



***The changing face of motherhood in Western Europe:
Portugal***

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1.1 Portugal

1.1.1 Introduction

In Portugal the concept of motherhood has undergone significant change since the beginning of the twentieth century. From the pro-natal, traditionalist image of motherhood promoted during the years of the Salazar regime, through the profound social and political reforms of the immediate post-revolution era of the 1970s and 80s, through to more recent economic and social change, the lives of mothers are quite different now from what they were fifty or sixty years ago.

As in other Southern European countries, Portuguese mothers are now having children later, marrying later (or sometimes not at all) and having smaller families. Unlike other Southern European countries, however, Portuguese mothers are also leading the way in terms of participation in the workforce, with a majority of mothers returning to full-time work after their children are born. Relatively high levels of education among women also partly explain why working mothers experience less of a gender pay gap in Portugal than in some other European countries.

At the same time, the role of mothers in the family remains largely unchanged: women are still responsible for the lion's share of childcare and spend more than twice as much time as men on household chores, cooking and cleaning. Despite recent reforms to childcare, there is still a gap between mothers' working responsibilities and state provision for looking after children while mothers are at work. This means that childcare responsibilities are taken up by extended family networks – or mothers simply become busier. Both at the state level (reflected in an shortfall in childcare provision) and at the family level (reflected in traditional gender division of labour) there is still the expectation that women are 'naturally' better in the domestic and emotional spheres of the home. On the other hand, mothers are also under increasing pressure to perform to a similarly high level in professional contexts as well. Like mothers elsewhere in Europe, then, mothers in Portugal face the challenge of balancing increased independence, equality and opportunity alongside traditional ideas about gender and, perhaps most importantly, they face the practical constraints of fitting all these complex aspects of modern motherhood into the hours available in the day.

1.1.2 Historical perspectives

With regard to motherhood and the rights of women, Portugal's recent history is not unlike that of Spain in that it is characterised by a period of staunch conservatism followed by an era of progressive social and political

change underpinned by traditionalist values.¹ From the 1930s until the bloodless 'Revolution of Carnations' of 1974, Portugal was under the control of a fascist regime dominated by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. Under his control, and in keeping with the conservatism of the Catholic Church (which continues to have very significant influence in Portugal), women were expected to conform to traditional ideals of womanhood. This meant that Portuguese women were mainly confined to the private sphere of the family home, where they were expected to take primary responsibility for domestic chores and child-rearing. As in Spain, Portugal experienced a brief period of progressive reform in the first half of the twentieth century, followed by the reversal of these reforms under fascist rule. In the case of the Salazar regime, the new constitution of 1933 stated explicitly that women were not equal to men because of their 'natural' physical and intellectual inadequacies, and because of the 'innate' obligations of women as home-makers and mothers.

For much of the twentieth century, husbands maintained almost total legal control over their wives and gender roles remained distinct and unequal at a time when feminist discourse was changing the social and political position of women in other European societies. Even seemingly progressive changes bore the hallmarks of the conservative ideal of Portuguese womanhood. By the middle of the twentieth century, for example, women had gained the right to vote, but they were only able to do so if they had received a secondary education, and then only if they voted in favour of the same party as their husbands. Divorce remained forbidden by the Catholic Church and it was not until 1969 that Portuguese women could own a passport or leave the country without their husband's explicit consent. The Salazar regime maintained a pro-natal stance to families, encouraging the expansion of the family unit and limiting the involvement of the state in early childcare.

The lot of women in Portugal changed dramatically after the revolution of 1974. In 1976 all women were formally recognised as equal to men and all women over the age of 18 were given the right to vote. Women also gained legal ground in the re-framing of marriage laws and in 1977 the new government of Mario Soares established a section of government dedicated specifically to the rights and wellbeing of women and families. In 1984/5 new laws were introduced to provide sex education, family planning advice and free contraception for all. This marked a significant shift in the framing of Portuguese motherhood. The political and social focus began to shift from the pro-natal stance of the Salazar era towards an approach that emphasised choice and women's control over their biology. It is generally recognised, however, that changes

¹ See Araújo, H. (2000) Motherhood and Citizenship: educational conflicts in Portugal, in M. Arnot (Ed) *Challenging Democracy: International Perspectives on Gender, Education and Citizenship*. RoutledgeFalmer.

in family planning were slow, and it was not until 1999/2000 that further legislation addressed the inadequacies of provision experienced during the preceding ten years.²

General changes to the economy of Portugal in the second half of the twentieth century also had a significant influence on the lives of mothers. A move towards manufacturing and then service industries afforded women more opportunities to participate in the labour force. This in turn gave women a greater (if still limited) degree of economic independence and made women more visible in the sphere of public life. This trend has continued into the present, with Portugal now having one of the highest rates of female employment in Europe.

The industrialisation of Portugal's economy and its integration into broader European and global economic markets also engendered a move towards urbanisation, which in turn had an effect on family structure and on the role of women in the family. While extended kinship ties remain important, Portugal has, like all other Western European countries, experienced what anthropologists have termed a 'nuclearisation' of the family.³ Particularly in urban areas, family units and the organisation of households are now much more likely to be limited to immediate family members over two generations. There has also been a trend towards smaller families in terms of numbers of children, the norm now being to have one or two. This has significant implications for contemporary motherhood in Portugal, not only in terms of changing expectations of the role of mothers in the family, but also in terms of the role that the extended family plays in the provision of practical and emotional support for mothers.

Other sources suggest some alternative views that are not represented in the above account of social change over the last century in Portugal. It should be noted, for example, that despite processes of urbanisation, Portugal still has a relatively large rural population (only 37% of the population had become urbanised by 1997⁴). Classic studies of regional and class differences in Portuguese family formation suggest that since before the revolution, the limited structure of urban, upper- and middle-class families allowed men to maintain traditional gender roles by confining their wives to the private sphere of the family home and by managing their daughters' brief entry into the public sphere through highly restrictive, class-based courtship practices. In this way, anthropologists have

argued, men in the higher echelons of society have been able to ensure the continued subordination of women.⁵

In rural areas, by contrast, women may have experienced greater levels of gender equality because they were more involved in the public sphere and, particularly in areas of high male emigration, were regarded as the stable (or static) elements in the family structure.⁶ In the 1980s Caroline Brettel⁷ showed through her ethnographic research in the Minho region on Northern Portugal that high levels of male emigration led to a matri-centric (or mother-centred) style of family life in which men were referenced in conversation by their connection to their wife rather than the other way around ('Maria's José', for example). Children were also more likely to be given a second surname corresponding to the mother's family, rather than the father's surname as is the more common practice in Portugal.⁸

The anthropologist Jorge Dias has also suggested that cohabitation was reasonably common in rural populations in the south of Portugal during the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when this kind of family formation would have been unthinkable in the middle-class enclaves of urban Lisbon or Porto.⁹ Of course, these are specific examples of women gaining particular kinds of limited empowerment, always relative to their general economic and social marginalisation within broader Portuguese society. Nevertheless, it is worth considering how the experiences of mothers are different in urban and rural contexts within Portugal and to take account of those cases where experiences of motherhood do not match neatly with the mainstream narrative presented in historical accounts or statistical data.

Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, motherhood has continued to change relative to progressive reforms in the legal, economic and cultural spheres of Portuguese society. An example of this change at the level of political discourse is Article 59 of the 1997 Constitution, which directly addresses the need to reconcile the professional and family commitments of mothers. The year 1997 also ushered in the *Programa do Rendimento Mínimo Garantido* (Guaranteed Minimum Income Programme), a measure aimed at providing suitable welfare support for disadvantaged and low-income families. In 1995, the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity established the *Programa Ser Criança* (Being a

⁵ Willems, E. (1962) On Portuguese Family Structure. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 3(1):65–79.

⁶ Pina-Cabral, J. de (1986) *Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve: The Peasant Worldview of the Alto Minho*. Clarendon Press.

⁷ Brettell, C. (1986) *Men Who Migrate, Women Who Wait: Population and History in a Portuguese Parish*. Princeton University Press.

⁸ See also Cole, S. (1991) *Women of the Praia: Work and Lives in a Portuguese Coastal Community*. Princeton University Press.

⁹ Dias, J. (1963) Algumas Considerações acerca da Estrutura Social do Povo Português. *Actas do 1. Congresso da Etnografia e Folclore*, Vol. 1. Biblioteca Social e Corporativa.

² Antunes, A.B. & Sousa, M.P. (col.) (2000) *Contraceção*, Porto, MEDISA – Edições e Divulgações Científicas.

³ Cabral, M.V. (1992) Portugal e a Europa: Diferenças e Semelhanças. *Análise Social XVIII(118–119)*:943–954.

⁴ OECD (2000) Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Portugal

Child Programme) as another measure aimed at improving the quality of life for children and providing additional guidance and support for parents (particularly mothers). In 2001 laws were enacted to recognise a wider variety of family types, with couples who live together for more than two years being legally recognised as such, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender. The variety of ways in which motherhood can now be experienced in Portugal has also changed as a result.

In a recent Eurobarometer survey, more than three quarters of Portuguese respondents (79%) agreed that progress has been made in terms of gender equality over the past ten years.¹⁰ The extent of change in perceptions of what it means to be a woman and a mother in Portuguese society, however, and the realities of this experience, should not be over-estimated. Portugal maintains a reasonably traditionalist stance on a number of key issues related to ideas of motherhood and the role of women in the family and in society. In 1998, for example, a referendum showed that the majority of people were still opposed to legalising abortion. Abortion was eventually made legal, but only by a margin of less than 1%, in 2007. Catholic values still dominate in Portuguese society, meaning that traditional ideas about gender roles – that men should be breadwinners and women home-makers – prevail.

The nature of motherhood has certainly been altered significantly by the increasing participation of women in the workforce, and yet popular and political debate continues to focus on the seemingly impenetrable ‘glass ceiling’ that both limits Portuguese women’s (and especially mothers’) economic and professional progress and maintains entrenched gender inequality. This is a particularly important issue for women who want to combine a professional life with the commitments of a family. In 1993, for instance, 63% of mothers with young children were employed for more than 20 hours per week.¹¹ This was the highest rate of employment among mothers of young children across Europe, and yet childcare provision does not seem to have kept pace with this trend in employment. While Portugal has also seen progress in terms of state-funded childcare in the last thirty years, levels of provision are still considered by many to be insufficient given the increasingly complex demands of balancing a career with motherhood – particularly in terms of the *quality*, rather than the quantity, of children’s services available.¹² Ironically, perhaps, this may in part be due to deeply ingrained notions (among both women and men) about the role of

mothers in the socialisation of children – namely, that mothers should be responsible for primary socialisation taking place between home and school. These issues are of particular importance in light of the recent economic downturn and the precarious state of the Portuguese economy.

1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood

Portugal ranks 14th in the State of the World’s Mothers report, one place behind the UK and two places behind neighbouring Spain. According to the most recent Eurostat data,¹³ Portugal has a crude birth rate of 9.8 per 1,000 women, and a fertility rate of 1.33 per woman. Rates of fertility have been falling in Portugal since 1980 and they remain some way below OECD averages, and significantly below replacement rates.

