

# **If You Dare To Ask: Self-Perceived Possibilities of Spanish Fathers to Reduce Work Hours**

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Time scarcity is a reality for most mothers and fathers of young children who work full-time. Though the Spanish law recognises a specific right to a reduced schedule for care reasons, fathers very rarely make use of this policy. Many of them simply think that, in their current employment circumstances, they ‘can’t’ cut down on work hours. This analysis focuses on the subjective perception that employees have on their difficulty to reduce work hours. Using a nationally representative sample of Spanish employees in charge of young children, and drawing on intersectionality perspectives, we propose that several stratification systems (e.g. gender vs economic structure) overlap framing the subjective experience of how easy or difficult it is to adopt a reduced schedule. We confirm that fathers holding middle level service occupations (e.g. clerical workers) may be those who are ‘undoing gender’ at work, as they differ significantly in their perception that for them it would be difficult to reduce their work hours.

Keywords: family-friendly companies; gender roles; WLB; working time; Spain.

## **Introduction**

‘We have books on time crunch, time famine (e.g. Hochschild,1997; Perlow, 1997) all of which indicate that finding time, usually for family, is the essence of the problem’ (Bailyn & Harrington, 2004).

Parenting requires spending quality time with children on a regular basis- time is therefore an invaluable resource for parents. In most countries, it is usually the mother who ‘provides’ most of this time, so the ‘one-and-a-half’ earner model (Hook & Wolfe, 2013) is the one adopted, previously to or soon after the arrival of the first child.

In Spain, at the moment when parents have to come back to work after a paid parental leave<sup>1</sup> (that is, four months after the childbirth) the child still has very intense care needs, so many mothers actually opt for either extending their absence from work through an unpaid leave or coming back to work on a part-time basis. Many are also forced to quit their jobs. Any of these changes are actually quite unusual for men: in the case of the reduced schedule, only 4.1% of employed fathers of at least one child under eight years old had ever adopted it, while this percentage rose to 25.8% for mothers (Spanish Labour Force Survey 2010). The adoption of a reduced schedule by fathers could be a relevant strategy to achieve more evenly distributed of paid and unpaid work within families, potentially affording mothers the opportunity to combine work and family avoiding long career interruptions. At the same time, it could allow fathers to be more involved in their children’ daily routine, to adopt new responsibilities or to reduce work-family conflict. This research proposes that the reduced schedule schema has a strong potential to improve work-life balance (WLB) as well as gender equity, but its underutilization suggests that prothere may be structural elements hindering a more widely spread use among fathers.

The theoretical and methodological approach of this research aims to cover some relative gaps in the empirical study of WLB resources. First of all, the fact that fathers very rarely adapt their work hours to the presence of children in the family has received relatively scarce attention (for example, up to date only one study has focused on employers' support for fathers reduced hours (Haas & Hwang, 2015)). Therefore, this research focuses on *fathers*, though, for comparative purposes, we also include mothers in some analyses. Secondly, we focus on employees' own *subjective perception* rather than on actual use of the reduced schedule (given its rarity among fathers) or on information reported by employers, while keeping the representativeness of the sample. Third, the Spanish context is an interesting setting to study the adoption of measures that promote a more balanced allocation of time to work, family and other human activities. Spain is characterized by very low fertility rates (Esping-Andersen, 2013), relatively long schedules (Kalmijn & Gracia, 2016) and a particularly unbalanced distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women (Giménez-Nadal & Sevilla, 2014).

This article is organized as follows: the second section presents the setting for the study in the Spanish context. The third section introduces the theoretical framework, while the fourth one discusses the main hypotheses proposed. The methodology and the results of the empirical analysis are presented in the fifth and sixth sections respectively. The concluding remarks appear in the final section.

