

Problems of harmonization of family and professional life

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Nowadays, painless connection of professional and family life is an ideal desired virtually by all parents in the Czech society. It is certainly difficult to be engaged at work and in the family life as well. All parents face the problem of how to divide their attention and time. Whether this decision happens knowingly or rather intuitively, in the end, the parents have to find a certain compromise between their professional and family life.

The following text is based mainly on public opinion researches carried out by the Centre for Public Opinion Research of Academy of Science of the Czech Republic (Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění AV ČR). It will try to answer how successful is the process of harmonization of professional and family life in Czech families. It will also try to find out, what could facilitate this process for Czech parents and on the contrary, what makes harmonization of family and work in families more difficult.

Let us first have a look at the importance that people assign to their family and to their work. The CVVM research carried out in May 2004 dealt, among others, with the problem of value orientation. On the whole we can say that close friends and relatives have the highest value for majority of respondents. Almost all of the questioned stated that it is important for them to help their family and friends and live in a happy family (both statements were supported by 97 % of the questioned). Czech citizens assign absolutely crucial meaning to their surroundings and to their health.

90 % of Czech citizens ascribe important role to their work. As for professional values, the most important one is to have interesting and at the same time useful and meaningful job. For almost nine out of ten Czechs it is important to work in a group of nice people and to have a high salary. With respect to the importance that the Czechs ascribe to professional and family sphere, the problem of harmonizing family and professional life is surely worth examining.

In April 2003 CVVM dealt with the problem of harmonization of professional and family duties. The CVVM survey was initiated by people from the Gender and Sociology department of the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Sociologický ústav AV ČR).¹ The employees of the Institute were also authors of the questions.

At the very beginning of our research we wanted to find out whether respondents subjectively feel problems with harmonization of their professional and family duties. We therefore asked all economically active respondents: "How do you manage your professional and family duties?" More than one tenth of the respondents didn't answer the question, claiming that it didn't concern them. We will not include these respondents in our further analyses. From those, who are concerned with the given problem (n = 546), roughly half of the questioned claim that they manage their work and life with no major problems. The attitudes of men and women towards managing family and professional duties differed significantly (see Table 1).

¹ Department of Gender & Sociology was founded in 1990. In the course of the 90s they developed the concept of gender oriented sociology, both theoretically and empirically, transcending to feminist sociology. The main topics of their current researches are women on labour market, women in science, gender roles in family, harmonization of work and family, women in management and business, men in families, equal opportunities, motherhood and obstetrics, violence on women, creating gender identities and trans-genderism.

Table 1: Troubles with managing professional and family duties (in %) (n = 546)

	Total	Men	Women
I manage both with no major problems	59	56	61
I manage well my professional duties to the disadvantage of my family	21	27	16
I manage well my family duties to the disadvantage of my work	2	2	2
I manage both only partially	15	12	17
I have problems both in work and in family, I can't manage	3	3	4

Source: CVVM, Our Society (Naše společnost 2004) survey, research 04-03

By way of introduction we can observe a rather surprising discovery, that men admit having problems with harmonizing family and professional sphere more frequently than women. Almost half of men (44 %) and approximately two fifths of women (39 %) have certain problems with managing both family and professional life.

More than a quarter of men who face the problem of harmonizing work and family sphere admitted managing their professional duties at the expense of their own family. 16 % of women admitted that they disadvantaged their families at the expense to their professional duties. Only a small share of the questioned (2 %) admitted that they disadvantaged their work because of their family. More than one tenth of men (12 %) and almost one fifth of women (17 %) manage their work and family only partially. 4 % of women and 3 % of men struggle with considerable problems in harmonizing their work and family duties.

In the survey in question we were also interested in what would make it easier for the Czechs to harmonize their family and their work. On that basis, we can make some suggestions of how to make the harmonisation of work and family easier for the parents. We have therefore asked those respondents, who managed both their professional and family duties with no major problem, what helped them to do so.² They were presented a list of options from which they could choose.

² Question: "What possibilities, if you use them, help you most in managing your work and family duties without problems? Choose all relevant possibilities. (See Table 2)"

Table 2: What helps you most in harmonizing family and work duties (in %) (n = 319)

	Total	Men	Women
Partner is willing to divide housework equally	70	80	61
Partner is willing to share childcare and care of other family members	57	66	50
Partner is willing to take responsibility for the household	44	63	27
The management in my job is willing to agree to possible changes in work speed, work content etc.	34	35	33
I share my post with someone else	31	26	34
I have flexible working hours (I decide about my working hours on my own)	26	31	22
I use public baby-sitting facilities and other care facilities (creche, kindergarden, youth centre, day care etc.)	25	28	22
I use babysitters and people who take care of other family members (grandparents, private care person)	22	23	22
I can work at home (for example on a computer)	15	19	11
I work part-time	8	4	11
I have service or person at disposal, who does a major share of housework	5	7	3
We have childcare at my workplace	1	3	1

Note: The sum of 100 % for each statement is completed by "Didn't choose".