Infant mortality in Portugal has decreased dramatically since the 1960s – evidence of the significant social and political reforms that took place during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1965 the infant mortality rate was 64.9 per 1,000 live births. By 2008 this had plummeted to just 3.3 per 1,000 live births. The mean age of women at first birth today is 29.67, placing Portugal 13th (or just about in the middle) in terms of age at first birth among countries in the EU27.

The rate of marriage in 2008 was 4.1 per 1,000 population – a significant decrease from 1998 when the figure was 6.6 per 1,000. The average age of marriage has also increased. For women in 2008, the average age of marriage was approximately 27 years – a substantial increase on previous years, but slightly lower than some other EU27 members (in Switzerland, for example, the average age of first marriage is 32). The divorce rate in Portugal is 2.4 per 1,000 population. Along with Spain and Cyprus (until 2007), this marks the highest increase in divorce rates across Europe since 1998. Women are also giving birth outside of marriage more frequently. In 2010, 37,928 births took place outside of marriage – or 38% of all births for that year. This is a considerable increase from 20,221 in 1960 (under 10% of all births).¹⁴ Of all lone-parent families in Portugal, 87% are headed by females. Life expectancy at birth for Portuguese women is 82.2 years – an increase from 79.3 in 1997. This puts life expectancy in Portugal above the EU27 average of approximately 81.5 years.

The above demographic snapshot indicates that Portuguese women are marrying and becoming mothers later in life than ever before. They live longer and are mothers for longer than ever before. They are also marrying less, and having children outside of marriage more frequently.

¹⁰ Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*.

¹¹ OECD (2000) Country Note: Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Portugal

¹² Eurobarometer (2008) *Family Needs and the needs of an Ageing Population*.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_247_sum_en.pdf

¹³ Eurostat (2010) *Eurostatbook*.

¹⁴ www.portada.pt

Modern mothers in Portugal also keep their families relatively small historically, although still larger than in many other Western European countries. The average size of a Portuguese family in 2010 was 2.7 people, compared with a figure of 3.3 in 1983. A recent OECD report on families and childcare in Portugal indicates that Portuguese parents have responded to the recent economic downturn by limiting the size of their families. The decline in population growth in Portugal is therefore not a result of couples not having *any* children, but rather of couples having *fewer* children. Part of the rationale for this choice is that the costs of raising children are increasing and it is difficult for parents, and particularly mothers, to manage the care of several children with the demands of full- or part-time work. This in turn is directly linked to the lack of adequate state childcare provision in Portugal, despite recent improvements to services.¹⁵

What, then, do these changes indicate about modern conceptions of motherhood in Portugal? Is the ideal of what it means to be a mother in the 21st century profoundly different from notions of motherhood in previous generations?

1.1.4 Defining 'motherhood' (*maternidade*) in the Portuguese context

Qualitative research and trends in popular discourse shed some light on the lived experiences behind the statistics. Miguel Vale de Almeida's recent ethnography of a Portuguese town, for example, demonstrates that while women are more visible in the public sphere, and experience a greater degree of equality in contemporary Portugal, they must reconcile their changing social and economic roles with an over-riding ideal of Portuguese masculinity that is still based partly on the notion that women are inherently inferior to men.¹⁶ At the same time, Portugal is also host to a surge of academic interest in the lives of mothers, with leading authorities in the field of 'Motherhood Studies' coming together in Lisbon in 2011 to discuss the intricacies of 21st Century motherhood.

Generally, this academic research focuses on the difficulties that mothers face in balancing their economic and professional engagement with family responsibilities in the home – and on expanding the definition of motherhood to include a broader diversity of mothering experiences.¹⁷ Interest in the former can also be seen in popular discourse in Portugal, particularly in relation to debates about maternity leave and maternity pay.¹⁸

Indeed, the issue of work-life balance is key to understanding contemporary motherhood in Portugal. Other popular debates focus more on the quality of antenatal provision and healthcare in the early years. It is practical debate about services for mothers, and their ability to juggle work and home that appears to grab the public's attention the most, rather than more abstract debates about what motherhood is or how it is changing as an idea. This perhaps also reflects the fact that the meaning of motherhood is to a large extent taken as given in the Portuguese context. Despite demographic changes that delay motherhood as a period in a woman's life, and in spite of economic changes that complicate the experience of motherhood, raising children is still celebrated as *the* defining experience of womanhood in Portugal.

1.1.5 Motherhood and Employment

This does not mean that Portuguese women are focused on child-rearing alone. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that issues such as maternity leave are prevalent in popular discourse, given the fact that the majority of Portuguese mothers decide to balance work with raising children. As suggested above, over 60% of children in Portugal now live in families where both parents work more than 20 hours per week.¹⁹ Unemployment for women has also fallen dramatically in the last twelve years, from 20.5% in 1998 to 9% in 2008. Male unemployment is slightly lower at 6.6%. According to the latest Eurostat data, the employment rate for women is 62.5%, compared with 74% of men. This places the rates of female employment in Portugal above the EU Lisbon Strategy target of 60%. In Spain, by comparison, only 54.9% of women are in employment. Employment rates for women in Portugal, however, have only increased by 4% since 1998, suggesting that much of the dramatic change in female participation in the labour market had already taken place by the end of the 1990s.²⁰ Other data suggest that the most people in Portugal consider women's increasing participation in the labour force to be quite normal. In Eurobarometer research in 2009, 58% of Portuguese respondents disagreed with the statement that 'it is normal for women to work less than men'.²¹

The gender pay gap in Portugal is one of the smallest in the EU27, with women earning just under 10% less than men (the EU27 average is 17%). While this may still be indicative of popular concerns about the 'glass ceiling' that exists for women in many professions, it is also evidence that Portugal is rather more progressive than many of its European neighbours when it comes to equality of pay between men and women. Indeed, in a recent

¹⁵ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families: Portugal*. OECD.

¹⁶ Vale de Almeida, M. (2004) *The Hegemonic Male: Masculinity in a Portuguese Town*, Berghahn.

¹⁷ See, for example, work carried out by the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI): *Mothering and Motherhood in the 21st Century: Research and Activism*, February 18-19, 2011 (Lisbon, Portugal)

¹⁸ See, for example, Correio de Manhã, 'Oposição pede licença de maternidade de 150 dias paga na totalidade'

<http://www.cmjornal.xl.pt/detalhe/noticias/nacional/politica/oposicao-pede-licenca-de-maternidade-de-150-dias-paga-na-totalidade>

¹⁹ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families: Portugal*. OECD.

²⁰ Eurostat (2010) *Eurostat Factbook*.

²¹ Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*.

Eurobarometer survey, Portuguese respondents ranked 'the pay gap between men and women' as an issue of higher priority than 'violence against women' when thinking about gender inequality.²² Discrimination still persists, however – and this is an issue made more evident by the fact that generally women in Portugal achieve higher levels of educational attainment than men (although overall Portugal has low levels of educational attainment compared with other EU countries).

On the one hand, this smaller gender pay gap may be an incentive for mothers to work because the potential rewards may be greater relative to earnings of men. On the other hand, however, a smaller gender gap in pay may also indicate that mothers are compelled to work because they cannot rely on male partners to bring in a larger yield of income relative to their own potential earning power. Maternity leave in Portugal currently stands at 120 days with 100% of wages paid, in line with EU recommendations. In general, Portugal adopts quite a progressive approach to maternity and paternity leave. In addition to the statutory 120 days of maternity leave at 100% pay, parents can opt to extend this leave to 150 days at 80% of pay. After an initial recovery period of 42 days, mothers and fathers can also share the remaining days of maternity leave, in addition to the ten days of compulsory paternity leave that fathers must take. There is also a further non-transferrable leave period of three months that parents can take at any point before the child is twelve years-old, at 25% of normal pay. As of 2010, 85% of fathers had taken the 10 statutory days of paternity leave, with a further 26% sharing additional leave with the mother.²³

The statistics above seem to suggest that Portuguese women are fairing slightly better than their other European counterparts when it comes to employability, earnings and (perhaps to a lesser extent) maternity leave. Indeed, research by Rubery et al.²⁴ suggests that marriage and motherhood have much less of an impact on employment prospects for women in Portugal than in other European contexts. With this in mind, it might also be assumed that these conditions would make it easier for Portuguese mothers to find a balance between professional life and family life. Recent Eurobarometer research, however, suggests the opposite. Portuguese parents are finding it more difficult than parents elsewhere in Europe to find a balance between work and home life. Striking a good work-life balance was 'fairly' or 'very' difficult for 72% of Portuguese parents. A number of

factors related to employment compound the difficulty of balancing work with family.

Of the nearly two thirds of women who do work, 87% work full-time and the majority work long hours – 61.3% of women work more than forty hours per week. A much smaller proportion of working women, 16.4%, opt for part-time work and fewer hours (the EU average for women in part-time work, by contrast, is 31.5%). While in 2009 70% of mothers of children under six were employed, only 10.2% of women with children worked part-time. Interestingly, this is largely by choice – parents are entitled to work part-time for two years after the birth of a child, but only 21% of parents elected to do so.²⁵ At the same time, it must also be noted that generally working hours are quite inflexible in Portugal. According to the most recent available data, a scant 1.1% of women in employment aged 24-49 were able to 'bank' working time (compared to 38.2% of women in the same age-range in Germany). Only 2.9% of women had flexible working time.²⁶

Working more, and for longer, less flexible hours, but at better rates of pay, presents a significant strain on the family lives of mothers in Portugal. They are not, however, willing to give up full-time work in order to solve this issue. On the contrary, Eurobarometer data suggest that only 21% of Portuguese parents see more flexible working hours as a solution to difficulties of maintaining a good work-life balance.²⁷ And yet the struggle remains: many Portuguese mothers believe that their work schedule is a significant barrier to them being able to spend as much time as they would like with their children.²⁸

According to recent research on quality of life in Europe, 36% of Portuguese women agreed that they were too tired and had too little time to spend on family commitments because of work.²⁹

This is in part due to the other household responsibilities that Portuguese women must cope with in addition to paid work and childcare. Indeed, a large proportion of time use for women is dedicated to household chores. Portuguese women spend on average 23 hours per week looking after children, compared with 16 hours for men,

²⁵ Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*. Eurobarometer

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_326_en.pdf

²⁶ Hardarson, O. (2007) *The flexibility of working time arrangements for women and men*. Eurostat.

²⁷ Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*.

²⁸ OECD (2004) *Babies and Bosses – Reconciling Work and Family Life* (Vol. 3): New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland. OECD.

http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3746,en_2649_34819_31588543_1_1_1_1,00.html
http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3746,en_2649_34819_31588543_1_1_1_1,00.html

²⁹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

²² Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*.

Eurobarometer [available at

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_326_en.pdf

²³ Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender equality in the EU in 2009*.

