

The Linkages between Work and Family: State of Knowledge and Policy Implications

Nadia Steiber, Nuffield College, University of Oxford

The linkages between work and family emerged as a distinct area of research in the 1960s and 1970s (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000). When the male breadwinner model was still the norm, disjoint bodies of literature existed on work and on the family, but rarely was the connection between the two studied. By the 1980s, it was widely acknowledged that work and family are interrelated domains (Pleck 1977; Goldsmith 1988; Edwards and Rothbard 2000; Voyandoff 2002; Voyandoff 2004) with the area of work-family studies evolving into a rapidly expanding domain of study (for a review of research from the 1990s, see Haas 1999; Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999; Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000; Fredrikson-Goldsen and Scharlach 2001). This report elaborates on the current state of knowledge in research on the work-family interface, focussing on trends in the gender division of paid and unpaid labour, changing family formation behaviour and the consequences of employment for family well-being.

Social trends in the gender division of labour

During the last decades industrialized society witnessed a steady and in some countries dramatic increase in female labour market participation. As a result, the traditional male breadwinner model, which was the norm for middle-class married couples until the 1960s, was gradually replaced by the dual-earner model (e.g. Crompton 1999; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001; Leira 2002). Today, dual-earner couples represent more than 50% of couple households in most countries (Franco and Winqvist 2002b). However, while in a growing number of households both partners work full-time, there was also an increase in households in which both partners work less than desired (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Franco and Winqvist 2002a; Gregg and Wadsworth 1998; 2003; Gregg et al. 2004). Moreover, as employment has increased most rapidly among well-educated women, who tend to be in partnerships with high income earning men, the diffusion of dual-earner families has given rise to a polarisation between work-rich and work-poor households (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Kay 2003; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001). Concomitant with the rising number of women in the workforce, we witnessed a dramatic change in family formation behaviour. Many couples delay or limit childbearing, or decide not to have children at all (Altucher and Williams 2003; Rendall and Smallwood 2003; Hewlett 2002).

What has not changed is that women, employed or not, still tend to perform more household and childcare work than men (Hochschild 1989; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001; Franco and Winqvist 2002b; Leira 2002). While women tend to perform less housework than previous generations, because the work of care is increasingly moved to the paid sector, recent studies suggest that in most countries men's participation in house-keeping and childcare has not increased substantially (Gershuny 2000; Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001).

Explaining current patterns of the gender division of labour

There is a bulk of literature concerned with finding explanations for national differences in the form and extent of female participation (e.g. Gornick et al. 1997; Gauthier 1996; Daly 2000; Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2001; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Pfau-Effinger 1998; 2004; Uunk et al. 2005). These studies suggest that female labour force participation tends to be higher, is less likely to be interrupted during the child-rearing phases and is more likely to take the form of full-time employment in countries, which have developed a 'family friendly' policy framework (e.g. extensive provision of affordable, full-time care services, paid parental leave, availability of part-time work, individual taxation) and where we find a modernised gender culture.

However, this view fails in predicting women's strong involvement with the labour market in countries such as Portugal or the Baltic States, where the childcare infrastructure is poorly developed and where people tend to think that female employment negatively affects child well-being (see Figures 1 and 2).

Moreover, recent studies show that contrary to countries such as Britain or West Germany, where the presence of small children has a large negative impact on female labour supply, this effect is much smaller in the Nordic countries but also in Southern Europe (Uunk et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2003). This is confirmed by comparative data from the Joint Employment Report 2004/05: while the gap in employment rates comparing childless women aged 20-50 with mothers of children aged 0-6 in the same aged group amounts to 30%-points or more in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia and Slovakia, motherhood has a much smaller effect on female employment rates in the Nordic countries, Austria, Lithuania, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Greece, and even tends to come along with higher female participation in Slovenia and Portugal (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: Childcare coverage and female employment rates (full-time equivalents)