### **The Spanish Context**

There are several reasons why Spain is an interesting setting for the study of time based WLB policies. The Spanish labour market is characterized by long working hours (Kalmijn & Gracia, 2016) and a relatively low provision and use of employee oriented flexibility within the EU context (Chung & Tjeldens, 2013). About 33% of Spanish fathers of at least one child under six years old work on average more than 40 hours a week (see

Table 1). The same percentage (33%) have a split-shift schedule, that is, a long work day (which extends beyond 6 p.m.) with a long lunch break (Kalmijn & Gracia, 2016). The subject of ‘presentism’, which is the cultural assumption that time spent at the office proves productivity or work commitment, is usually on the popular media<sup>2</sup>. However, cross country comparisons have shown that Spanish women and men differ not so much on work time but on employment participation (Boeckmann, Misra, & Budig, 2014). Long work hours are probably one of the main working conditions that expel mothers from the labour market.

Kalmijn and Gracia have showed how the split-shift schedule is negatively related to family time and parent-child time. Empirical evidence shows that today’s first-time fathers reject the model of the ‘absent father’ (González, Domínguez-Folgueras, & Luppi, 2013) and show concerns about the need they will eventually have to adapt their work patterns to the requirements of their coming offspring (Abril et al., 2015). However, many finally fail to do any substantial adaptation- in many couples, the arrival of the first child leads in fact to the ‘traditionalization’ of gender roles (Conde-Ruiz & Marra de Artíñano, 2016; Domínguez-Folgueras, 2015). Signs of change are however starting to be visible in recent years, as men are increasing their involvement in unpaid work while women are reducing it (Domínguez-Folgueras, 2015; Giménez-Nadal & Sevilla, 2014).

Spain is among several other western countries (Haas & Hwang, 2015) which recognise the right to reduce work hours for family reasons. This policy was originally regulated in the first version of the Workers’ Statute (1980), which is the main document regulating labour relations. Since then, the reduced schedule scheme has been successively modified to expand its scope: nowadays, the access to a reduced schedule includes not only the case of young children, but those of disabled children or

dependent adults. In the first case, and since the passing of the latest reform in 2013, all people in direct charge of at least one child under 12 years old can apply for the reduced schedule. The previous reform, in 2007, had increased the age to eight years (Lapuerta, 2012). The reduction can take between a minimum of one eighth to a maximum of one half of the standard work week- which in the case of a full-time job (40 hours) would imply working between 20 and 35 hours a week. This range has also been successively extended. Employees may decide, within their usual work schedule, the extent and period of the working time reduction (Moss, 2010). Although the wage is proportionally reduced, social security benefits are not totally prorated today. Therefore, this figure is different to ordinary part-time work, which is usually an employer-oriented arrangement, particularly frequent in the case of non-qualified jobs in services and commerce. In Spain, about 700,000 men and 1,900,000 women (7% and 23% of employed people, respectively) worked in any kind of part-time job in 2010 according to the Survey on Quality Life in the Workplace.

Table 1. Average working hours per week (father and mothers of at least a child under 6 years old)

**[Table 1 near here]**

Some longitudinal analyses using panel data from an administrative database (the Spanish Continuous Sample of Working Life Histories) have showed the particularities of the trajectories to and from the reduced schedule and parental/maternity leave (Lapuerta, 2012; Treviño, Vidal, & Devolder, 2009). Having job security (having a permanent contract, or working in the public sector) increases the likelihood for mothers to opt for a reduced schedule (Lapuerta, 2012; Treviño et al., 2009). All these analyses focused on mothers, due to the reduced amount of men who reduce their work hours. When focusing

on men, academic research has more frequently analysed male leave takers (Castro García & Pazos Morán, 2012; Escot, Fernández-Cornejo, Lafuente, & Poza, 2012; Romero-Balsas, 2012) than fathers working part-time for family reasons.

## **Literature revision**

### ***The 'Long Hours Culture' and the Right to Reduce Work Hours***

Sociological research on WLB has expanded substantially in recent decades, due to demographic as well as institutional reasons (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Probably the demographic change with the most dramatic effects is the generalization of dual earner couples. While there seems to be mixed evidence about the increase in individuals' paid work hours in recent decades (Gershuny, 2011; Jacobs & Gerson, 2001), what is undeniable is that families taken as a unit devote much more time to paid work than they did decades ago (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). While the model(s) of western families have dramatically changed during the last decades, the social norm about the 'ideal employee' has remained fairly unchanged (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013).

