

Gender Impact on Parenthood: A Qualitative Cross-Country Analysis

Ana Sofia Monteiro Maia^{1,2}, Joana Maria Correia Amaro^{1,2,3}, Margarida Miguel Costeira e Pereira⁴, Joana Moreno^{1,2,5}, Jessica Dimka⁶, Svenn-Erik Mamelund⁷, Teresa Isabel Costa Leão^{1,2,5}

¹EPIUnit - Instituto de Saúde Pública, Universidade do Porto

²Laboratório para a Investigação Integrativa e Translacional em Saúde Populacional (ITR)

³Departamento de Ciências da Saúde Pública e Forenses, e Educação Médica, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade do Porto

⁴Centro de Investigação em Antropologia e Saúde, Universidade de Coimbra

⁵Unidade de Saúde Pública, SESARAM-EPERAM

⁶Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice, Seton Hall University

⁷Centre for Research on Pandemics & Society (PANSOC), Oslo Metropolitan University

Abstract

Fathers' active involvement in family caregiving has been recognized as crucial for family well-being and workplace gender equality. However, gender disparities in childcare time persist, along with "fatherhood premium" and "motherhood penalty" in careers. This study aims to compare mothers' and fathers' perceptions of how parenthood affects professional trajectories, work-life balance, and well-being. We conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with employed Portuguese mothers and fathers living in Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy. A coding framework was developed to classify dimensions and applied using Nvivo software. Thematic content analysis was performed to analyze interviews. Despite gender equality progress, traditional norms and sociocultural patterns still shape parental roles in work and family life. In our sample of interviewees, women, particularly in Portugal, face work-life conflict as they juggle full-time work with primary caregiving responsibilities. In countries like Germany and Spain, women take on the role of main caregivers but reduce their work commitments by either working fewer hours or leaving the workforce. In contrast, men, even those committed to egalitarian roles, experience career benefits such as higher pay and career growth due to increased workload. The double burden of professional and private demands negatively

impacts well-being, with women expressing anxiety and guilt, intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, while men mainly reported physical impacts related to health behaviors. To ensure equal opportunities for balancing professional and parental responsibilities, access to supportive measures such as shared parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and childcare is essential, regardless of gender.

Keywords: gender; parenthood; qualitative research; well-being; work-life balance