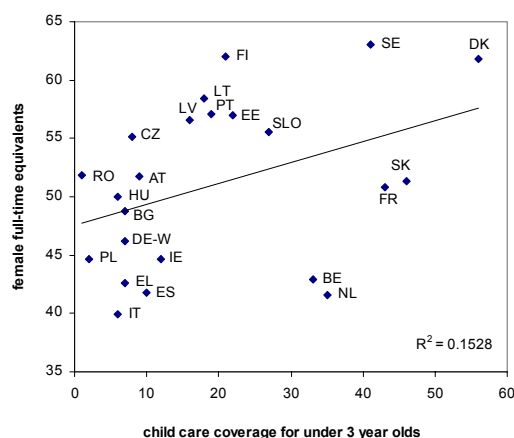


Figure 2: Gender culture and female employment rates (full-time equivalents)

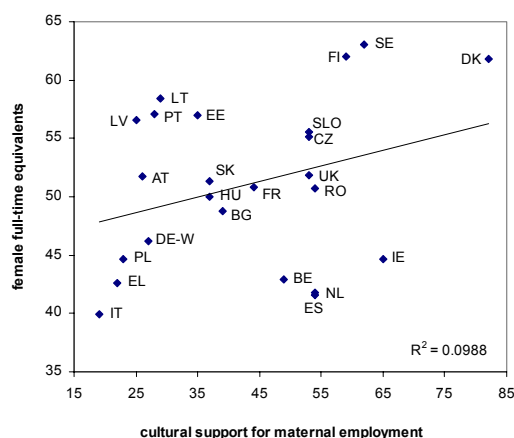


Figure 3: Employment impact of motherhood I: children aged 0-6

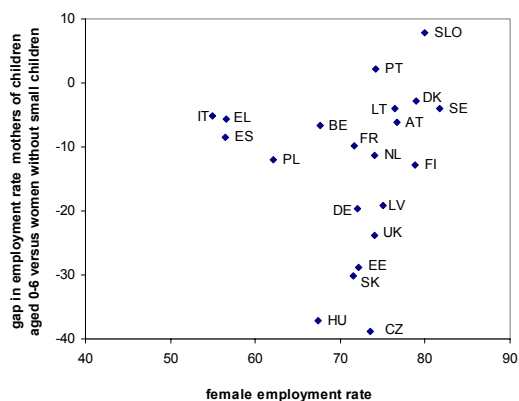


Figure 4: The availability of part-time work and female employment rates

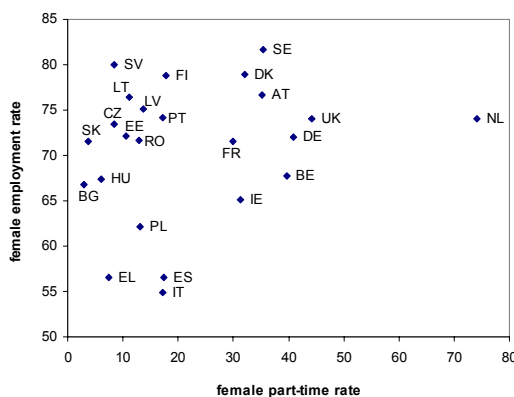


Figure 1: Childcare coverage rate from Remery and Plantenga (2005) for most countries; for Ireland and for Slovakia from OECD (2001), for Romania (for 1997) from UNICEF (1999). Data on female full-time equivalents from Remery and Plantenga (2005).

Figure 2: The measure of prevalence of negative views towards maternal employment is the share of respondents (strongly) agreeing that pre-school child suffers when the mother works (calculated based on data from the ISSP). Female full-time equivalents from Remery and Plantenga (2005).

Figure 3: Female employment rates refer to employment/population ratio for the age group 25-54, data is from the OECD Employment Outlook 2005 for most countries, data for Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia data for 2001 from Eurostat; employment impact of motherhood defined as the gap in employment rates comparing women aged 20-50 without children and those in the same age group with children aged 0-6, from Remery and Plantenga (2005); for Sweden from the Government Offices (2005).