Eurobarometer

²⁴ Rubery, J., Grimshaw, D. & Figueiredo, H. (2005) How to close the gender pay gap in Europe: Towards the gender mainstreaming of pay policy, *Industrial Relations Journal* 36: (3):184-221

and women spend a further 17 hours per week on cooking and housework, compared with 7 hours per week for men.³⁰ Accordingly, a quarter of Portuguese women (25%) report doing more than their 'fair share' of housework. This inequality of unpaid labour has been highlighted as a major indicator of gender inequality within Portuguese families. As Heloísa Perista from the *Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social* notes:

*"Portugal is one of the countries where these gender differences are most marked, especially with regard to everyday, routine, time-consuming tasks such as cooking or doing laundry."*³¹

Perista has also conducted research showing that on average, Portuguese mothers do more than twice as much housework as their husbands each day.³²

Despite this, however, only 13% of Portuguese respondents to the survey on quality of life totally agreed with the statement that 'women have less freedom because of their family responsibilities'.³³ It would seem that to an extent these kinds of domestic responsibilities are incorporated into a wider vision of what it means to be a mother, along with child care and paid work. As Perista has argued, this idea has become 'naturalised': it is seen as normal that mothers should be primarily responsible for the lion's share of unpaid domestic and emotional work in the family home.

1.1.6 Childcare

Despite having a long history of early childcare provision, it is only in recent years that Portugal has begun to develop a system that goes some way towards adequately catering for children under 3 in need of care. During the Salazar period, pre-school was entirely abandoned by the state on the grounds that mothers should be taking full responsibility for this period of their child's development. Over time, a certain degree of reform was put into place, with minimal state and private childcare facilities available to some. Then in the years directly after the revolution of 1974, the quantity of provision increased twenty-fold as the government took responsibility for early childcare. While the quantity of facilities increased, however, it has been argued that the quality of childcare in Portugal

remained low until new initiatives were put in place in the 1990s.³⁴

Despite significant improvements, childcare in Portugal today is still considered to be lacking relative to the demands placed on working mothers. The OECD points out that Portugal spends less than average at every stage of child development, with spending on early childhood at less than half the OECD average (€11,500 per child compared with €24,900 per child).³⁵ The European Commission also recognises that, particularly for younger children, there is a 'large and unmet demand' for childcare services which impacts particularly on the poorest families living in disadvantaged areas on the outskirts of the cities of Porto and Lisbon. This effect is exacerbated by the fact that private childcare is generally regarded as far too expensive.

According to recent data, 83% of Portuguese parents agree that childcare can cost almost as much as the mother earns.³⁶ OECD recommendations for improving the quality of life for Portuguese families focus on the need for more adequate childcare that will alleviate the burden placed on mothers and on extended family networks (where these exist) to account for much of the childcare needed until age three.³⁷ Beyond age three, childcare provision improves and the majority of Portuguese children aged 4 to 6 are in some form of pre-school facility or in formal education.

An alternative in this context, of course, is that fathers become more involved as providers of childcare in the early years. Interestingly, recent data suggest that 86% of Portuguese men and women are in favour of men mainly looking after the children and the home. Generally more women were in favour of this idea than men, but nevertheless it was the majority of men who favoured this as an option for the domestic sphere.³⁸ This suggests quite a significant departure from traditional ideas about the gender division of labour in the home. It is equally interesting to note, however, that in the same survey, only 49% of Portuguese respondents agreed that a father should give up work to care for children if he is on the lower salary in the household.³⁹ It would seem that there

³⁰ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

³¹ Observatorio Das Desiguales (2011) Persisting gender inequality in household chores. Interview with Heloísa Perista <http://observatorio-das-desigualdades.cies.iscte.pt/index.jsp?page=news&id=149>

³² Perista, H. (2003) *Time, paid and unpaid work in Portugal – A gender issue*, working paper no4, Centre for the Study of Law & Policy in Europe, University of Leeds.

³³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

³⁴ OECD (2000) *OECD Country Note Early Childhood Education and Care Policy In Portugal*. OECD.

³⁵ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families: Portugal*. OECD.

³⁶ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

³⁷ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families: Portugal*. OECD.

³⁸ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

³⁹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf>

is a limit to the extent that men are willing to give up their own economic independence in favour of taking responsibility for the domestic sphere.

1.1.7 Children leaving home

As in other countries in Southern Europe, contemporary motherhood also involves taking care of children well into their twenties and thirties. While women are becoming mothers later in life, they are also expected to look after their children in the family home for longer than ever before. This is particularly the case for sons, who tend to spend much longer at home than daughters. In Portugal approximately 60% of all males aged 24-29 still live at home with their parents, while a smaller number of women in the same range (approximately 45%) still live in the family home.⁴⁰

The median age of leaving home for men is 28, while for women it is 26. A closer look at the statistics, however, reveals that the majority (80%) of men have left the family home by the time they reach their early- to mid-thirties. For women the age is closer to 30. A number of different reasons are given for this trend in Southern European contexts. In Portugal, the vast majority of people still living at home with their parents suggest that they continue to live at home for economic reasons. Either they struggle to find appropriate employment to support themselves, and/or rents or property prices are too high to make independent living affordable. The age of leaving home in Portugal, however, is lower than in other Southern European countries, and in the case of women this would seem to reflect higher levels of female participation in the workforce (and therefore possibly higher levels of economic independence).

In any case, the trend towards living in the family home for longer has two significant implications for motherhood in Portugal. On one hand, young mothers are delaying motherhood until they are able to establish themselves as economically independent and leave the family home to set up their own family units. Perhaps more importantly, this means that the period of what we might call 'active' motherhood (the period where mothers are expected to play a key role in the domestic lives of their children) is extended, with mothers taking care of their children at home well into their twenties and thirties. For young mothers today, this also suggests that their 'active' mothering careers are likely to last ten or fifteen years longer than would have been the case in their grandparents' generation.

1.1.8 Motherhood and sports

In Portugal as in other European contexts, sports have played an important role in the social history of the nation

over the past twenty years. As in Spain under Franco, during the Salazar regime international sports competitions were used as a means of showcasing the supposed successes of conservative society, with the robust health of athletes working as a metaphor for the health of the nation. Along similar lines, Portugal has an established history of providing sports programmes for young people. Today, sports participation is seen as a fundamental part of healthy living, with football being by far the most popular sport among young people. Recent research into levels of sport participation and the role of parents in encouraging this kind of activity suggests that 58% of children and adolescents take part in sporting activities.⁴¹

This is a marked increase from previous years. Adelino et al. suggest that the number of participants in formal sports increased in Portugal by 24.3% between 1998 and 2004. Over the same period interestingly, the increase in the number of females participating in sport during this period far outstripped that of males, with the number of males participating in formal sport increasing by 19.5% and the number of girls increasing by 42.1%.⁴² Seabra et al. point to an increase in state investment in sports facilities, the increasing variety of sports facilities available and the ongoing social significance of sport in Portuguese society as factors influencing this increase in interest. Seabra et al.'s study also shows interesting links between the sports participation habits of parents and those of their children. While it is widely accepted that there is a relationship between the level of sports participation among parents and the levels of sports participation enjoyed by children, in the Portuguese context this was configured in a particular way. Seabra et al. noted that on one hand there was a gendered element to this relationship – if mothers were engaged in sports participation, then their daughters also demonstrated high levels of sports participation. Similarly, if fathers were engaged in sports, so were their sons. Interestingly, however, there was little effect of mother's sports participation on sons, but a considerable effect of father's sports participation of children of both genders. This would seem to tally with the broader picture of Portuguese family life, in which generally the father continues to play a dominant role, despite the significance of the mother in both the domestic and professional spheres.⁴³

⁴⁰ Eurostat (2008) *The Life of Men and Women in Europe 2008*. Eurostat http://www.forschungsnetzwerk.at/downloadpub/life_of_women_and_men_europe_2008.pdf

⁴¹ Seabra, A., Mendonc, D., Thomis, M., Peters, T. & Jose' A. (2007) Maia Associations between sport participation, demographic and socio-cultural factors in Portuguese children and adolescent, *European Journal of Public Health*, 18(1): 25–30.

⁴² Adelino J., Vieira J. & Coelho O. (2005) *Sports Participation in Portuguese Young Athletes*. Lisboa: Instituto Desporto de Portugal.

⁴³ Seabra, A., Mendonc, D., Thomis, M., Peters, T. & Jose' A. (2007) Maia Associations between sport participation, demographic and socio-cultural factors in Portuguese children and adolescent, *European Journal of Public Health*, 18(1):25–3.

1.2 Portuguese national survey

1.2.1 Introduction

During November 2011 a national survey of mothers was conducted across all the regions of Portugal. The total sample size across Portugal was 509. The raw data have been analysed using StatSoft *Statistica* 9.0. The intention of the survey was to gather a rich array of data related to women’s experiences of motherhood, their perceptions of family life, and their perspectives on their own experiences of motherhood relative to those of women in other generations. The findings are detailed below.

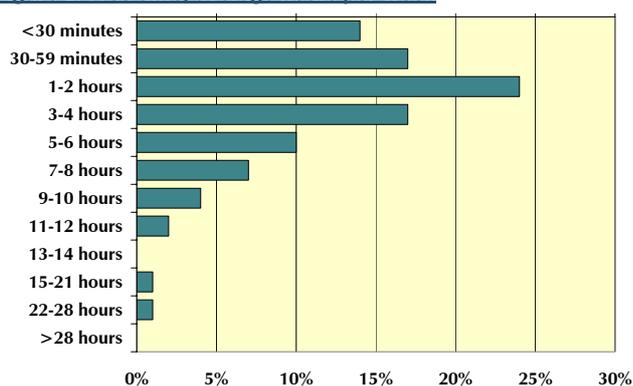
1.2.2 Current free time and ‘me time’

Across Western Europe, mothers have on average just over three quarters of an hour (48 minutes) per day of ‘me time’ when they do not feel obliged to do anything for anyone else. As can be seen in Figure 1, mothers in Portugal fall significantly below the European average for ‘me time’, with only 29 minutes per day. In fact, Portuguese mothers fare worst across all of Europe in terms of ‘me time’.

Portuguese mothers have the shortest amount of ‘me time’ per day in Western Europe – just 29 minutes.

In an average week, almost a quarter of Portuguese mothers (24%) record between 1-2 hours of ‘me time’, while almost one fifth (17%) have only 30-59 minutes of ‘me time’ per week. A further 14% of Portuguese mothers record having less than 30 minutes of time to themselves each week.

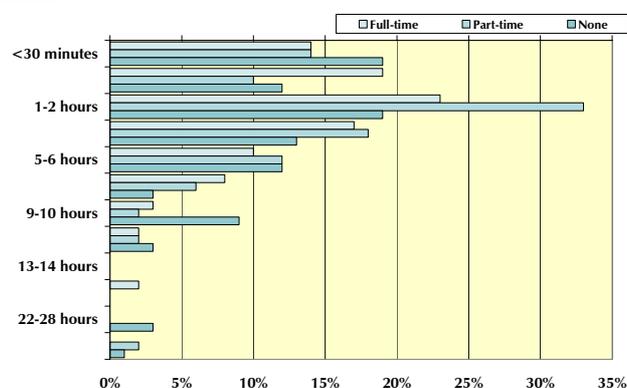
Figure 1. Free time, average hours per week



As in other European contexts, the amount of ‘me time’ that mothers have varies relative to the number of children in the family. Almost a quarter (23%) of Portuguese mothers with four or more children record having less than 30 minutes of ‘me time’ per week, while there are no mothers with one child who record having less than 1-2 hours of ‘me time’. Overall, employment status also has an impact on ‘me time’— although the relationship between employment and ‘me time’ is not a straight-forward one. The data in Figure 2 suggests that

mothers working part-time do not experience an increase in ‘me time’ proportional to their time outside of paid work; and more interesting still is the fact that sometimes mothers not in paid employment actually have less ‘me time’ than those who work.

