

FLEXIBILISATION OF WORK AND PREFERENCES AND NEEDS OF SLOVAK PARENTS IN THIS AREA

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Abstract

Between European countries there are significant differences in the employment of female labour, particularly of women with young children. The reasons of this situation are not only economic. Also factors of sociological and cultural nature play an important role. In our research we emphasise although on these non-economic factors, which are country-specific preferences and specific behaviour of parents with young children in Slovakia by their division of gender roles to home care, to children care and to their participation in the labour market. These preferences and behaviour are determined by institutional and structural factors too and interaction of these factors is indisputable, therefore their influence on the decision can not be viewed in isolation, but in synergy. In this paper we will present first results of primary research of needs and preferences of parents in balancing professional life with family obligations in Slovakia, with an emphasis on positive labour flexibilisation as a tool for promoting the reconciliation of working and non-working life (here especially family life). Based on these results we will formulate recommendations for improving the situation of working parents in the area of reconciling work and family life, with an emphasis on the tools of positive labour flexibilisation.

Key words: work-life balance, flexibility of work, flexibilisation of labour

JEL Code: J24, J81, M14

Introduction

With new forms of positive labour flexibilisation in Slovak and Czech conditions deal many experts in theoretical and practical terms. They are dealing with different aspects of flexibilisation of work - specifically with economic, legal, sociological, political and other aspect of problematic. In this paper we primarily associate this issue with the needs of parents of children in preschool and school age, and we will understand a positive labour

flexibilisation as a tool for promoting the reconciliation of working and non-working life (here especially family life).

There are different views on the problematic of flexibilisation and work-life balance – from the demand site (the recipients - the parents/families), namely policies and instruments to implement flexibilisation and work-life balance and from the supply side of these policies and measures at all levels (national, regional, local, business, civil) too. We will pay attention primarily to the demand for flexible forms of work in order to satisfactorily reconcile working and non-working, especially family life. The issue of positive flexibilisation of work as a means of reconciling work and family life is closely related to patterns of family behaviour, needs and preferences of parents in the care of children, to the issue of gender division of roles in the field of work and family.

Between European countries there are considerable differences in the employment of female labour force, particularly in the case of women with young children. The reasons are not only economic, but also cultural and sociological. Especially on these non-economic factors, preferences or behaviour of parents with young children - in particular the participation rate of mothers in the labour market in Slovakia – we emphasise in this paper, based on the assumption that these preferences and behaviour patterns are nationally/culturally specific, due to influence of institutional and structural factors such a state social and family policy, labour market conditions, labour demand and working conditions (specifically for parents of young children). In the theoretical part of the paper we summarize some theories dealing with the supply of labour force by parents, using the method of content analysis and comparisons. In the application part of the paper we present the results of our primary research of preferences and needs of parents to reconcile working and family life (the respondents were Slovak parents (women and men) of children under 14 years of age and a method of data collection was a questionnaire survey).

1 Theoretical assumptions of problematic and current status on the basis of international comparison

Research of positive flexibilisation of work as an instrument of work-life harmonization issue requires a multidisciplinary approach. Economic theory, first the economic theory of human capital, family economics, economics of gender relations, explains

the form of childcare and the form and extent of participation of parents in the labour market, and decisions of reconciling work and family exclusively with economic arguments (see Čaplánová, 1999, s. 30 - 38). In addition to economics, the problem of overlapping spheres of work and family life and gender division of roles in the lives of families is object of contemporary sociology too (see Bodnárová, Čermáková, Gerbery, Chorvát, Hašková, Holubová, Křížková, Maříková, Porubánová, Šanderová, Šmídová, Vohlídalová). In sociology a Catherine Hakim's theory of preferences is known. Family and labour market were understood contradictory by Hakim. She also believes that the behaviour of men and women would not converge, even if the labour market discrimination against women no exists. Hakims theory of preferences criticize Crompton and Harris due absence of consideration of institutional and structural factors in explaining the decision-making of women (see Leahy, Doughney, 2006, p. 37-48).

Sphere of work and family in many theoretical approaches, but in everyday life too, are often seen as contradictory/conflicting spheres. Šanderová and Šmídová (2009, p. 106, 107) differentiate the following strategies linking parental roles and work roles (particularly in terms of their passivity, respectively activation with the aim to satisfactory alignment/articulation/harmonization): 1st activation strategies in terms of usage rights, but also of active and requiring enforcement and of usage of potential options, 2nd strategy "hidden parentage," which is concealing intend to have children, concealment of pregnancy and later the efforts of parents to adapt their parenthood to "no disrupt" a mode of employment, 3rd strategy called "life on the edge" is only temporarily possible, until some change in work life, in family life, or in both comes.