However, today's WLB policies do not necessarily touch the deeper structural roots of the 'long hours' culture', that seems to be paramount to sustain our economy (Sayer, 2005). Even in a country like Sweden, which pioneered the introduction of the reduced schedule for fathers, there seems to be little institutional interest to contest the assumption 'that the economy needs to be organized around a 40 hours week' (Haas & Hwang, 2015). The underutilization of the reduced schedule is probably related to its really challenging the 'accepted politics of time', which has very deep cultural roots (Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl 2013). Full-time and part-time work are social constructions (Lewis, 2010; Sheridan, 2004) that allocate people into two different sets of opportunities and constrains. Companies seem to be less supportive of fathers reducing

their work hours than of their taking a parental leave, maybe because working fewer hours than the standard represents a greater deviation from the norm than taking some time off work (Haas & Hwang, 2015).

The high time demands that some employees face at their work can have different deleterious outcomes. First of all, they can affect the quality of life and health of workers. Differences between actual and desired work hours (especially, in the case of ‘overwork’) are related to worse self-perceived health (Bell, Otterbach, & Sousa-Poza, 2012). Long schedules can negatively affect children too, as they can be deprived of spending enough time with their parents. In contexts like in USA, the ‘work devotion schema’ (Williams et al., 2013), for both men and women, is increasingly questioned. Empirical evidence shows that employees’ adoption of WLB measures is positive for organizations too, as it is associated with organizational attachment and commitment (Eaton, 2003; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Adopting more family-friendly work patterns can have a wide range of positive outcomes: higher job satisfaction, lower turnover, lower levels of strain and stress or work-family enrichment (see Kelliher and Anderson for a more complete revision of the evidence on organizational and individual’s outcomes of flexibility (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010)). There is not however clear evidence on why people do not use the work hours reduction to a greater extent. It is usually argued that one of the main reasons for parents not to reduce their work hours is related to the decrease in incomes (Treviño et al., 2009). However, as these authors point out (p. 185), only for a minority of Spanish people who have the right to reduce work hours, this is the reason alleged (12% of men and 6% of women). Reducing normal work hours can have different outcomes for people in different occupational statuses. Whereas for non-professionals, working fewer hours could imply simply ‘doing less of the same work’, professionals may have to cut down on the range

of activities they do (Barnett & Gareis, 2000). In a research among physicians, Barnett and Gareis found that part-timers' experienced a lower quality of life if they felt a high discrepancy between the activities they would like to perform and their work arrangements. However, as is evident from Figure 1, in those couples in which both members work less than 40 hours, children spend more time with their parents and in a more equitable way.

**[Figure 1 near here]**

Figure 1. Daily hours spent with children under 13 years old by couples' work time arrangement - weekdays. (% of total heterosexual dual-earner families in brackets). Source: Spanish Time Use Survey, 2009-2010.

***Fathers' Adaptation of Work Schedules***

As early as 1977, Pleck pointed to men's work demands as the ultimate obstacle they will have to face to adopt a more involved role in the family. 'If and when these norms [those related to the traditional division of family labour] break down the demands of the male work role will emerge as the crucial constraint on how much men can increase their family role' (Pleck, 1977). Still today, men very rarely reduce their work hours for family reasons. In a thorough theoretical reflection on 'why men do not work part-time', Sheridan argued that only a complex explanation (drawing from different perspectives such as economic rationality or feminist psychoanalysis) could answer such a complex question (Sheridan, 2004). Her main argument is that men do not consider part-time work because they see themselves as 'independent' –and part-time work implies assuming dependence on others. Her whole analysis questions the assumption that part-time work (but not full-time work) has to be analysed as a violation of the norm. However mothers still experience different forms of 'flexibility stigma', and are usually



relegated to a 'mommy track' - a second-tier group of supposedly less committed employees (Bailyn, 2011)).

Whereas fathers are gradually adopting a new model of fatherhood and, consequently, changing behaviour patterns at work, the pace of change is slow. One of the main obstacles fathers face are organizations' written or unwritten norms about male and female employees' desired behaviours. Companies' explicit support for equal parenthood has proved to be a factor even more important than the feminization of the staff, or the company economic constraints, in order to influence fathers' adoption of a reduced schedule (Haas & Hwang, 2015).