Figure 2. Free time, average hours per week by employment status.



On the whole, stay-at-home mums in Portugal do not gain extra ‘me time’ as a result of not working. Mothers working part-time do not gain significantly more ‘me time’ as a result of working less, compared with full-time working mums.

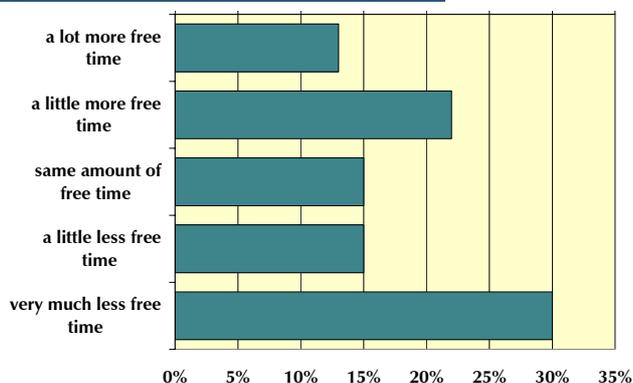
The large majority of Portuguese mothers taking part in the survey are in full-time employment (77%), with only 10% in part-time work and 14% with no paid work at all. This is in keeping with figures for Portugal as a whole: Portugal has one of the highest rates of female participation in the labour force across the EU27, and relatively low rates of part-time employment. Among survey respondents working full-time, a higher percentage (19%) record having between 30-59 minutes of ‘me time’ per week, compared with 10% of part-time working mums and 12% of stay-at-home mums. A larger proportion of mothers working part-time – some 33% – claim to have 1-2 hours of ‘me time’ each week, compared to 23% of full-time working mums and 19% of stay-at-home mums. Generally it is possible to see from Figure 2 that part-time mothers often experience equal or larger amounts of ‘me time’ than stay-at-home mums. The exception to this rule are the 9% of stay-at-home mums who record extensive periods of ‘me time’ each day (9-10 hours). In turn, mothers working part-time only gain a small amount of extra ‘me time’ as a result of working half as many hours as mothers in full-time employment.

1.2.3 Generational comparisons

When asked to consider whether or not they have more ‘me time’ than mothers in previous generations, contemporary Portuguese mothers put forward a variety of opinions. Figure 3 shows that almost one third of respondents (30%) agree they have very much less time to themselves than did their own mothers during the same

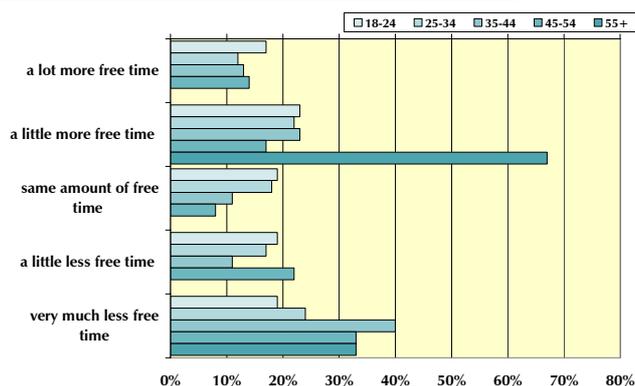
life-stage. A further 15% think they have a little less 'me time' than their mothers, and the same proportion (15%) were of the opinion that things have not changed significantly between the generations. Just over one fifth (22%) think that they have a little more time than their mothers had at the same life-stage, while fewer (13%) consider themselves to have a lot more free time.

Figure 3. Free time, generational comparison



Considering how responses to this question differ according to age reveals some interesting patterns. It is possible to see in Figure 4, for example, that mothers over the age of 55 are quite positive about their experiences relative to those of their own mothers. Of mothers in this age range, 67% agree that they have a little more free time than previous generations at the same life stage. This may relate to the fact that their mothers would have lived through the latter years of the Salazar era, during which time women were explicitly subordinated to men in most spheres of life and were expected to sacrifice their own leisure time for the sake of the family. Mothers aged 35-44, on the other hand, were much more likely (40%) to agree that they had very much less free time than their own mothers. This in turn may relate to the fact that the mothers of women in this age range would likely have experienced the transition to a far more progressive, liberal post-revolutionary Portugal in which women gained new rights and freedoms but had not yet fully integrated into the labour force. For contemporary mothers managing the competing demands of employment alongside traditional emotional and domestic responsibilities in the home – the notorious 'triple shift' of modern motherhood – this period may seem a golden age for mothers, when women had rights and independence but were not yet expected to join the labour force. Whether or not life really was easier for Portuguese mothers in the late 1970s/early 1980s is debatable; but the perception of this reality certainly exists among mothers now reaching middle-age.

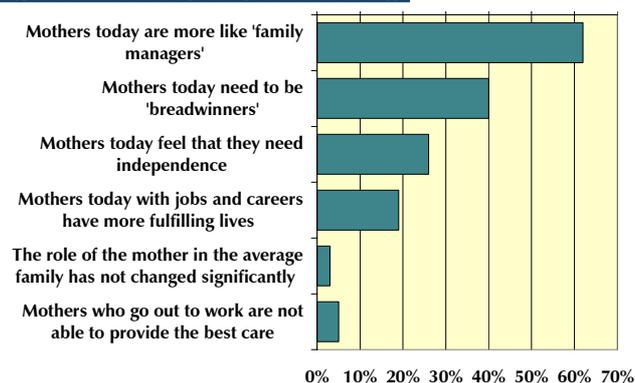
Figure 4. Free time, generational comparison by age



1.2.4 Perceptions of change

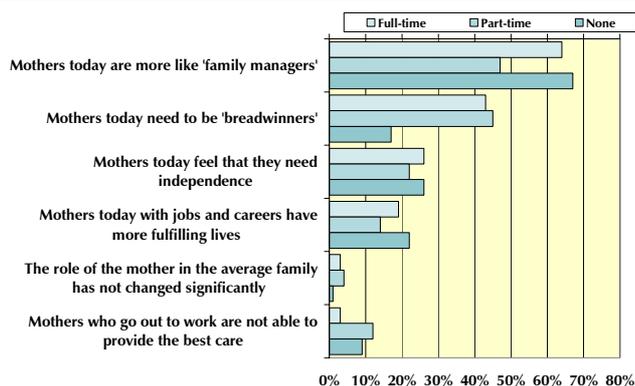
Whether agreeing that mothers now have more or less time to themselves than in previous generations, there is general agreement that the experience of motherhood has changed significantly over the years. Figure 5 shows that a large proportion of Portuguese mothers agree motherhood is now about being a 'family manager', rather than a 'traditional housewife' as was more frequently the case in previous generations.

Figure 5. Mothers' perceptions of change



More than half (62%) agreed with this statement, while a further 40% agree with the idea that mothers now need to be 'breadwinners' more than they were a generation ago. A further 26% agreed that mothers now need the independence to pursue their own interests much more than in the past; and almost a fifth (19%) argue that women with paid jobs live more fulfilling lives than those who stay at home. Given that Portugal has seen an enormous expansion in female participation in the labour force during the past 50 years, and bearing in mind that most contemporary mothers in Portugal work full-time, it is perhaps not surprising that they have such a clear view of generational difference, and such a positive view of working mums (see Figure 6 below). It is noteworthy, however, that stay-at-home mums are actually the most likely to think that women who work live more fulfilling lives. This perhaps suggests something about the positive popular image of the working mother in Portugal – and about the guilt that stay-at-home mums might feel for not living up to this ideal of modern motherhood.

Figure 6. Mothers' perceptions of change by employment status

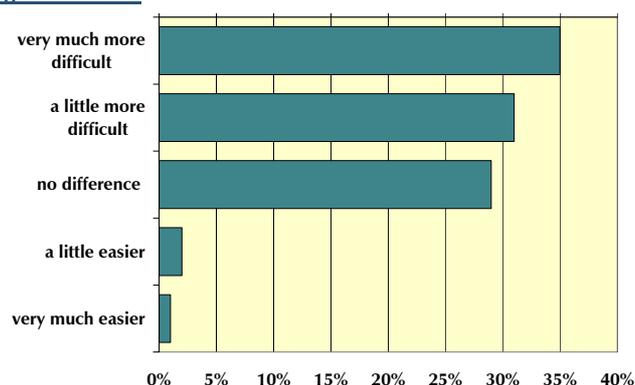


Portuguese stay-at-home mums are the group most likely to agree that mothers today with jobs and careers have more fulfilling lives

1.2.5 Impact of the economic downturn

While working may be considered to be a positive, liberating aspect of contemporary motherhood in Portugal, it is worth considering the extent to which full-time employment has also become a necessity for Portuguese mothers struggling to cope with difficult times. For many, full-time work is now an economic necessity rather than a lifestyle choice. This and other aspects of the recent economic downturn have potentially negative implications for contemporary motherhood in Portugal. Among European countries, Portugal has suffered some of the worst effects of recent economic turmoil, and for a large proportion of mothers this has in turn had an impact on their perceived ability to be 'good' mothers. Indeed, only mothers in Italy had a more negative opinion of the impact of the current economic climate on motherhood. As indicated in Figure 7, more than one third of Portuguese mothers (35%) agree that the current economic climate has made it very difficult to be a 'good' mother. A further 31% of mothers agree that the economic crisis has made it a little more difficult to be a 'good' mother, while 29% do not think it has had any real effect at all. Overall these figures are in stark contrast to perspectives in Spain, where most mothers think that 'la crisis económica' has had little or no effect on their capacity as 'good' mothers.

Figure 7. Impact of the current economic climate on being a 'good' mother



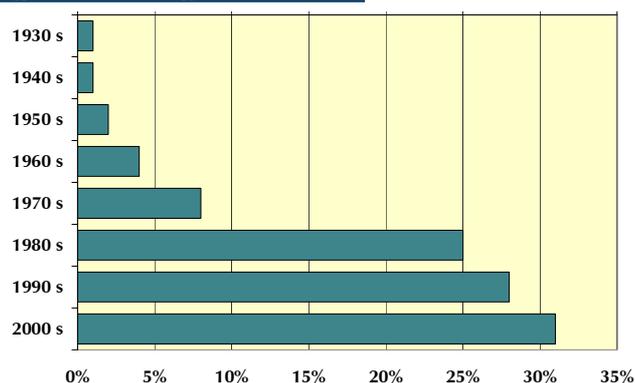
Among Portuguese mothers, negative views of the relationship between economic conditions and motherhood are particularly marked among women who work part-time. Among mothers in part-time paid employment, 41% agree that it has become very much more difficult to be a 'good' mother, compared with 35% of mothers working full-time and 30% of stay-at-home mums. It would seem that working part-time means that mothers are pulled both ways, at once not having sufficient time for their families, but also not working enough hours to bring in sufficient funds so that they can be 'good' mothers in this respect as well. Given Portugal's relatively inflexible approach to working hours, and the scarcity of part-time positions, it may now be even more difficult for mothers working part-time to make ends meet. One solution to this problem is simply to work longer hours, as is the preference (or obligation) of most mothers in Portugal today.