Figure 4: Female part-time rate from Eurostat (the distinction between full-time and part-time work is made on the basis of respondents' evaluation), data on female employment rate, refer to employment/population ratio for the age group 25-54, see notes for Figure 4.

This suggests that in Italy, Spain and Greece the low level of female labour market participation is not strongly linked to motherhood. Here, most women either work before and after entering motherhood or are non-employed at both times ('exit or full-time model', see Anxo et al. 2006; Gutiérrez-Domènech 2005b). Looking at an enlarged Europe also contests the view that female employment rates tend to be higher where part-time work is more common (as for instance suggested by Daly 2000): In Finland, the Baltic States and Portugal, to name but a few, female

employment rates are high despite a low prevalence of part-time work (see Figure 4).

This is not to say that these factors have no bearing on women's employment decisions. A lack of part-time employment opportunities together with the low availability of public childcare may well contribute to low maternal employment rates in Italy or Spain, as frequently argued (Del Boca et al. 2005). Yet, given that in other countries, where women face similar constraints, maternal employment rates are much higher, we see that observed patterns of female employment behaviour are likely to be the outcome of different factors in different countries (Crompton and Lyonette 2006).

In sum, despite important insights gained into the determinants and consequences of female employment behaviour over the life course, research still has to go some way in explaining national variations. Most of the theoretical accounts on the impact of the cultural and structural context have evolved with view to the more affluent countries of Western and Northern Europe, but it has become clear that these have less explanatory power in Southern Europe and even less so in the New Member States. For instance, while in the Netherlands the expansion of part-time opportunities since the 1980s lead to a sharp rise in female employment (Visser 2002), in the less affluent countries of Europe part-time work is less of an option because many women cannot afford to work reduced hours. The economic necessity for many women to work full-time may also explain mothers' strong paid work involvement in countries where maternal employment is neither institutionally nor culturally supported. Another important factor driving national differences in female employment and explaining the high rate of non-employment both among mothers and childless women in Spain, for instance, is involuntary non-employment (Hofferth 2000; Russell 2000; Haas et al. 2006). Moreover, in Italy and Spain, women's employment rates tend to already decline before entry into motherhood – at marriage (Gutiérrez-Domènech 2005a).

To date, there are only few individual level studies on the impact of institutional factors such as the availability of childcare on women's decisions. Most of these studies, which exploit regional variations in supply, suggest that childcare availability plays a crucial role in women's decisions about work (e.g. Del Boca 2002b for Italy; Büchel and Spieß 2002; van Ham and Büchel 2004 for Germany; van Ham and Mulder 2005 for the Netherlands; Simonsen 2005 for Denmark). The effect of the cost of childcare, by contrast, is still debated (for an overview, see Del Boca and Vuri 2005; Wetzels 2005). A number of studies suggests that the availability of formal childcare is more important than its price, especially when slots are strongly rationed (Gustaffson and Stafford 1992; Chiuri 2000; Del Boca 2002a; Wrohlich 2006). Moreover, it is frequently stressed (Hank and Kreyenfeld 2003) that besides the availability and cost of childcare, the flexibility of opening hours is an important additional parameter in this regard, as is the quality of day-care. However, data on the quality and flexibility of child care facilities is not readily available. Other researchers emphasise that maternal employment behaviour is affected both by formal childcare availability and by the availability of informal care: on the one hand, the extended family can be an important substitute for formal childcare services, especially in contexts where the childcare system is characterized by low availability, high cost and rigid opening hours (Deven et al. 1998; Del Boca 2002a); on the other hand, care services can be brought from the private market, though at much higher cost (Wrohlich 2006). It has

also been suggested that in some countries, such as West Germany, the use of childcare facilities is weakly if at all linked to the employment decision; the reason for this being that part-time care for children aged 3-6 is seen as pre-school education rather than as an opportunity for parental employment. This is suggested by the fact that the non-participation rate among West German mothers whose youngest child is aged 3-6 and in public childcare, amounts to 39% (Wrohlich 2006). An interesting contribution in this respect is the study by van Ham and Büchel (2004), who look at the mediating effect of women's willingness to work on the relation between the availability of childcare and their employment decision. Their finding, that only those mothers who would want to be in employment are affected by supply restrictions, highlights the importance of taking account of the fact that women are heterogeneous as regards their preferred work-family priorities and work plans (Hakim 2002).