At the end of the first few chapters of OECD data from the Family Database (see www.oecd.org/social/family/database) documenting the different participation rates of women /mothers in the labour market. According to latest available data for OECD countries (derived from 2009, for selected countries most recent data come from the years 1999 to 2010) the employment of mothers with the youngest child under 3 years is highest in Slovenia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Cyprus and Portugal, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Belgium and Austria. The share of employed mothers with youngest child under 3 years exceeds in these countries 60%, followed by France, Canada, Germany, Israel, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ireland, Romania, Italy, Chile, Spain, USA, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Mexico and New Zealand with a share of over 40%. Than follows Malta, Bulgaria, Estonia and Japan with a share of over 30%. In Turkey, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary makes the proportion

of employed mothers with a youngest child aged less than three years less than 20%. Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Estonia also show the greatest differences in the employment rate of mothers with the youngest child under 3 years old and with the youngest child between 3 and 5 years.

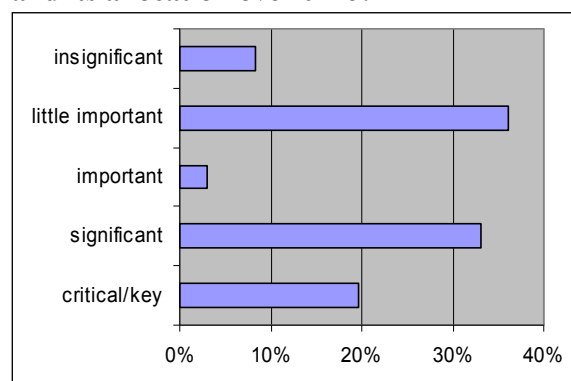
2 The importance given by Slovak parents to actions promoting reconciliation of work and family life

Considering a high degree of rigidity of the Slovak labour market, in particular as regards the low rate of use of instruments of positive forms of flexibilization of work and non-working life in comparison with other European countries, we set the first phase of the project to examine the demand side - interest, needs, requirements, and design real decision of parents in this area, as the most numerous and most famous group of the recipients of promoting tool for positive flexibilization of work.

We based on the assumption, and first research results confirm it, that the needs and preferences of the parents in this area are country-specific, and are subjective with respect to cultural and social norms and values, and determined by structural factors and institutional arrangements. We therefore examined in the first phase, before proposing recommendations to promote positive labour flexibilisation in practice, the needs and preferences of the parents in the field of working life and family life. We detect the value orientation of parents in relation to the arrangement of their family life and in connection with their participation in the labour market, and we have identified patterns of behaviour that are influenced not only by the preferences of the parents, but also by institutional and structural factors operating from outside the family.

The answers to questions 1-5 concern the significance of factors affecting decision-making and behaviour of parents with young children about reconciliation childcare and paid work in employment. An importance of factor rated respondents on a scale of 1 to 5 (while 1 - insignificant, 2 - little important, 3 - important, 4 - significant, 5 - critical / key).

Fig. 1: How do parents assess the importance of possibility/impossibility to adjust the length of working time and its allocation over time?

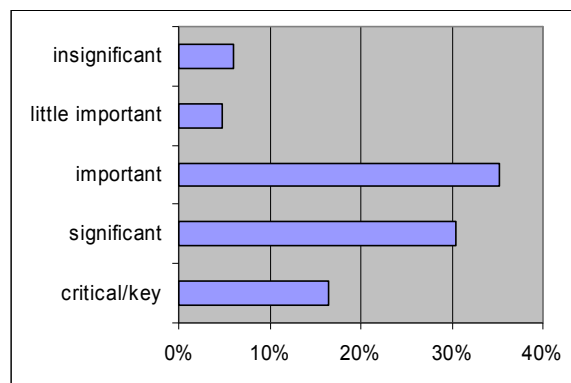


Source: Processing of the results of our own research

The responses to the 1st question clearly showed that the halt of respondents - Slovak parents - don't recognize the flexible organization of working time and flexible working forms as important, respectively they have very low requirements on employers in this area. This is result of decades of persistent high employment rate of women with young children in Slovakia and of traditional fixed working regimes. Less than a fifth of respondents (not only women but also men) value the possibility of the organization of working time and working patterns as a key factor of promoting reconciliation of working and family life, respectively less than 60% of respondents ranked this factor on a scale of importance to one of the three most important. Rest of respondents rate this factor as little important or insignificant.

More clear/strong opinions we state by the answers to the second question about gender division of roles in childcare between partners. Crucial importance attributed to gender division of roles in the family as a factor supporting the work-life alignment 15% of respondents. One of the three leading positions attributed to this factor more 80% of respondents.

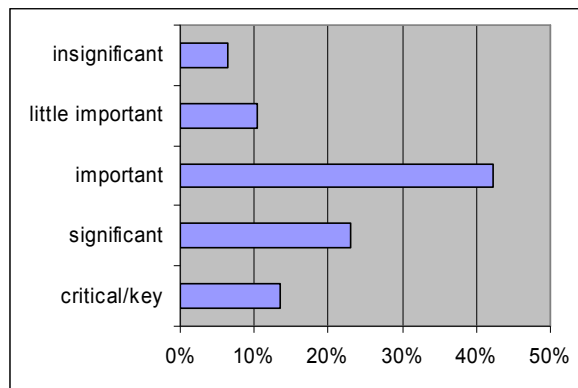
Fig. 2: How do parents assess the importance of the division of childcare between partners?