Most Portuguese mothers think that the current economic climate has made it more difficult to be a 'good' mother

1.2.6 Ideal decades

The tough economic conditions of the present may cause some Portuguese mothers to long for a time when it was easier to be a 'good' mother. We were interested, if this was the case, to find out when was the 'golden age' of motherhood in Portugal. Figure 8 shows that for many (30%), the 2000s – a time of relative economic prosperity in Portugal – represented the ideal decade in which to be a mother; for a slightly smaller percentage (28%), it was the 1990s. Slightly fewer still (25%) thought that the 1980s were the golden age of Portuguese motherhood, perhaps linked to the wave of social change taking place during this decade. Only a small minority (8% across the years 1930-1960) were willing to agree that motherhood was better during the Salazar era.

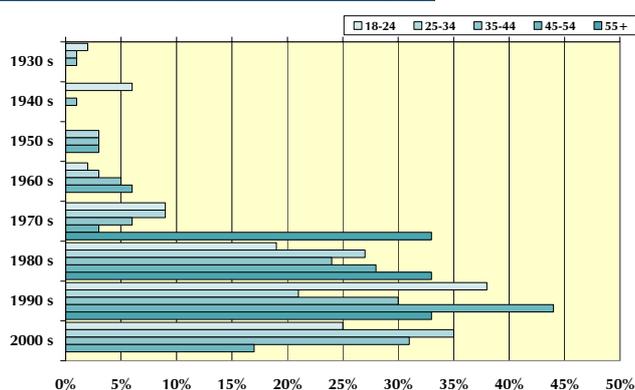
Figure 8. Golden Age of motherhood



Mothers aged 45-54 were most likely to hark back to the 1990s, while those aged 25-45 agree that the 2000s were the best time to be a mother. For women aged 18-24, however, it is the era of their own youths – the 1990s – that holds the most nostalgic value in relation to motherhood (see Figure 9).

Most Portuguese mothers see the 2000s as the golden age of motherhood. Those who were children in the 1990s are most likely to see this decade as the best time to be a mother.

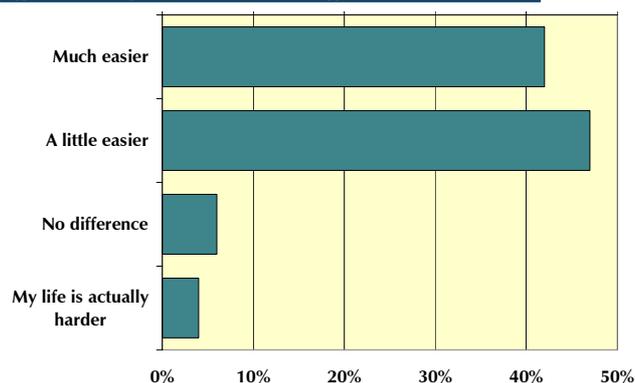
Figure 9. Golden Age of motherhood by age



1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

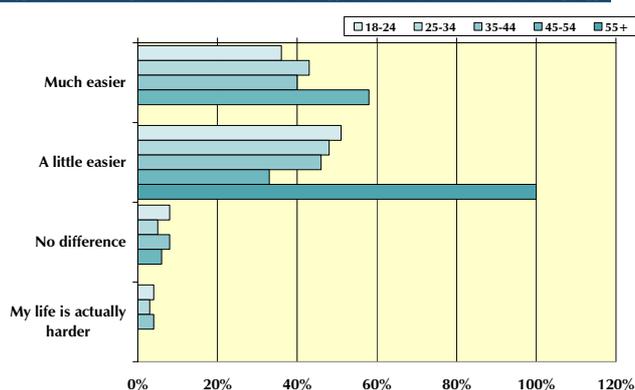
While Portuguese mothers may see the near past as an ideal time to be a mother, they are nevertheless very positive about certain aspects of their lives in the present as well. This can be seen in Figure 10. In relation to labour-saving devices and products, the overwhelming majority of Portuguese mothers agree that life is now richer and easier than it was for previous generations. Almost half (47%) agree that life is now a little easier as a result of labour-saving devices, while 42% are confident that their role as mothers has been made much easier.

Figure 10. Impact of labour-saving devices on mothers



Once again, it is worth noting how mothers' perspectives vary according to age (Figure 11) and employment status. For mothers aged 55+, 100% agree that life is a little easier; and among mothers aged 45-54, 58% agree that labour-saving devices have made life much easier. Younger mothers are less likely to see the value of labour-saving devices, and this may be simply a result of different degrees of access to these kinds of products between generations. As in Spain, for instance, it is very likely that mothers aged 45 and over would have qualitatively different experiences of domestic labour compared with those of their own mothers, because of the degree of economic, political and social change that took place in Portugal during the final decades of the twentieth century. Between younger mothers and their mothers, the degree of social change has not been quite so marked. Young mothers (4%) and full-time working mothers (4%) are the most likely to agree that their lives are actually harder now compared with previous generations. Mothers with this opinion, however, clearly represent a very small minority in both groups.

Figure 11. Impact of labour-saving devices on mothers by age

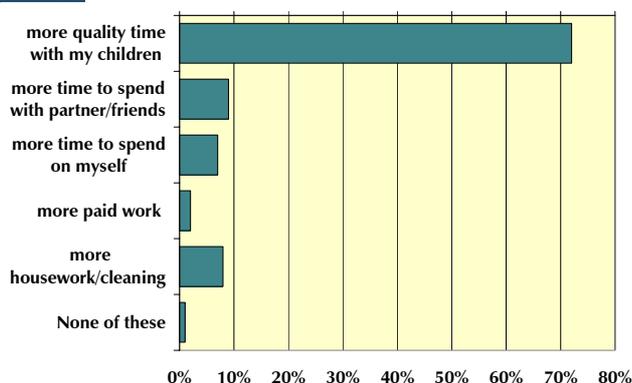


For mothers who do not work, the impact of labour-saving devices is perceived to be slightly greater: 52% of stay-at-home mums agree that life is now much easier, compared with 41% of mothers who work full-time and 37% of mothers in part-time paid employment.

Portuguese mothers agree that life has been made a little easier with the introduction of labour-saving devices and products. Stay-at-home mums are the most appreciative of the impact that these products have had on their lives compared with other generations.

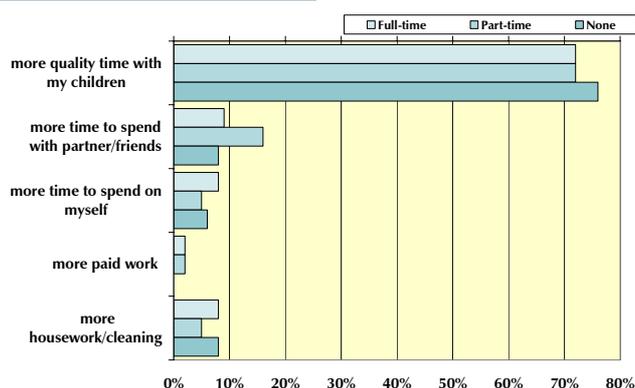
Given that most Portuguese mothers feel they have benefited from labour-saving devices and products, it is also worth exploring how this extra 'saved' time is spent. The data in Figure 12 indicate that less than 10% use 'extra' time to catch up with their friends or partner, or to snatch some extra 'me time'. A similarly small proportion (8%) use this 'saved' time to do more housework. It is interesting, however, that for most mothers housework is given equal importance in this respect to spending more time with friends or partners, or gaining more 'me time'. Ironically, then, for a small minority these labour-saving devices simply make more time for doing more housework. For the majority, though, this 'saved' time is translated into more time for childcare. As in other European contexts, the vast majority (72%) of Portuguese mothers transfer this 'saved' time into quality time with their children (see Figure 12 below).

Figure 12. Use of time saved by labour-saving devices and products



While this pattern holds for all women across the cohort, Figure 13 shows that mothers working part-time are more than twice as likely (16%) to spend this extra time with friends or a partner compared with women working full-time and with stay-at-home mums. Part-time working mothers are also less likely to spend this 'saved' time on additional household chores (5%).

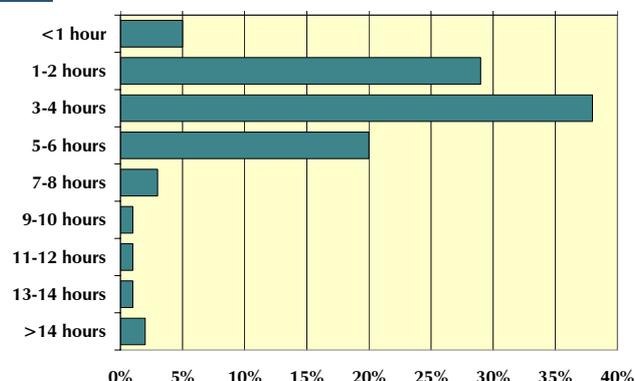
Figure 13. Use of time saved by labour-saving devices and products by employment status



1.2.8 Active time with children

In contrast to the above claims about 'extra' time spared through the use of labour-saving devices, however, Portuguese mothers actually record relatively low levels of 'active' time spent with their children each day ('active' time describes time spent reading, writing, dressing, playing, washing etc.). On average, Portuguese mothers spend 3.89 hours of active time with their children each day, placing them some way below the European average of 4.1 hours. As Figure 14 indicates, more than a quarter (29%) agree that they spend between 1-2 hours of active time per day with their children, while one fifth (20%) register between 5-6 hours.

Figure 14. Active time spent with children, average hours per week

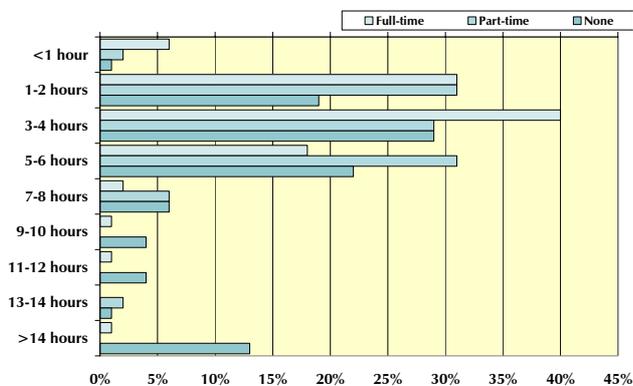


Portuguese mothers spend 3.89 hours of active time with their children – below the European average of 4.1 hours per day.