It is frequently argued that a lack of part-time opportunities or other forms of flexible employment may constrain women's employment, i.e. that more mothers would opt for employment in the event that such opportunities were more readily available (e.g. Del Boca 2002b). The few studies available which test this proposition at the individual level are inconclusive. Hofferth (1996) suggests that returns to work after childbirth tend to be swifter when employers provide for flexible leave and part-time work. Another study found that mothers working for companies with generous leave policies and flexible scheduling are more likely to return to work after childbirth (Galinsky and Stein 1990). Glass and Riley (1998), by contrast, suggest that women who would have the possibility to phase into work slowly, i.e. on a temporary part-time basis, and enjoy schedule flexibility are not less likely to withdraw from employment after childbirth. We can conclude that, to date, little is known about how part-time opportunities (or other forms of non-standard employment) affect women's employment decisions with comparative work at the individual level completely lacking.

We still know little about the mechanisms by which parents form their employment choices. We know that employment levels are generally higher among better educated women and that countries differ in the degree of variation between high and low educated women (Rubery et al. 1999; Vlasblom and Schippers 2006). Similarly, the more human capital women have accumulated before entering motherhood, the faster their re-entry into the labour force tends to be (Dex et al. 2005; Jonsson and Mills 2001). Yet again, this effect varies across countries (Gustafsson et al. 1996; Gutiérrez-Domènech 2005b). Furthermore, we know that a higher occupational status of the man, tends to decrease female activity in some but not all countries (Blossfeld and Drobnic 2001). However, there is little knowledge about the determinants of such cross-national variations as only few studies have applied an integrative approach looking at the mediating effect of macro-level factors on individual or household level determinants.

The gender division of unpaid work

As women's employment rates, also the gender division of unpaid work in the home displays a high level of differentiation within and across countries. The extent that household and care work are equitably shared has been found to vary depending on the level of economic activity and income share of the partners, the couples' marital status and gender values (Almeida et al. 1993; Bianci et al. 2000; Batalova and Cohen 2002). Our knowledge about cross-national variations in the gender division of unpaid work and especially its determinants is rather limited (recent exceptions include Evertson and Neramo 2004; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Batalova and Cohen 2002) and the few

studies available rarely set out to test the canonical theoretical frameworks for explaining the gender division of unpaid work in different societal contexts. The few studies which do, suggest that the validity of these theories varies between countries and across welfare state regimes (Geist 2005; Evertson and Neramo 2004). For instance, while in some countries the division of housework is mainly determined by the relative resources that each spouse possesses, in others women perform more housework than their male partners even if they have much higher incomes ('gender trumps money', Bittman et al. 2003). Yet, to date, we know little about why the mechanisms that govern the division of housework vary across nations (Coltrane 2000). Moreover, the issue of elder care has become a pressing concern for many employed adults (Allen et al. 2000a). Yet, while there is a considerable body of research on childcare, we know very little about how households manage care for aging relatives (Moen and Chesley 2006).

Changing Family Formation Behaviour

The literature on the impact of employment changes on fertility behaviour is expanding. Recent macro-level evidence (e.g. Ahn and Mira 2002; Rindfuss et al. 2003) suggests that among OECD countries the correlation between the total fertility rate and the female labour force participation rate has changed from a negative value until the early 1980s to a positive value today, because of policy developments in a range of countries that have facilitated the compatibility between employment and childrearing. Other studies, however, contest this view (Engelhardt et al. 2004; Kögel 2004) suggesting that fertility still tends to be lower where female employment rates are high. Economic theories explain this negative relationship with women's rising income potential that implies higher opportunity costs of childbearing. At all events, the view that institutional changes have eased the incompatibility between work and care in some countries goes some way in explaining why there are some countries where female participation tends to reduce fertility, while in others this is less the case (Rindfuss et al. 2003). However, neither view can account for the fact that fertility declines have actually been greatest where female employment is low (e.g. Italy and Spain) or declining (e.g. transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe).