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 (Naše společnost 2004) survey, examination 04-03

The results of our survey indicate that partnership and division of family roles play a fundamental role in harmonization of professional and family life. Majority of respondents, who stated, that harmonizing family and work doesn't present major difficulties, stated, that they manage thanks to the willingness of their partner to divide the housework equally and share the childcare and care of other members of the household. Almost two thirds of men admitted, that they manage family and work, because their partner was willing to take on the responsibilities for household. Only a quarter of women, however, which have no problems with harmonization of family and work, chose this answer.

Roughly one third of the questioned claimed that certain concessions made by their employer help them significantly in managing family and work. The most frequently mentioned changes in professional sphere were willingness of the management to agree to certain changes in working pace or job-sheet and possibility to share their post. Approximately one quarter of respondents have a possibility of flexible working hours.

One quarter of respondents manage to manage smoothly their professional and family life thanks to various forms of childcare, such as public childcare (crèche, kindergarden, youth centre, day care) or help of other people (grandparents, private care).

Relatively small share of parents claimed that harmonization of professional and family sphere is easier for them thanks to the possibility of working at home or having a part-time job. Services or hired household help for doing major share of housework are used only marginally.

Respondents, who admitted having problems in managing both their family and professional duties were presented the same list and they were supposed to state, which option in the list would ease their situation.³

Table 3: What would be most helpful in harmonization of family and professional duties (in %) (n = 226)

	Total	Men	Women
Flexible working hours (the employee decides when to work)	73	71	75
Willingness of the management at work to accept changes in working pace, etc.	58	56	60
Partner's willingness to share equally the childcare and care of old parents	51	41	61
Partner's willingness to share the housework equally	51	38	64
Possibility to use other people for babysitting and care of other family members (grandparents, private care person.)	46	38	53
Possibility to use public childcare facility or facility for care of other family members (creche, kindergarten, youth groups, day care etc.)	44	39	48
Possibility to work at home (for example on a computer)	42	46	38
Partner's willingness to take on responsibility for the household	35	41	28
Part-time job	31	16	47
Possibility to use services or people for major share of the housework	31	28	34
Sharing the work post	23	19	26
Childcare at place of work	10	4	17

Note: The sum of 100 % for each statement is completed by "didn't choose".

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 (Naše společnost 2004) survey, examination 04-03

Certain concessions at work would help the respondents significantly in harmonizing their work and family. Almost three quarters of parents, who admitted that they were not too successful in managing both family and professional duties, would find flexible working hours (73 %) most helpful and half of them would welcome other flexible changes in their work, such as changes in work speed or worksheet (58 %). Many parents would also welcome the possibility to work at home (42 %). Less than one third of respondents believe that the possibility to have part-time job would ease their situation. Sharing the work post with someone else is not much valued. Possibility to have a childcare facility at workplace seemed useful to a relatively small share of the questioned.

Women particularly would appreciate equal division of childcare and housework (almost three thirds would choose this possibility). Division of household duties has proved to be crucial to manage successfully work and family.

In many cases, some kind of help with childcare would also help the respondents to harmonize their family and professional sphere. Almost one half of parents would like to use other people for childcare or care of other family members (grandparents, private care person, etc.) or public childcare facilities or facilities for care of other family members (creche, kindergarten, youth club, day care.). Approximately one third of parents would welcome a person, who would do a significant share of housework.

³Question: „Which of the following possibilities would help you to harmonize work and family? Choose all relevant answers. (See Table 3)“

It is also interesting to study the possible causes of possible problems in harmonizing family and professional duties⁴. Only respondents with children who are not provided for were asked this question.

