowances.

Qualitative data

Evidence from quantitative data shows dominant values and *praxis* that influence strategies and perceptions of career opportunities and work-life balance which are not gender neutral.

In sequence, sixteen interviews were made in order to understand conditions, perceptions and strategies of work-life balance and career development and opportunities by men and women.

Work-family interactions

Men and women had, in their professional life, career opportunities, but only women reported difficulties regarding conciliating work responsibilities with family responsibilities and how these difficulties were important in their career decisions.

Only women in technical functions reported decisions of delaying the increasing of professional responsibilities in order to be able to take care of their children. Only women in leadership functions said that they preferred not have children because of work responsibilities and that the work-life balance is very hard because people expect them to be present and not fail. For men, family responsibilities were never a problem or a difficulty.

“*Long hours*” seems to be the dominant model of working time – leaving work after hours, taking work to do at home - There are no differences between men and women in leadership functions regarding this, but women in technical functions reported as essential, the capacity of their family (mother, sister, husband etc.) to provide support on taking care of children. Men recognised that their spouse role and support is crucial to allow them to work after hours or to go abroad.

Another interesting question that has emerged within the interviews was the peer or superiors perception of the use of work-family balance allowances and of relative justice, being a source of organizational conflict. Work time and legal allowances management seems to be an important issue and a difficulty for working mothers that are aware of the impact that those decisions may have in their professional opportunities and performance assessment.

Work-life interaction is clearly a gendered dimension. And although only women have reported a permanent conflict between these spheres this conflict is, nevertheless, felt quite differently by women in technical or leadership functions. Women in technical functions felt that the family responsibilities interfere and are an obstacle to their work responsibilities, or career advancement possibilities and women in leadership functions say that work

responsibilities have a negative impact on their family responsibilities (time for being with family, quality of “family time”).

Men are aware of the responsibilities asymmetries between men and women in work and private spheres, but don't express intention to change practices, looking at gender roles as natural attributes.

Perceptions

The perception's analyses illustrates a gendered core of values and of professional and individual attributes.

Only women (leaders and technical) report that they have been discriminated in the access to leadership functions and promotion or other career opportunities, that they have to work much more than man to have the same recognition or rewards and say that, much times they need to choose between a career opportunity or family wellbeing.

Only men say that women don't want to assume leadership responsibilities because they want to be as good mothers as possible.

Regarding gender equality promotion, only men say that it is not necessary to do anything more about it but for both, men and women, the increasing number of women in the public administration ultimate signal of gender equality.

Brief conclusions

The first evidence that emerges from data and results is the gendered division of areas of work and of a glass ceiling *phenomenon*. Although the feminization rate, Public State Administration reproduces sexual division of work.

The persistence of a traditional (“feminine”) model of domestic division of labour based on traditional gender roles – in spite of the qualifications of the workers – co-exists with a dominant model (“masculine”) full time and *long hours* work, that seems to be specially difficult for women since family responsibilities only impacts women's work situation and decisions. Work and family are conflicting spheres for women but not for men, and only women faces decisions of *or* (better) work *or* (better) family.

It seems that women leaders need to adapt the “masculine” dominant work time model in order to be able to compete within the organisations but, as the others face a “feminine” asymmetric domestic division of labour. This is a double gendered hard reality.

In spite of feminization rate and all public policies regarding non discrimination and work-life balance, persists, in the Portuguese State Administration, a culture and *praxis* based on traditional gender roles, that reflects on

professional difficulties for women and reinforces the traditional model of domestic division of labour of all workers.

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