Recent studies have explored the possibility that the decline in fertility has to do with persistently high unemployment and rising labour market insecurities (Adsera 2004; Adsera 2005; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004; Del Boca et al. 2005; Blossfeld et al. 2005). Worsening economic conditions tend to be associated with reduced fertility; however, evidence on the effects of economic uncertainty on fertility decisions is inconsistent: while some studies suggest that employment insecurity leads to a postponed entry into parenthood (e.g. Bettio and Villa 1998 for Italy; Golsch 2003; de la Rica and Iza 2005 for Spain; Bhaumik and Nugent 2005 for East Germany; Ranjan 1999 for Eastern Europe), others fail to identify economic uncertainty as a major factor driving the fertility decline (Kreyenfeld 2005; Ahn and Mira 2001; Andersson 2000). Furthermore, it has been suggested that part-time employment would allow women to combine work and motherhood (Del Boca 2002b), but there is evidence for national differences in the way that working part-time affects fertility (Del Boca et al. 2005; Ariza et al. 2005). More comparative research is needed to see whether the availability and conditions associated with non-standard work arrangements can add to the explanation of national differences in fertility patterns.

There is evidence from a large number of single-country studies that more highly educated women tend to have lower fertility; however, this effect varies across societal contexts (Gustafsson et al. 2002). Yet, only recently have researchers started to put the relationship between individual and household characteristics and fertility decisions 'in context' to explain such national variations (Gustafsson et al. 2002; Billari and Philipov 2004). Research of this kind should help to account for national differences in the relation between female employment and fertility by taking account that apart from women's rising career aspirations, there may be other reasons for falls in fertility such as youth and female unemployment and the spread of precarious work (Gustafsson 2001). Another thesis to explain low fertility in Southern Europe stresses culturally dominant norms with regard to maternal employment and childcare (Bettio and Villa 1998; Di Tommaso 1999).

Extant research draws an ambiguous picture of the potential impacts of childcare availability on fertility. For Italy and East Germany, there is evidence that the availability of public care services increases the probability of having a child (Del Boca 2002b; Hank et al. 2004). Kravdal (1996), by contrast, finds no effect of childcare coverage on the probability of having a child in Norway. Similarly, Andersson and colleagues (2003) fail to detect an impact of regional variations in the characteristics of day-care on parents' propensity to have another child in Sweden. For West Germany, Hank and Kreyenfeld (2003) suggest that the availability of public day-care does not increase the probability of entering parenthood, but access to informal care arrangements does. Similarly, Del Boca (2002b) found that grandparents' help increases the probability of having children and that this effect appears to be more important than the impact of formal childcare availability.

Associated with declining fertility rates is the decline in long-term partnership commitments. In Southern Europe, not only the transition to parenthood but also union formation tends to be postponed (Billari and Kohler 2002; Billari and Rosina 2004; Ahn and Mira 2001). A thesis commonly found in the literature is that labour market flexibilisation and youth unemployment leads young people to delay the establishment of independent households and discourages marriage. A recent contribution (Blossfeld et al. 2005) covers a large number of countries in the aim to understand how employment insecurities at labour market entry impact on partnership formation behaviour. However, more comparative research is needed to understand why non-marital unions have spread rapidly in most countries, while in Southern Europe the significance of these alternative living arrangements is still small (Nazio and Blossfeld 2003). Apart from changes to youth labour markets, possible reasons include the continuing educational expansion (Aassve et al. 2002), high costs of establishing an independent household and strong inter-generational ties (Rosina and Fraboni 2004).