Clearly, this is related to employment status – but as with 'me time', the relationship is not always a straightforward one. There is little difference, for example, between the amount of 'active' time that full- and part-time working mothers spend with their children up until 3-4 hours of 'active' time. After this point, mothers working part-time outstrip full-time working mothers, with 33% of part-time mothers spending between 5-6 hours of 'active' time with their children each day. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the

mothers who do not work who are able to spend extended periods of active time with their children: 13% of stay-at-home mums record more than 14 hours of ‘active’ time spent with their children each day (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Active time spent with children, average hours per week by employment status



1.2.9 Help in the home

1.2.9.1 Childcare

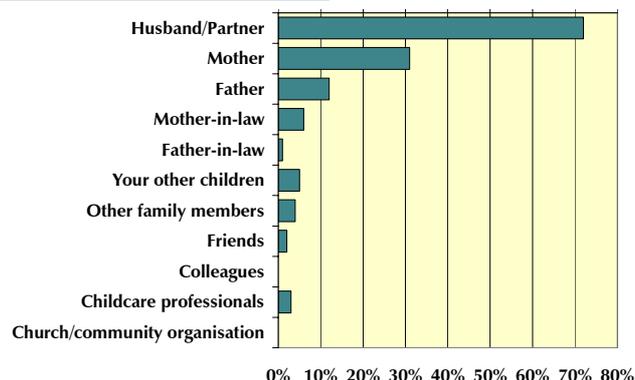
As in other European contexts, then, Portuguese mothers must balance their work commitments against time spent with their families, and again it seems that mothers working part-time face the greatest challenges in terms of managing work commitments against time spent with children. Managing this balance also involves the support and assistance of other family members, friends and, much less frequently, childcare professionals or community organisations. Just as in other European countries, Portuguese mothers receive the majority of help in the home from their husbands or partners. Almost three quarters (72%) agree that their husband or partner is the main other provider of childcare in the household, followed by the maternal grandmother (31%) and, to a lesser extent, the maternal grandfather (12%) (see Figure 16). These latter figures are also in keeping with most other European countries – although the extent of support from the maternal grandmother in Portugal is particularly marked. After Italy, Portugal ranks second highest in terms of the level of support with childcare from the mother’s mother.

Portuguese mothers rely on their husbands, their own mothers, and to a lesser extent their own fathers, for support with childcare. Extended networks beyond these family members are seldom used.

Interestingly, however, the Portuguese mothers surveyed do not conform to the ideal of Portuguese family life, within which extended family networks supposedly form an important part of childcare provision. On the contrary, only 5% agree that they involve other family members in childcare. A similarly small proportion suggest that they

employ a childcare professional (au pair, nanny, childminder, etc).

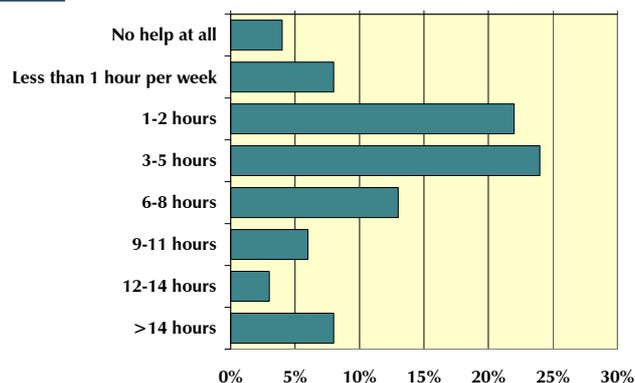
Figure 16. Support with childcare



1.2.9.2 Domestic work

While husbands/partners clearly represent the most *important* figure with regards to childcare and domestic tasks, it is worth digging deeper to explore what this actually means in practical terms. When Portuguese mothers were asked to tabulate the number of hours that their husbands/partners spend on domestic work each week, Portuguese fathers came up slightly short of the European average of 5.7 hours: Portuguese husbands/partners commit to an average of 5.2 hours per week. Figure 17 indicates that only 4% of Portuguese mothers receive no help whatsoever from their husbands/partners. Just under one quarter (24%) suggest that their husbands/partners do between 3-5 hours of household tasks each week.

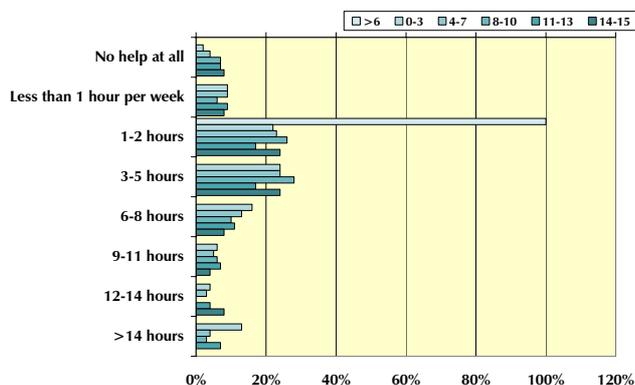
Figure 17. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores



It is interesting to note that the majority of husbands/partners do not seem to spend significantly more time on household tasks relative to the age of youngest child in Portuguese families (see Figure 18). It might be expected that younger children require a greater amount of involvement on the part of husbands/partners. This is indeed the case among a minority of husbands/partners with youngest children aged 0-3: 13% of husbands/partners in this age range spend more than 14 hours per week on childcare and domestic tasks. For

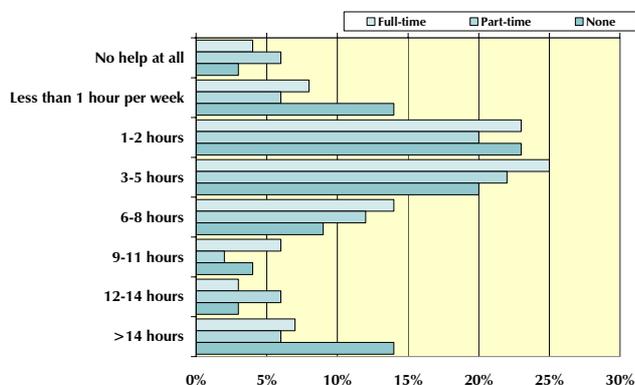
the majority who spend between 1-5 hours on domestic tasks, however, the figures do not vary significantly for husbands/partners with youngest children aged 0-10. After this point involvement drops off slightly for families with youngest children aged 11-13, and then resumes at a similarly average level of involvement in families with youngest children aged 14-15.

Figure 18. Time spent by husband/partner on domestic tasks by age of youngest child



It is also interesting to note that the level of support from husbands/partners does not change dramatically relative to mothers' employment status. That is, women can expect roughly the same amount of help with domestic tasks from their husbands/partners irrespective of whether they work full-time, part-time, or not at all. There is some variation: mothers who do not work, for example, are more likely to record low levels of support with childcare from their husbands, while women working full-time are slightly more likely to record levels of support between 3-8 hours. However, the differences in support are by no means relative to the number of hours that women spend outside of the home due to full- or part-time employment (see Figure 19). This runs contrary to the notion that the gender division of labour in Portuguese households in some way compensates for the increased participation of women in the labour force.

Figure 19. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores by employment status

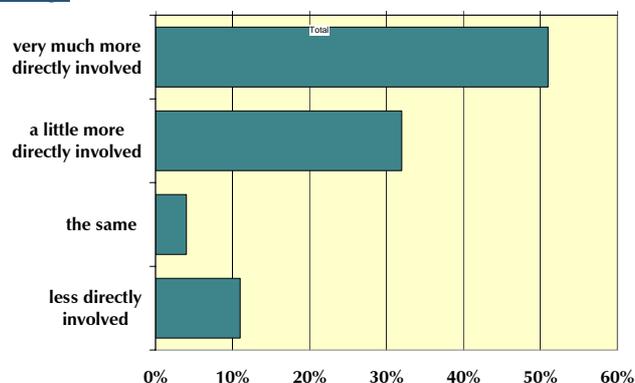


Mothers' employment status has little effect on the number of hours that husbands/partners spend on domestic chores.

1.2.10 Role of the father

Bearing this and the other contextual factors above in mind, mothers were asked about their perspectives of the role of the father in contemporary family life. In the Portuguese context (Figure 20), just over half of mothers (52%) agreed that fathers are now much more directly involved in the family than was the case in the past. A further 32% agree that fathers are a little more involved in the family than they were before. Interestingly, 11% of Portuguese mothers think that fathers are now even less involved in family life than they were in previous generations.

Figure 20. Involvement of the father in family life, generational change

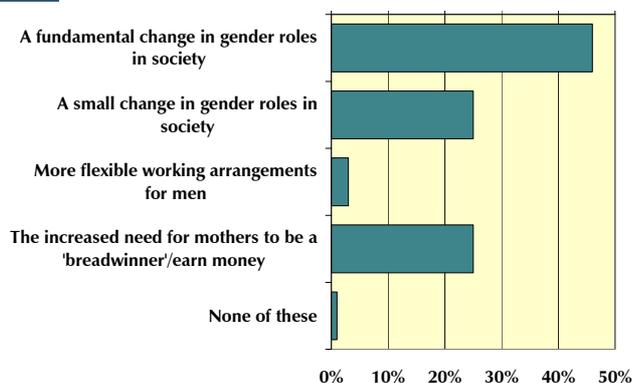


Younger mothers were most likely (13%) to agree with the latter argument – although in this age range, as in all others, the perspective of fathers' increasing involvement in family life was generally seen in positive terms.

When asked what they thought was the primary factor influencing this shift towards fathers' greater involvement in the family, Portuguese mothers agreed that this was a result of significant changes in gender roles within Portuguese society (see Figure 21). Almost half (46%) think that there has been a fundamental shift in gender roles in Portugal, while a further 25% think that the shift in gender roles has been small. On one level this is in keeping with the significant social changes that Portugal has experienced during the last forty years. Women only received universal suffrage in Portugal, for instance, in 1976, and since the end of the Salazar era both men and women have been expected to significantly alter their perspectives of gender in society. While entrenched views about the different roles and abilities of men and women remain – in part explaining the figure of 25% above, and also the relatively low participation of men in household chores – there is some evidence here that Portuguese society is making the transition to a position of greater gender equality.

It is important to note that this process is not merely due to changing perspectives of men, however: in keeping with Portuguese mothers' experiences of labour force participation, a quarter (25%) argue that this shift was in fact due to the changing roles of women, with women becoming 'breadwinners' on an increasingly equal footing with men.

Figure 21. Perceptions of the changing role of the father in the family



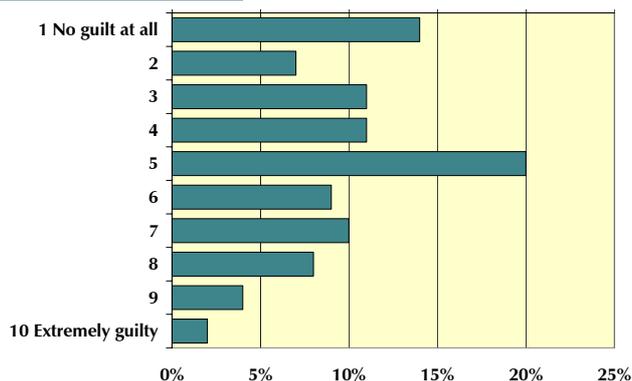
This shift in gender roles seems to be more evident among the younger generation of mothers. More than half (59%) of Portuguese mothers aged 18-24 agree that there has been a fundamental shift in gender roles, but only 2% in this cohort think that women becoming 'breadwinners' has a big impact on the role of fathers in the family. Among mothers aged 35-44, 42% also agree that there has been a fundamental shift in gender roles. Mothers in this cohort, however, are also the most likely (31%) to attribute the changing role of the father in the family to a shift in women's position as 'breadwinner'.