Source: Processing of the results of our own research

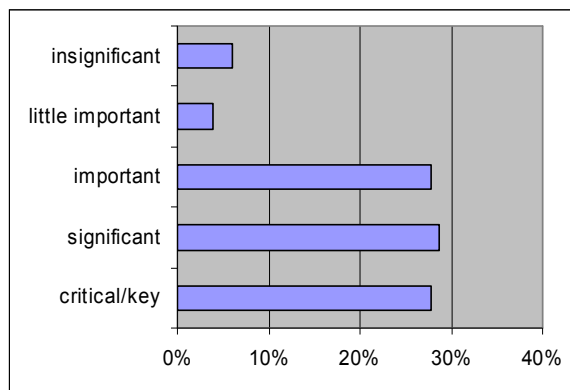
Primary put parents an emphasis no on working conditions and flexible working arrangement, but on support of parents by instrument of state social policy, particularly on financial contributions, which is documented in answers to questions No. 3, 4 and 5.

Fig. 3: How do parents assess the importance of satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the length of maternity/parental leave?



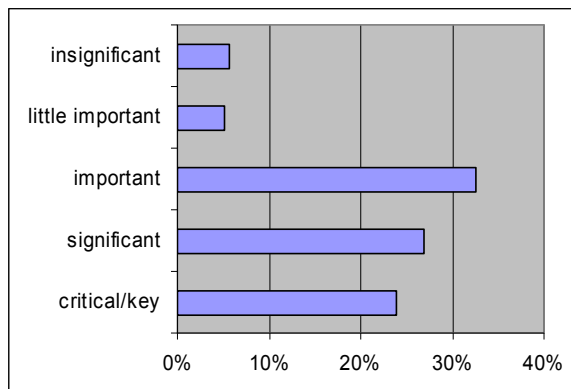
Source: Processing of the results of our own research

Fig. 4: How do parents assess the importance of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the amount of maternity/parental contribution?



Source: Processing of the results of our own research

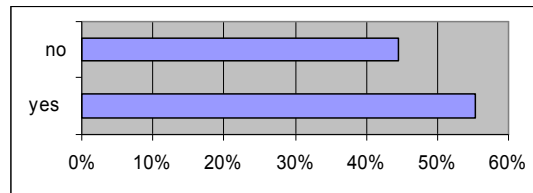
Fig. 5: How do parents assess the importance of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the introduction and amount of contribution to support child care?



Source: Processing of the results of our own research

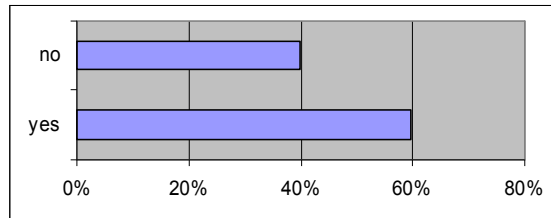
In the last two questions we ask parents about needs of positive working time flexibilisation during the day, but also during the week or month longer, particularly in order to accumulate hours worked and instead choose a day off. Such in answers to the first question, in answers to questions 6 and 7 many respondents (I think to many) confirmed, that the expectations of parents to employers concerning flexible working conditions are too low, inadequate, unpretentious.

Fig. 6: Would parents choose the option to rearrange working hours during the day?



Source: Processing of the results of our own research

Fig. 7: Would you choose the option to rearrange working hours during the week?



Source: Processing of the results of our own research

Conclusion

The research results confirmed the very conservative views of Slovak parents on the issue of reconciling work and family life. Parents prefer, before a creating appropriate working conditions and implementation of flexible modes of work organization and forms of work, rather tools of state social policy (length of maternity and parental leave and amounts of

maternal/parental allowances). Compared with the past, we observed an increasing parents' demands for quality and accessibility (both financial and spatial) childcare facilities. A very similar view was confirmed by the researches of the Czech population. Our task in the next phase of the solution of our research project will be to examine statistically significant differences in the answers of parents by age, sex, number of children, by level of education, by economic activity of parents.

These conservative views of parents we attach to gender stereotyped roles of both parents in raising children, and subsequently to their options to participate in the labour market at this stage of their lives. Equally important role in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of parents in this area plays a setting of institutional or structural factors (particularly labour market situation).

Attitudes and behaviour of parents in the labour market we attach to weaknesses awareness of parents and to their disinterest to actively seek their rights at the workplace, however. Very low level of awareness of parents as recipients of the innovative possibilities of positive flexibilisation of work, intended for parents in order to harmonize their duties and childcare, we attach to insufficient public awareness and to insufficient information about problematic too. Our goal is to change the status quo for the better.

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