Work and Family Well-Being

Employment and the well-being of adult family members

The literature suggests that combining work and family roles is generally conducive to the well-being and health of women and men, because multiple roles generate economic resources, social support and opportunities for development and success (Barnett and Hyde 2001; Harenstam and Bejerot 2001; Barnett 2004). However, research has also revealed that the combination of family and employment can lead to role overload. Some work demands have been found to negatively affect individual well-being and the quality of family relationships. For instance, when employees work nights, evenings or rotating schedules they have an elevated risk for depression (Bildt and Michelsen 2002). Those working non-standard schedules also tend to

report worse family functioning (Strazdins et al. 2006) and are more at risk of separation and divorce (Presser 2000). Another job characteristic that has been linked to impaired psychological well-being and family relations is job insecurity (Larson et al. 1994; De Witte 1999), with perceived job insecurity being more consistently associated with psychological distress than objective measures (Sverke et al. 2002). Job strain - defined as a combination of high work demands with a low level of control (Karasek 1979) - has a particularly strong effect on the risk for depression and physical health problems when it occurs together with job insecurity - a combination increasingly prevalent in contemporary economies (Strazdins et al. 2004a). Evidence on the impact of temporary work on well-being is mixed: in some countries permanent workers tend to report better health and well-being than workers with fixed-term contracts (e.g. Germany), while in others either no differences according to contract type are found or temporary workers are even found to have better health (e.g. in the Nordic countries and the UK). The impact of temporary work strongly depends on the specific type of contract and on workers' skill level. Thus, attention needs to be paid to the heterogeneous character of temporary work across workers and countries when studying its health-related outcomes (for an overview, see Silla et al. 2005). Evidence on the relation between the number of hours worked and well-being related outcomes suggests that long hours are detrimental to personal and family well-being (Sparks et al. 1997; Spurgeon et al. 1997; Glezer and Wolcott 1999), however, the effect of work hours is not linear, with negative effects being restricted to very long hours (Barnett 1998). Indeed, compared with part-time employment, standard full-time employment tends to be associated with better physical and mental health and a higher quality of marital relations. Mediating factors that have been suggested include the poor quality of many part-time jobs and the greater involvement in housework among part-timers (for overview, see Barnett and Gareis 2002). However, the nature of part-time jobs varies across countries - accordingly, no negative effects of part-time work on well-being were found in the Netherlands (Van Rijswijk et al. 2004). Research on the effects of unemployment is strongly focused on its economic and health implications and there is strong evidence for considerable country differences in this regard (Gallie et al. 2000). Unemployment and its implications for family life, by contrast, is a neglected topic. The few studies available suggest that both men' and women's unemployment increases the chances of marital dissolution (Hansen 2005).

*Parental
employment and
child outcomes*

Given the strong policy efforts to increase female employment rates in the European Union, the impact of maternal employment on child well-being and development is a very sensitive topic. A channel for a positive relationship is the fact that maternal employment increases the level and stability of family income, which is positively related to child outcomes (Joshi and Verropoulou 2000). Some evidence, however, points to a negative effect of maternal employment during the early child-rearing years on child development. A number of studies found a negative association between maternal employment in the first years of children's life and their reading ability in later childhood (Joshi and Verropoulou 2000; Gregg et al. 2005) and educational attainment as young adults (Ermisch and Francesconi 2001; 2002). Effects are strongest when the mother works in the first year of a child's life, with full-time work having a larger negative impact than part-time work (Ruhm 2004). However, the consensus emerging from the literature is that whether children with working mothers suffer or benefit depends on the quality of alternative care (Love et al. 2003; Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002; Han et al. 2001). Recent UK-based evidence suggests that adverse effects of maternal employment during infant years on child development predominantly occur when mothers mainly rely on informal

care from relatives or friends, while children who attend day-care centres appear to be protected from any negative effects (Gregg et al. 2005). Also when it comes to formal day-care at older pre-school ages, there is evidence of benefits to children (Sylva et al. 2004): quality pre-school attendance improves cognitive and behavioural outcomes once school starts. In sum, the message is that if the quality of care is high, there are no adverse effects of non-parental care on child development (see also Waldfogel 2002). Even more so, universal enrolment in high-quality preschool programmes may be an important means to decrease social inequality by breaking the link between parental and child attainment (Esping-Anderson 2004).