Table 4: Reasons for impossibility to harmonize family and work duties (in %) (n = 355)

	Total	Men	Women
Frequent illnesses of child, children	52	50	55
High demands at work	36	48	25
Unavailable help from grandparents	36	30	41
Impossibility to hire person to help with childcare or care of other family members	29	27	31
My partner's job allows him only limited or irregular stay at our address	29	18	39
Impossibility to hire someone to help with the housework	29	22	34
Partner's unwillingness to share the housework	22	5	37
Family conflicts	22	18	25
Partner's unwillingness to share adequately the upbringing and childcare and care of other family members	21	6	34
Partner's unwillingness to take on responsibility for housework	19	7	30
Inaccessibility of a suitable childcare facility	19	18	20
Conflicts at work	14	18	11
My health problems	13	9	16
The fact that I live without a partner (unmarried mother, divorced mother or mother separated from a partner, etc.)	10	3	15
Inaccessibility of a suitable facility for care of old parents or other family members	8	9	7
Other reason	7	5	9

Note: The sum of 100 % for each statement is completed by "didn't choose".

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 (Naše společnost 2004) survey, examination 04-03

Respondents regard their child's illness as the most frequent obstacle in harmonization of family and professional sphere. Women and men have differed quite markedly in indicating other causes of difficult coordination of family and work.

Men indicated the causes more frequently in the professional sphere. Almost half of them believe that high demands at their work complicate harmonization of their family and working life.

Women, on the contrary, far more frequently indicated the causes in insufficient help with childcare, both from their relatives or paid institutions and people. More than one third of women believe the causes of their problems are inaccessible help from grandparents, in their partner's unwillingness to share housework, childcare and care of other family members and the impossibility to hire a person to help with the housework. Women indirectly confirm that men's problems with harmonizing family and work are caused by high demands at work. Two fifths of women believe that their situation is complicated because of their partner's job, which allows him only limited or irregular stay at home. In comparison to men, women are

⁴ Question: "What was the reason for impossibility to harmonize family and work or work with family? Choose all relevant answers. (See Table 4)."

more frequently disabled in harmonizing family and work by the fact that they live without a partner or by their own health problems.

Specific position of women at labour market is reflected by Code of Law, which regulates labour conditions both of all women, and especially of pregnant women and mothers. Apart from privileges that employees must provide to pregnant women and mothers according to the law there is also a number of measures that employees can but don't have to introduce (flexible working hours, possibility to work at home etc.) Women don't always regard these measures as positive ones. Some women regard them as a suitable pretext of their employee to cut their salary or withdraw their amenities.

Another question of our survey tried to find out, whether these measures are really applied at Czech workplaces or whether they could be introduced there. Only economically active respondents were asked to answer this question.

Table 5: Measures for harmonization of family and professional relations (in %) (n = 627)

	Exists already	Can be introduced	Can't be introduced in any way
Part-time job	29	25	41
Sharing work post with someone else	21	25	44
Flexible working hours (the employee decides when to work)	22	20	53
Working at home (for example at a computer)	11	13	70
Childcare available at place of work	2	8	83
Exceptional time off	12	31	43

Note: The sum of 100 % for each statement is completed by "didn't choose".

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 (Naše společnost 2004) survey, examination 04-03

From all the listed measures, Czech workers most frequently encounter with part-time job (29 %). Approximately one fifth of economically active respondents further claimed that there was a possibility at their workplace to share the work post with someone else or to work flexible hours. Only one in ten respondents stated, that employees in his/her workplace could work from home or take unexpected time-off. Childcare at work has turned out to be a marginal solution.

Among measures that could be introduced at their workplace, respondents mentioned most frequently exceptional time-off as well as part-time job and job-sharing. Majority of respondents stated that these measures already existed or they could be introduced at their workplace. On the contrary, more than one half of economically active respondents believe that flexible working hours at their workplace is out of the question. Possibility to work from home was excluded by seven out of ten respondents and childcare at place of work even by 83 % of all economically active respondents.

Conclusion

Czech parents are more or less successful in harmonizing work and family life. However, there is still an insignificant percent of workers, who admit having certain difficulties in harmonizing work and family. Whether parents manage to deal with both their work and family duties depends significantly on the situation in the family and at work.

Women who face problems in harmonizing family and work would welcome more help with household and childcare from their partner and other relatives. Smaller number of women

stated that they would welcome the possibility to use paid childcare or household help. Even women, who don't have problems in harmonizing work and family, admitted that their partner's help was crucial.

In working sphere, flexible working hours proved to be most helpful in harmonizing work and family. At the same time, more than a half of economically active citizens believe that introducing this measure at their workplace is out of the question. Similar situation applies to work at home. Many parents would welcome this measure at their workplace, but 70 % of economically active citizens believe that its introduction at their workplace is not feasible. Absolute majority of workers would also welcome willingness of their management to agree to certain changes in work speed, worksheet and so on.