### ***The 'Subjective Experience' of Access to WLB Resources***

Fathers' perceptions on the normative models shaping work and careers at their organizations are important to determine fathers' behaviour at their workplace (Ladge, Humberd, Baskerville Watkins, & Harrington, 2015). This paper approaches the use of a WLB resource from the point of view of *how* employees *perceive* their *possibility* to access it, while keeping the representativeness of the sample. Subjective perceptions have particular limitations as social indicators, but they also present several strengths. For example, they offer an alternative to the study of actual *use* of WLB measures by fathers, given the scarcity of this use. Though perceptions and attitudes are not mechanically translated into behaviour, it is proposed that this kind of subjective assessments can be interesting 'synthetic indicators' of other individual and environmental variables, providing an 'overall subjective experience' of the interest variable (Powell & Cortis, 2016). Precisely due to (and not in spite of) their being subjective, they can be an appropriate way to approach individuals' decisions.

Subjective perceptions on WLB resources at the job level are usually addressed in qualitative studies (Abril et al., 2015; González & Jurado-Guerrero, 2015). These

studies confirm the popular notion that employees actually take a risk if they dare to ask for a reduced schedule, even if the Spanish law nowadays provides a quite flexible scheme and allows for a reduction from just five hours a week. The study of workers' subjective experiences contributes recognizing the 'power relations underlying working arrangements' (Powell & Cortis, 2016). As this employee recognises, in '*his job*', the possibility to reduce work hours *does* exist but at the same time *it doesn't*:

'No, not possible; I don't think so, because me, the only thing that I could reduce is, no [...] eventually I would end up being at work and earning less, which is not possible. In the job I have now, I *couldn't* do it; I *could*, but I *wasn't going* to do it, so...'  
(Abril et al., 2015).

The 'risks' can take several forms – from workplace mistreatment from their supervisor or work-mates, who may feel 'underprivileged' or unfairly overloaded, to occupational downgrading, or even a job loss. The economic crisis and the 'hard times' that companies are facing may reinforce the feeling that employees have to be particularly committed– i.e., that the time spent at the company does matter more than ever (Grau-Grau, 2013). Qualitative studies support this hypothesis (González & Jurado-Guerrero, 2015). In some regions of Europe, after the Great Recession, many employees have to face 'dramatically rising workloads' in 'chronically understaff organizations' (Kossek et al., 2010). Some of these obstacles would affect both men and women, though probably not to the same extent and they might consequently be assessed differently.

## **Theory and Hypotheses**

Drawing on intersectionality as a theoretical perspective inclusive of the different structures of domination (e.g. class vs gender) that constrain individuals' supposedly free choices (Risman, 2004), we propose that fathers' perceived difficulties to reduce work hours will be basically derived from gender roles or from the economic

/organizational constraints they face at their particular job, acknowledging the possibility of interactive effects.

We expect that, given the prevalence of the ‘female carer-male breadwinner’ model, gender is one of the most important variables explaining perceived difficulty to reduce work time. Experimental studies (Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003) show that, in comparison to mothers, the minority of fathers that seek for flexibility at the workplace may be in fact exposed to an ‘extra’ penalization. A double social stigmatization can affect those fathers who break several cultural norms (those related to the ‘ideal employee’ as well as the ‘ideal man’). We also expect that part of the effect of gender is in fact due to gender segregation; that is, women perceive less difficulty to reduce work hours because they are in the right jobs to do so.

However, we propose that particular jobs (more particularly, those middle-level occupations in the service sector) could offer a good scenario for fathers to ‘undo gender’ (Domínguez-Folgueras, Jurado-Guerrero, Botía-Morillas, & Amigot-Loache, 2016) and pioneer social change to a more equal division of paid and unpaid work (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2016). These jobs differ from lower and upper job categories in several relevant aspects. On the one hand, the ‘time famine’ is alleged to affect particularly professionals (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hochschild, 1997). This is consistent with the ‘stress of the higher status’ hypothesis (Schieman, Whitestone, & Van Gundy, 2006), which posits that higher status job conditions may have deleterious effects on work-life balance due to high levels of responsibility and job demands. Having high incomes has proved to have a high negative effect on men’s willingness to take paternity leave (Escot et al., 2012). This fact can probably be due both to the monetary and non-monetary rewards of high level occupations. People in managerial or professional jobs build a great part of their identity upon their occupations and are at the same time coerced and attracted by the