1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

Partly due to this recognition of changing gender roles – but also *because* of the recognition that women are increasingly also 'breadwinners' in the family – Portuguese mothers register varying levels of guilt about their work-life balance. Mothers were asked to rate their feelings of guilt about balancing work and family commitments using a scale where 1 represents 'no guilt at all' and 10 represents feeling 'extremely guilty'. Their responses can be seen in Figure 22. Among the Portuguese mothers, one fifth (20%) rated themselves a 5 out of 10 – or quite guilty. A further 10% ranked themselves at 7 out of 10, or very guilty. A larger proportion of mothers, however, ranked themselves below 5, suggesting that overall mothers feel some guilt but are reasonably content about their work-life balance. A total of 14% of mothers registered 'no guilt at all', while 11% ranked themselves at 3 and 4 on the scale.

Most Portuguese mothers register medium to low feelings of guilt about work-life balance

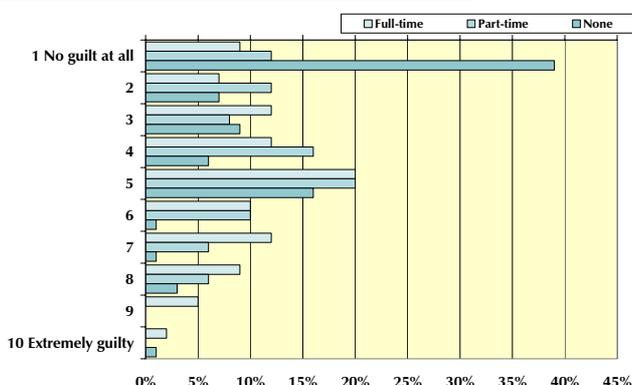
Figure 22. Maternal guilt



Digging deeper into this data reveals a number of interesting patterns to do with maternal guilt. There is a relatively straightforward relationship, for instance, between employment status and maternal guilt (see Figure 23). Among mothers who do not work, questions of work-life balance are clearly less complicated: 39% feel no guilt at all about this issue. Mothers working full-time and part-time register similar levels of guilt up to point 6 in the scale, at which point full-time working mothers register rather higher levels of guilt. Mothers working full-time represent the highest proportion of mothers scoring 7,8,9 and 10 on the scale. Indeed, 5% of full-time working mums feel 'extremely guilty' about their work-life balance. We might also relate this pattern to that above showing a relatively small increase in support from husbands/partners relative to the number of hours worked by full-time working mums. It is perhaps not surprising that mothers working full-time register higher levels of guilt about work-life balance, bearing in mind that they are also given responsibility for the lion's share of domestic and childcare activities as well.

Full-time working mums in Portugal feel the most guilty about their work-life balance. A small proportion (5%) feel 'extremely guilty' about the balance between work and family commitments

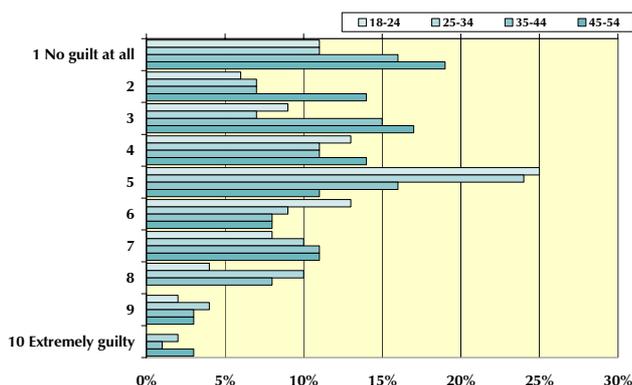
Figure 23. Maternal guilt by employment status



It is also noteworthy that younger mothers register higher levels of guilt about work-life balance. Mothers in the age

range 25-34 are disproportionately represented at points 7,8,9 and 10 of the scale (see Figure 24). Given the average age of first birth in Portugal (29.67), these levels of guilt might be explained in relation to younger mothers adjusting to the new and competing demands of becoming mothers for the first time, alongside already existing work-related responsibilities. With the majority of young women already in full-time employment by this age, it is not unlikely that the challenge of combining work and childcare leads to feelings of guilt.

Figure 24. Maternal guilt by age



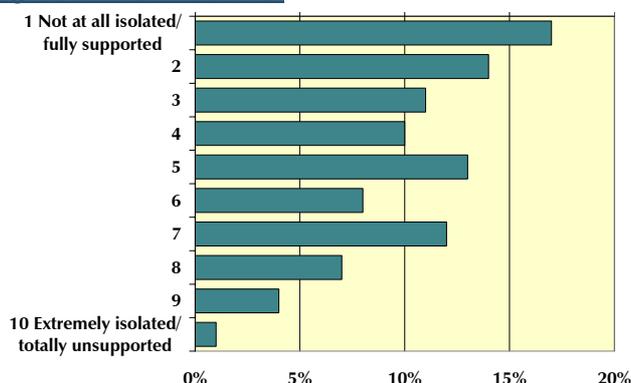
1.2.12 Maternal isolation

In some cases, levels of maternal guilt can also be linked to feelings of isolation. Mothers were asked to rank their feelings of isolation/not being supported (of missing out on social contact and/or not receiving adequate support with domestic/childcare responsibilities) on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing ‘not isolated at all’ and 10 representing ‘extremely isolated’. Figure 25 indicates that on the whole, Portuguese mothers were positive about the amount of support that they receive, and most registered medium or low levels of isolation. Almost one fifth (17%) consider themselves to be ‘not at all isolated/fully supported’, while a further 48% rank at 5 or below on the scale.

The majority of Portuguese mothers, then, seem quite happy with these aspects of their lives, despite the issues to do with time management and domestic/childcare support explored above. One way of explaining this apparent contentment, despite the sometimes difficult circumstances of Portuguese motherhood, is to relate back to data about Portuguese mothers’ perceptions of gender roles in the family. According to recent research conducted by the Portuguese social scientist Heloísa Perista and others, many Portuguese women still maintain a view of the domestic sphere as the ‘natural’ domain of women; and as a result, many women also consider the strains and challenges of modern motherhood – such as making up for both family income, emotional support and domestic activities – to be the ‘natural’ responsibility of

mothers as well.⁴⁴ For some, experiencing gender inequality at home does not necessarily lead to feelings of guilt, or isolation, or to feeling unsupported.

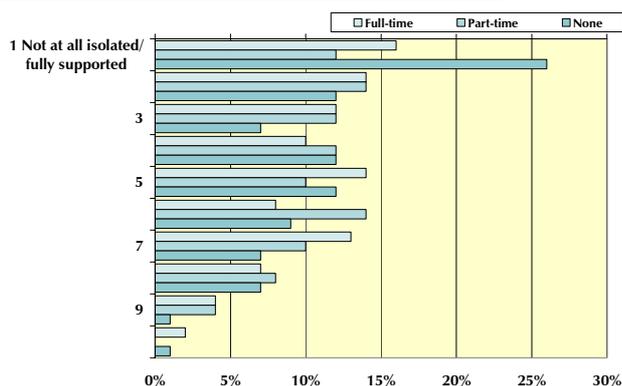
Figure 25. Maternal isolation



This is not, however, the full story; and as the data above suggest, there are some Portuguese women who feel particularly isolated or unsupported in their role as mothers. While mothers aged 25-34 are disproportionately represented on the higher end of the isolation scale, it is in fact mothers aged 35-44 who feel the highest levels of isolation and the lowest levels of support (see Figure 27). On the whole, it is also mothers who work full-time who register the highest levels of isolation and the lowest feelings of being supported (see Figure 26). This in particular links to the previous data suggesting that mothers in full-time employment feel especially guilty about their work-life balance, and not least because they do not always receive extra help from their partners/husbands relative to the increasing demands of full-time work. This latter point may explain why some mothers working full-time do not feel particularly well-supported. We might also connect the fact that mothers aged 35-44 who are in full-time employment are more likely to be at a crucial stage in their careers when they are expected to take on more professional responsibilities in order to earn higher salaries. Given the relatively low gender pay gap and low level of mother wage penalty in Portugal, full-time working mothers at this stage in their lives are likely to experience an even greater conflict of competing interests in their lives, and may feel isolated and in need of support as a result.

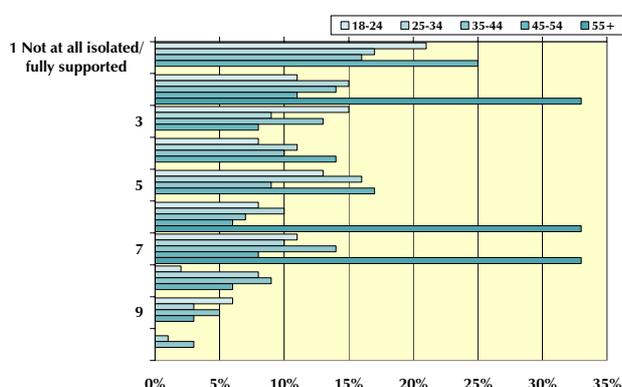
⁴⁴ Perista, H., (2003) *Time, paid and unpaid work in Portugal – A gender issue*, working paper no4, Centre for the Study of Law & Policy in Europe, University of Leeds. See also: Observatorio Das Desigualdades (25-1-2011) Persisting gender inequality in household chores. Interview with Heloísa Perista, <http://observatorio-das-desigualdades.cies.iscte.pt/index.jsp?page=news&id=149>

Figure 26. Maternal isolation by employment status



Portuguese mothers aged 35-44 and mothers in full-time employment experience the highest levels of isolation and the lowest levels of support.

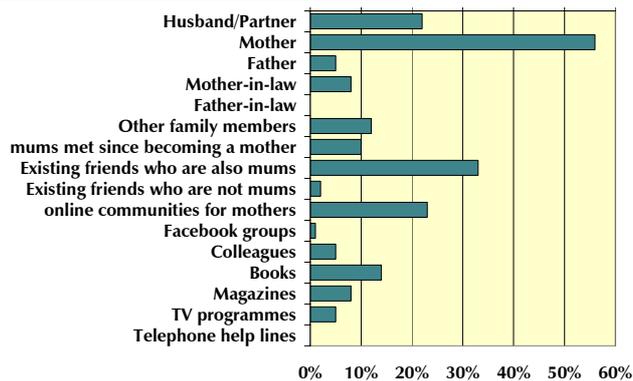
Figure 27. Maternal isolation by age



1.2.13 Support and advice

As we have seen above, however, most Portuguese women do not feel particularly isolated or unsupported in their roles as mothers. It is interesting to note, though, that most consider their own mothers, rather than their husbands or partners, as the first port of call for support and advice. Indeed, as Figure 28 shows, husbands/partners rank a lowly fourth as sources of advice and support. More than half of Portuguese mothers (56%) agree that they turn to their own mother most for advice about being a mother. A third (33%) turn to their own friends who are mums for advice. Just over one fifth (22%) turn to their husband or partner for support and advice. However, more (23%) would rather go online and seek the help of members of parenting/mothering forums. Paternal fathers are an even less trusted source of support and advice: they come a poor second to mothers-in-law, other family members, fellow mums recently met, and even magazines as a source of advice and support.