In the European Union, nearly half of all employees work at least one Saturday a month and a third work one Sunday or more per month (Boisard et al. 2003). Little is known about the effect that work at such 'atypical' times might have on family life. Non-standard schedules have been viewed as part of job flexibility that is potentially family friendly, because weekend and evening work can be fitted around the partner's schedule, so while one parent is at work, the other is available to give care. However, recent evidence suggests that family activities cannot easily be fitted around non-standard schedules (Daly 2004; La Valle et al. 2002). Children are more likely to have emotional or behavioural difficulties when one or both parents regularly work in the evenings, nights or on weekends (Strazdins et al. 2004b; Strazdins et al. 2006). An important mediating factor in the relation between parental job characteristics and child development and well-being is again the type and quality of childcare used (Han 2005). Workers in part-time or other forms of non-standard employment are less likely to opt for formal modes of childcare, as these are less likely to be flexible enough (Kimmel and Powell 2001; Connelly and Kimmel 2003; Han 2004).

Work family balance

Work-family conflict is typically defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of work and family roles are incompatible in some respect so that meeting the demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet the demands in the other domain (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). It can take two forms: from work to family and from family to work, although work tends to affect family more than vice versa (Frone et al. 1992; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998; Kinnunen et al. 2006). For this reason, most extant research has focused on work-to-family conflict (WFC), also referred to as negative spill-over from work to family.

Work *demands* that have been linked to higher WFC include long working hours (Voyandoff 2004; White et al. 2003; Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Major et al. 2002; Batt and Valcour 2003; Dex and Bond 2005), being required to work extra hours without notice (Voyandoff 2004), job insecurity (Kinnunen and Mauno 1998; Voyandoff 2004; Batt and Valcour 2003), work pressure (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Voyandoff 2004) and non-standard work schedules (Tausig and Fenwick 2001). Work-related *resources* that have been linked to lower WFC include job autonomy or decision latitude, i.e. the extent to which employees are able to decide how to do their jobs (Clark 2001; Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Maume and Houston 2001) and in some but not all studies time autonomy, i.e. having discretion over one's work schedule (Christensen and Staines 1990; Tausig and Fenwick 2001; White et al. 2003; Clark 2001; Batt and Valcour 2003). Recently, researchers have also looked at policies at company level to investigate whether different organisation or human resource practices assist employees in managing the work-family interface. Work-family policies such the availability of parental leave and policies that allow workers to take time-off during the workday to

meet personal or family needs have been found to reduce work-family conflict (Major et al. 2002; Voyandoff 2004), such policies being more effective in the context of a supportive work-family culture that legitimizes the use of such policies (Voyandoff 2004; Batt and Valcour 2003; Maume and Houston 2001; Allen 2001; Thompson et al. 1999; Behson 2002). Berg and his colleagues (Berg et al. 2003) furthermore suggested that high-performance work practices such as the opportunity to participate in decisions, training, performance-related pay, and having a job that is intrinsically rewarding and offers good promotion opportunities positively affect employees' perception of the extent that their company helps them to achieve a balance between their work and family responsibilities. However, such perceptions of companies' 'good will' do not seem to translate into lower levels of experienced work-family conflict among employees. In a pioneering study (White et al. 2003), that looks at the impact of 'high performance' and 'high commitment' human resource and management practices on work-family conflict, it emerged that such practices (e.g. appraisal systems and work organisation practices that emphasise team work), which are commonly observed to provide greater discretionary efforts from employees, tend to increase negative spill-over from work to family.