‘work devotion schema’ (Rutherford, 2001; Williams et al., 2013). While highly qualified professionals may be subject to particularly high productivity demands, we can’t exclude the possibility that some of those holding particularly ‘rewarding jobs’ may also decide to work longer hours (Gershuny, 2011). Using a sample of Swiss fathers, Gasser found that having a leadership position increased work hours, especially for fathers that had schedule control (Gasser, 2015). The effect of higher occupational status could be in fact reinforced by gender, so that men holding professional or managerial roles simply do not consider ‘part-time work as an option for them’ (Sheridan, 2004). On the other hand, we believe, as Lewis, that ‘the proliferation of contracting out, temporary contracts and other new forms of work’ transfers ‘risks and uncertainty from employers to employees’, creating a ‘growing peripheral or contingent workforce to whom family-oriented policies often do not apply’ (Lewis, 2010). We identify these jobs with those grouped in the category ‘sales and services jobs’, e.g. waiters, shopkeepers, sales workers, ticket clerks or security guards. In contrast with these two categories, men in middle level occupations are more likely to work in organizations or departments with a high presence of women, to have moderate incomes (and thus live in dual-earner couples) and not to be as career centred as managers or professionals. We hypothesize therefore that men whose jobs belong to the broad categories of ‘technicians’ or ‘clerical support workers’, perceive more easiness to access a reduced schedule, in comparison with lower and higher occupational groups. With regard to the effect of the gender structure on the perceived possibility to reduce work hours, we formulate the following hypotheses:

*H1. Mothers perceive less difficulty to reduce work hours for family reasons than fathers do (Hypothesis of the ‘male flexibility stigma’).*

*H2. Fathers in middle level occupations in the service sector (technicians and associate professionals, and clerical support workers) find it easier to reduce work hours for family reasons (Hypothesis of the 'undoing gender of middle class fathers').*

With regard to the economic /organizational constrains, we expect that employees in the private sector are subject to greater pressures imposed by productivity requirements and therefore also to overload and long schedules. In the case of the transferable part of the maternity leave, there is evidence that Spanish men working in the public, health or education sectors are more willing to take it than men working in other sectors (Escot et al., 2012). Likewise, some employees may be subject to overwhelming workloads which may force them to systematically work overtime.

The relatively small size of Spanish companies has been acknowledged as one important challenge to WLB. Big organizations tend to have formalized personnel rules and benefit from economies of scale (Osterman, 1995). If firms have internal labour markets (ILM), that is, if they offer possibilities of promotion within the organization, have high commitment systems and work in tight labour markets, they are more likely to have introduced WLB programmes (Osterman, 1995; Poelmans, Chinchilla, & Cardona, 2003). Multinational firms are more likely to be in any of these situations. International evidence shows also that the uptake of parental leave is more frequent in large companies (Romero-Balsas, 2012). We expect that, due to an easier redistribution of the workload within teams, the presence of a HR department or a greater protection against the adverse effects of the crisis, the effect of size will act in the same direction.

Therefore, with respect to the economic constrains, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3. Fathers working in the public sector perceive less difficulty to reduce work hours for family reasons than those working in the private sector (Hypothesis of the exposure to the market).*

*H4. Fathers working long hours (i.e. more than 42 hours a week) perceive it is more difficult for them to reduce work hours (Hypothesis of the high workloads).*

*H5. The bigger the size of the company, the smaller the difficulty found by fathers to ask for a reduction in their work hours (Hypothesis of the economies of scale).*

To end with, we propose that the effect of gender obscures to some extent the effect of gender segregation by occupations and workplaces. Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

*H6. The 'male flexibility stigma' of work-family policies (H1) is reduced when the effect of workplace related variables (occupation, size of company, economic sector, performing overwork) are considered (Hypothesis of gender segregation).*

## **Methodology**

### ***Data***

The data used in this study have been taken from the last edition of the Spanish Survey on Quality Life in the Workplace (2010), carried out by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. The survey includes a specific module on WLB, covers also individual characteristics (as household structure or personal and household net earnings), and has a considerably big sample size (about 9,000 individuals, representing the whole Spanish workforce).