Figure 28. Sources of advice and support

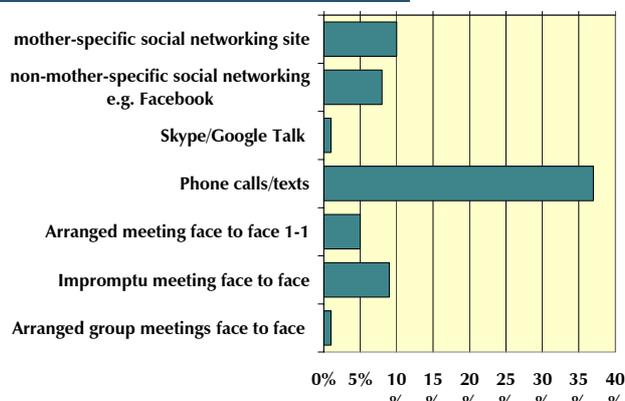


Portuguese mothers would rather go online for advice and support than ask their husbands/partners

Some interesting patterns emerge if we look at the relationship between age and sources of advice and support. Younger mothers, for example, are much more likely to ask their own mothers-in-law for advice. In keeping with stereotypes about the age of internet users, younger mothers (aged 18-44) are more likely than mothers aged 44 and over to rely on forums/online social networks related to motherhood and parenting.

When asked about how they tap into these networks of support, Portuguese mothers provided some interesting answers (see Figure 29). A large proportion (37%) of mothers suggest that their main avenue of communication for support and advice is via phone or text, while a further 10% frequent online mother-specific social-networking sites. Just under one tenth (8%) use other social networking facilities online, such as Facebook, for support, while only slightly more (9%) meet up with other mothers face-to-face in an impromptu way. Fewer still (5%) arrange to meet with other mothers face-to-face in a one-on-one context.

Figure 29. Communication with networks



There is a clear preference, then, towards virtual rather than face-to-face social contact for Portuguese mothers. This may also explain why many Portuguese mothers register relatively low levels of isolation: after all, if they

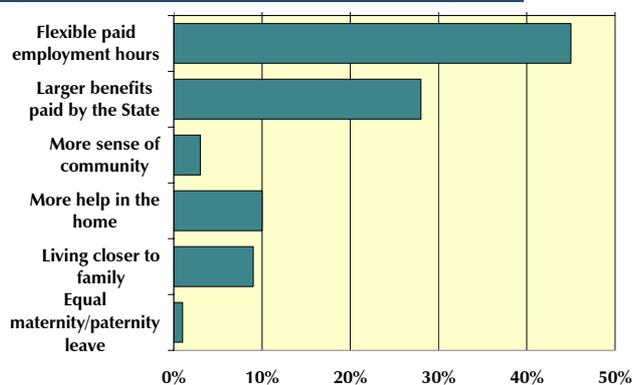
are able to go online, or phone, or text at any point during the day, then advice and support are never very far away.

Portuguese mothers are much more likely to seek advice and support through virtual rather than face-to-face contact. Phone, text and social networking are the main avenues of communication for support and advice.

1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

When asked about factors that would improve their quality of life, Portuguese mothers were clear in their support for more flexible working hours, more substantial state benefits and more help in the home (see Figure 30).

Figure 30. Factors with most impact on quality of life

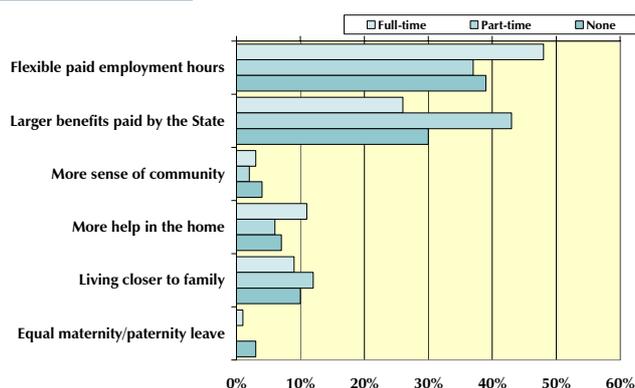


Almost half (45%) agree that a more flexible approach to paid employment hours would have the most significant impact on quality of life, while 28% suggest that increased state benefits would create the most impact. A further 10% think that more help with domestic tasks would have the biggest impact on quality of life.

Portuguese mothers prioritise flexible working hours, greater levels of state benefits and more help in the home as the key factors influencing their quality of life.

It is worth noting, as indicated in Figure 31, that flexible working hours are given priority by 48% of full-time working mothers – perhaps not surprising, given the potential impact of more flexible working hours on their work-life balance. Mothers working full-time are also most likely (11%) to argue for more help in the home as a means to improve quality of life. Relating this back to previous data on the involvement of husbands in the domestic sphere in relation to the employment status of mothers (see Figure 19), it is evident that some mothers working full-time want to see a more equitable division of labour in the home as recompense for their increased activity in the economic sphere.

Figure 31. Factors with most impact on quality of life by employment status



Mothers working part-time are most likely (43%) to prefer an increase in state benefits as a way to improve quality of life – a request that is in keeping with OECD recommendations that Portugal improve the state provision of childcare, particularly in the 0-3 age range.⁴⁵ Like mothers working full-time, mothers who are not in paid employment are also most likely (39%) to opt for more flexible working hours as a route to improved quality of life. In the latter case we may connect this to the fact that stay-at-home mums have a generally positive view of working mothers (see Figure 6 above), and that some would also like to work if flexible working hours made this a more feasible possibility for them.

Interestingly, Figure 31 also shows that 9% think living closer to family would have the biggest impact on quality of life. It is possible to link this statistic back to the ideal of the Portuguese family, in which extended family networks are supposed to play an important part in providing childcare and support. In the absence of such networks (see Figure 16 above), with increased geographical mobility across the country, and with a shortfall in state childcare provision, some mothers seem to wish for a greater degree of informal support from their families.

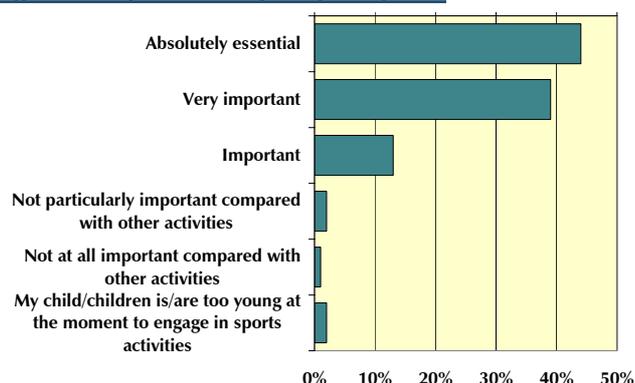
1.2.15 Sport

There is no doubt among Portuguese mothers that sports participation is a vitally important aspect of children's lives (see Figure 32). Almost half (44%) see sports participation as 'absolutely essential' for their children, while a further 39% see it as 'very important' and 13% think it is 'important'. Only 5% of mothers gave any caveats at all about the importance of sports participation for their children. This is in keeping with general trends across Portuguese society in terms of the ongoing significance of sports as an aspect of national culture and identity. The Portuguese state has also invested considerable resources in sports during recent years, with the effect that sports

⁴⁵ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families: Portugal*. OECD.

participation among young people has increased considerably.⁴⁶

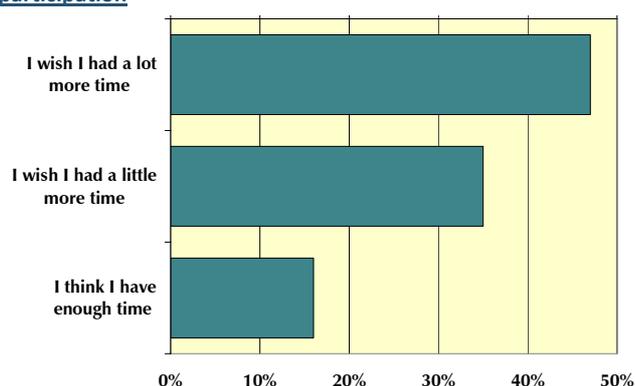
Figure 32. Importance of sports participation



This strength of belief in the importance of sports is not matched, however, in mothers' perceptions of how much time they are able to dedicate to their children's engagement in sports activities. Figure 33 indicates that almost half (47%) of Portuguese mothers wish they had much more time to dedicate to their children's participation in sports, while a further 35% wish that they had a little more time. Only 16% of mothers were confident that they were already spending enough time on sports participation for their children.

Portuguese mothers think that sports participation is a very important part of their children's lives. Most, however, feel that they could devote more time to sports participation. This is particularly the case among mothers working full-time.

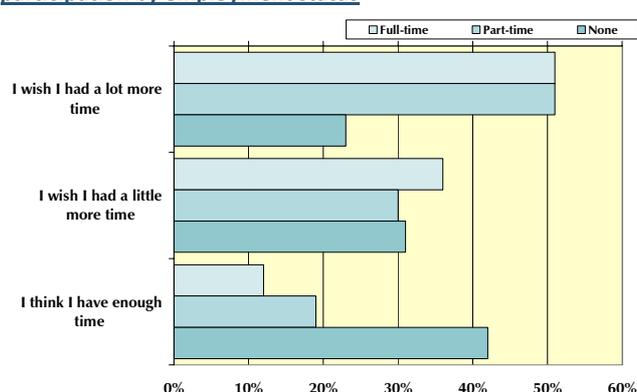
Figure 33. Perceptions of time spent on children's sports participation



Perhaps not surprisingly, it is mothers who are not in paid employment who are most likely to feel that they already have enough time for sports activities. Mothers in full- and

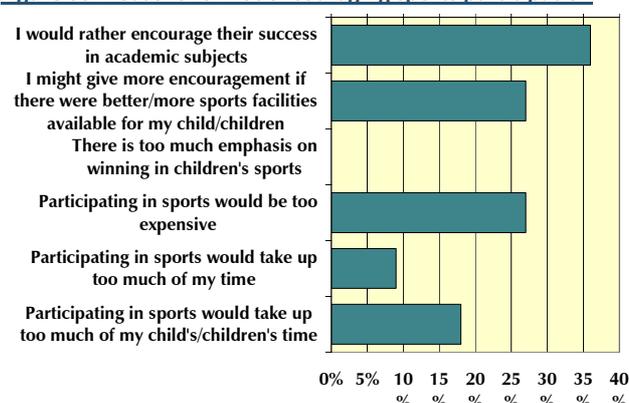
part-time work are equally likely to wish they had much more time for sports participation (see Figure 34).

Figure 34. Perceptions of time spent on children's sports participation by employment status



Among the very small proportion of Portuguese mothers who did not think sports participation was as important as other activities, a few interesting patterns emerge – although the particularly small size of the sample in this case (n=29.5) makes generalisation rather tenuous. Figure 35 shows that the most popular reason for not encouraging sports participation was a preference for supporting academic growth instead, while a further 27% of mothers agree that they would give more support for sports participation if they had better access to the appropriate facilities. An equal proportion (27%) suggested that participating in sports activities is too expensive.

Figure 35. Reasons for not encouraging sports participation



⁴⁶ Seabra, A., Mendonc, D., Thomis, M., Peters, T. & Jose´ A. (2007) Maia Associations between sport participation, demographic and socio-cultural factors in Portuguese children and adolescent, *European Journal of Public Health*, 18(1), 25–3.