The presence of small children in the home has been shown to come along with increased levels of WFC (Dex and Bond 2005; Kinnunen and Mauno 1998; Kinnunen et al. 2006) especially among women (Maume and Houston 2001). Moreover, WFC is particularly acute among dual-career couples (Roehling et al. 2003). Little is known about the impact of time demands of care for elderly relatives and about the possible mediating effect of household's capacity or willingness to buy services from the market to reduce unpaid housework and care demands.

The *consequences* of WFC have been extensively documented. A consistent finding in the literature is the significant relationship between such conflict and stress-related health outcomes including psychological strain, anxiety and depression, somatic complaints, elevated blood pressure, exhaustion and alcohol abuse (see Allen et al. 2000b for systematic overview; for recent longitudinal evidence, see Demerouti et al. 2004). WFC has also been linked to decreased job and life satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Noor 2004; Allen et al. 2000b; Grant-Vallone and Donaldson 2001; Kinnunen et al. 2004; Perrone et al. 2006).

Most of the extant research on work-family links has adopted a role conflict perspective. However, individuals may also benefit from combining work and family, i.e. the resources associated with one role may also facilitate the participation in the other role (Barnett and Hyde 2001). Yet, research on positive spillover from work to family and vice versa is scarce, which contributes to a negative view of the work-family interface (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Voyandoff 2004). Indeed, recent research suggests that positive work-to-family spillover tends to be more common than negative work-to-family or family-to-work spillover (Kinnunen et al. 2006; Wayne et al. 2004). Factors that are associated with positive spillover between work and family include learning opportunities, meaningful work, decision latitude and a supportive work-family culture at work (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Demerouti and Geurts 2004; Voyandoff 2004). Some researchers have also begun to document the effects of positive spillover between work and family (e.g. better physical and mental health, family and job satisfaction), suggesting that employment does, under certain circumstances, contribute positively to family life (Grzywacz and Bass 2003; Grzywacz 2000; Wayne et al. 2004).

Policy implications

The reconciliation of work and family life is an essential part of the European Employment Strategy. The focus is on increasing female labour market participation – thus fostering gender equality, while seeking to increase fertility rates, which have fallen below the population replacement rate in all European countries. A central thesis in the literature is that the expansion of part-time work may be a key factor in the aim to achieve these potentially conflicting goals. Indeed, the view that flexible forms of employment including 'atypical work', more generally, may facilitate the reconciliation of paid work and family has gained some currency in recent years (Evans 2001; Glass and Estes 1997; Dex and Smith 2002). However, there are many problems associated with labour market flexibilisation, and research has gone some way in investigating the implications of the continuing de-standardisation of labour markets on female employment, family formation behaviour and family welfare. The general picture emerging from the literature is that many forms of non-standard employment are not very effective in easing work/family tensions among dual-earner couples. One exception is part-time work, which may help parents to reconcile paid work with their care responsibilities. However, given that this form of employment tends to be of lower quality than full-time employment in many countries, part-time work tends to be associated with lower levels of individual well-being and gender inequality. Overall, the conclusion is that new and more flexible forms of employment can make work-family integration easier or more difficult depending on the conditions associated with different forms of employment. Changes to labour markets that increase economic insecurity, such as the spread of fixed-term contracts, tend to come along with postponed family formation, decreased individual and family well-being and a higher level of work-family conflict. Also non-standard work schedules, such as work in the evenings, nights or weekends, is generally found to have detrimental effects on well-being and health, marital quality and child development. However, it has to be borne in mind that countries differ in the extent to which non-standard employment tends to be precarious and associated with poor working conditions. Moreover, while in some countries numerical and temporal flexibility has mainly increased to the benefit of employers, in others attempts have been made to increase workers' rights for autonomous time flexibility. To the extent that employees have control over when they work, non-standard employment may indeed contribute to easing work-family tensions. However, for state or firm level policies aimed at supporting employees in balancing work and family to be effective, their use needs to be 'legitimised' and encouraged at firm level by a family supportive work-family culture.

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