With the aim of analysing a homogeneous sample of employees in terms of their life cycle, a subsample of fathers and mothers of young children has been selected. The survey allowed us to identify those people living with children being five years old or

younger. At the moment of the survey, parents could benefit from the statutory work hours reduction if their youngest child was 8 years old or younger. Other restrictions, such as having answered the question chosen as the dependent variable, have been applied. The final subsample (926 employees) was composed of individuals who have the following characteristics:

- They 'live with at least one child being five years old or younger' either in a couple or in a single-parent family.
- They are employees, either in the public or in the private sector, i.e., they work for a public or private organization with two or more employees..
- They hold full-time jobs or voluntary part-time jobs, so they have or have had the possibility to reduce work hours for family reasons. Including people with voluntary part-time jobs avoids the introduction of a selection bias, because those people may have already benefited from the reduced schedule.

This subsample corresponds to a sampling universe of about 2.3 million employees in the Spanish labour market (about 13% of the Spanish labour force at the moment of the survey).

### ***Measures and Analysis***

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, we have constructed a set of hierarchical linear regression models. To exclude the possibility that there are endogeneity issues (between two independent variables or between one independent and the dependent variable), a bivariate correlation test has been carried out. The higher significant correlation<sup>3</sup> was not high (40% of correlation in the case of being a man and working in a highly masculinized sector). Model 1 aims to test *Hypothesis 1*, that is, the effect of gender on the dependent

variable. Model 2 tests *Hypothesis 6* by introducing all the variables considered, that is, it tests the potential reduction of the effect of gender when the effect of workplace characteristics is analysed. Model 3 tests *Hypotheses 2, 3, 4* and *5*, regarding the effect of occupational status (*H2*), working in the public sector (*H3*), working long hours (*H4*) or working in bigger companies (*H5*). For comparative purposes, a last model (Model 4) has been added to replicate Model 3 with the sample of mothers.

The categories for each variable have been built following two basic criteria: a substantive one, derived from the theoretical framework and the hypotheses proposed, and a technical one, respecting a threshold of at least 10% of the cases in each variable category in a regression model (Jovell, 2006). That affects particularly the categories for the variable ‘occupation’, which have been grouped trying to respect both criteria.

The dependent and independent variables have been operationalized as follows:

The ‘difficulty to reduce work hours’ is the dependent variable and it derives from an original question asking employed people (self-employed people were excluded from that question) to ‘assess the level of difficulty they have to ask’ for different flexibility measures (such as taking an unpaid leave for family reasons). One of the items referred to asking for a reduced schedule for family reasons. The question was answered using a 0-10 scale, where 0 corresponds to ‘very easy’ and 10 to ‘very difficult’.

As all the original independent variables (excepting average week work hours) are categorical, they have been introduced as ‘dummy’ variables. With regard to the occupation (*H2*), the survey provides detailed information about the occupation of the individual, using two-digit codes of the National Classification of Occupations (CNO 94 in Spanish). We have regrouped the first level grouping (ten categories) of the CNO 94, which perfectly coincides with that of the International Standard Classifications of Occupations (ISCO 08). Due to its being a widely used classification of jobs at the



European level (Beham, Drobnič, & Präg, 2014; Eurofound, 2016), we will refer to the ‘ISCO 08 code’ hereafter. This classification groups occupations respecting a certain hierarchical level according to occupational status and qualification required, giving the code “1” to managers and the code “9” to elementary occupations. To test the hypothesis of the ‘undoing gender of middle class fathers’ (*H2*), ‘middle level services occupations’ will be compared with those in upper positions (‘manager and professionals’) and lower positions (‘services and sales workers’) in the occupational scale<sup>4</sup>. What we defined as ‘middle level services occupations’ corresponds to ‘technicians and associate professionals’ and ‘clerical support workers’ (ISCO 08 codes 3 and 4, respectively). The variable ‘works more than 42 hours a week’ has been built from the estimated average weekly work hours reported by respondents. The company size (*H5*) was originally a categorical variable comprising the following categories: 2-10 workers, 11-50 workers, 51-249 workers, and more than 249 workers.

