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Time Squeeze versus Wellbeing: Gender Differences in Household Management among Maltese Couples with Children

Introduction: Maternity, paternity and responsibility leave, leave to attend ante-natal visits, as well as teleworking, flexi-time and reduced hours are some of the measures available in Malta to facilitate non-work responsibilities for employees. Many of these measures are focused on early stages of the family lifecycle, or on periods when extra care for a family member may be required. They are availed of frequently by Maltese employees, especially mothers; however, the challenges of work-life balance are still a common lamentation when wellbeing is being discussed. Simultaneously, Malta is experiencing multiple demographic shifts, including a greater proportion of dual-career families, an emerging same-sex parent household group, and labour market entrance of Generation Y individuals who strongly value the balance between professional career and time for personal interests and family. Given this scenario, a research study is being initiated to explore various aspects of time management in Maltese families with children, with a particular focus on gender differences in sustainable reconciliation of work commitments with family obligations and personal needs of both parents.

Methods: This research will revolve around a number of case studies involving families of different configurations (parental employment type/hours; number and age of children; parents' gender; provision of special care for a family member). Data will be collected through household management diaries and one-to-one interviews with parents.

Findings: Differentiated strategies implemented to keep the household operating successfully on a daily basis will be uncovered, as will physical, psychological and social barriers to devoting quality time to children, significant others and oneself. Particular attention will be given to parents' perceptions and realities of the experienced time squeeze, the division of responsibilities and chores, and how these impact on individual careers and wellbeing.

Recommendations: Implications of the study results for decision-making and practical skills in Home Economics education will be presented.