## **Results**

Mothers find it easier than fathers to ask for a reduced schedule for family reasons (*H1*) as the descriptive and regression analysis confirm, especially if they work in the public sector or in a company with more than 250 employees (see Table 2. Descriptive statistics. Table 2). About 45% of fathers (vs 39% of mothers) scored their difficulty to reduce work hours 6 or above. Fathers find it easier to reduce their schedule if they work as technicians (e.g. web technicians, dental assistants) or clerical support workers (e.g. library clerks) than in any other occupational category. The same does not occur for mothers, what seems to be suggestive of the hypothesis of interactions between gender and occupational status with respect to individuals’ position to access WLB resources. Therefore, *Hypothesis 1* and *Hypothesis 2* can be confirmed.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics. Dependent and independent variables

**[Table 2 near here]**

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Armed forces, industry, agriculture and elementary occupations.

Table 3. Linear regression estimating the perceived difficulty to reduce work hours'. Main results

**[Table 3 near here]**

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Armed forces, industry, agriculture and elementary occupations.

\* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

With respect to the effect of economic/organizational variables (public/private sector, high workloads or size of the company), only the latter (*H5*) can be (partially) confirmed. Though working in a company with less than 50 employees seems to provide a relatively bad scenario for fathers to reduce work hours, there are not significant differences between medium size companies (50-249 employees) and bigger companies (more than 249 employees). There is a difference between men and women here, as mothers seem to find relatively better conditions than men in the smallest companies (2-9 employees). Therefore we can confirm *H5*, though the threshold to consider an 'economy of scale' would be in 50 employees.

When all the variables are introduced in Model 2, the effect of gender becomes insignificant, confirming therefore *Hypothesis 6* regarding the effect of gender segregation. That means that the differences found between men and women are to a great extent due to differences in the jobs, companies and sectors in which women and men work.

To end with, it is also worth noting that, while working long hours introduces the highest significant effect for women, this is not a significant variable for men. While for mothers working long hours actually an obstacle to reduce their schedule, it is not so for men. This fact is consistent with the argument that part-time work threatens the construction of masculinity (Sheridan, 2004), as for men, the greatest obstacles to make use of it seem

not to be material. The latter hypothesis can't however be empirically tested with these data.

The whole model is more explicative for women than for men (as the  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  measures show) which is probably a consequence of the greater information women have on WLB resources, which enables more consistent responses. In any case, it has to be born in mind that only a small proportion of the variance (from around 1% to 7%) was explained by the models proposed.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

While many women in Spain are virtually expelled from the labour market after becoming mothers, men very rarely modify their work conditions, and if they do so, it is precisely to increase their attachment to their jobs. In this context, the adoption of a reduced schedule could potentially contribute to achieve a new scenario of a more equitable division of paid and unpaid work within families, as long as we gain better insights on why men very rarely make use of it. Drawing on intersectionality theories, it is proposed that a set of organizational/economic as well as gender related factors interact providing the conditions for all employees in an organization, or for some of them, to be embedded in a 'long hours culture' (Allard, Haas, & Philip Hwang, 2007). This culture prevents employees from openly asking for an adaption in their working conditions without fears of the eventual negative consequences of that demand.

The present article presents the case of Spain, a country characterized by long work hours. It aimed to shed light on which variables have an impact on fathers' perception that it is easy or difficult for them to reduce work hours for family reasons if they needed to. A representative sample of 926 working parents obtained from the 2010 edition of the Spanish 'Survey on Quality Life in the Workplace' has been used. Four of the proposed hypotheses could be confirmed ( $H1$ ,  $H2$ ,  $H4$  and  $H6$ ). Gender seems to be

a crucial factor to explain employees' perceptions that they could (or not) reduce their work hours. However, these results suggest that much of that gender effect is 'absorbed' by the job and other workplace characteristics. Therefore, a man in a traditionally feminine occupation (e.g. a clerical officer) would experience similar difficulties than women with regard to reducing his work hours. This fact would confirm gender as a 'package' of behaviours, choices and preferences that interacts with many other characteristics that define people as individuals. It would also confirm that work environments are not gendered neutral (Acker, 1990) but in fact built upon a deeply rooted role differentiation between men and women, which includes in the first place vocational decisions. An effective design of public policies should therefore account for the complexity of the gender structure. In this sense, enhancing male managers' uptake of parental leaves or reduced schedule schemes would be more effective if considering in the first place a potential self-selection of those men into traditional male roles (defined by high orientation to work vs family, high competitiveness, and so on). However, according to our findings, in the case of women, jobs do not introduce any significant difference with respect to the dependent variable, suggesting that the use of a reduced schedule has a wide social recognition in the case mothers, even for those holding typically masculine jobs.

Our results suggest therefore that gender roles are more relevant to explain our dependent variable than organizational / economic variables. Nonetheless, medium and big size companies (more than 49 employees) seem to offer a better scenario for both men and women seeking to reduce their work hours for family reasons.

These findings are not conclusive and, in fact, they open the door to new relevant research questions, as those related to the reasons why some fathers (e.g. those working in middle level occupations and/or bigger companies) seem to be in a relatively good

position to reduce their work hours. Further research could explore if this finding is due to material constraints (e.g. workloads) or to cultural factors.

This work has several limitations that are also worth noting. To begin with, the size of the sample (926) forces us to draw conclusions prudently, especially for some small subgroups, though it provides an overview on a relatively homogeneous collective in terms of their position in the life cycle.

With regard to the dependent variable, we are conscious of the fact that the phenomenon under study has been a *subjective perception of a relative position*. Assessing this ‘difficulty’ to reduce work hours is probably the result of a more or less conscious comparison with people in a similar position, and therefore dependent of the subjective perception of the individual on *how well others do* regarding this issue. This subjective perception probably hides also more or less conscious *preferences* that are worth being explored further. Further research could help understand to what extent gender differences in perception are mediated by different preferences to actually make a schedule adaptation. The variables proposed in these models account for only a small amount of the differences in fathers’ perception that it is difficult for them to reduce work hours. In any case, this research has shown a quite different picture for men and women. While those mothers who are more ‘time-squeezed’ at their jobs (i.e., the 15% of mothers who work more than 42 hours per week) seem to be in the worst position to reduce their schedule, our results suggest that the situation is more complex for fathers, and that, for them, having a ‘reduced schedule for childcare’ may still be more than a question of time.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Spain, fathers are entitled to three types of leave in case they want to take time off work after a childbirth: maternity leave, paternity leave and unpaid parental leave. None of them is compulsory for fathers. Maternity leave comprises a maximum of 16 paid weeks (of which 10 can be transferred to the father). Since 2017, paternity leave has been extended from 15 days to one month. It can't be transferred to the mother. Unpaid parental leave can take up to 3 years (for each parent) after the childbirth. Social security benefits, and the maintenance of the job, are guaranteed in the case of unpaid parental leave. In addition, some regional governments offer low-flat benefits (Escot et al., 2012). For a synthetic revision of regional differences in the benefits associated to these leaves, see Escobedo and Navarro (Escobedo & Navarro, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> There is a specific organization promoting legislative and cultural changes in this direction, the Commission to Rationalise Spanish Work Schedules (ARHOE) <http://www.horariosenespana.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Correlation results available upon request.

<sup>4</sup> As all taxonomies, the (re-grouped) ISCO 08 classification may establish arbitrary conceptual frontiers. It has been complex to establish relevant categories for both men and women with a sufficient sample size (i.e. more than 10% of the sample) for at least two reasons. First of all, some relevant groups (e.g. managers) are relatively underrepresented in the Spanish labour market (less than 6% of the working population) so comparative quantitative analysis is difficult to address with these groups. Secondly, the high gender occupational segregation makes the issue of finding relevant categories for both sexes more complicated (for example, while 13% of mothers work as 'clerical workers', only 6% of fathers do so). In any case, we have preferred to respect the inner composition of each one-digit category of the ISCO 08 /CNO 94, which are widely accepted as standard classifications. Therefore we have only re-grouped consecutive one-digit groups.

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