

*Fathers and Mothers - Dilemmas of the work -Life Balance:*

*A comparative study of 4 European Countries*

**Introduction**

The above study into reconciliation of work and family roles, commenced in January 2001 and concluded in July 2002 with co-funding from the European Commission (DG V) utilising funds from the European Social Fund and funds from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in Ireland were provided under the Equality for Women Measure of the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

The project was co-ordinated by the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, [ Dr. Margret-Fine -Davis] with scientific collaboration from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and the Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (France) [Dr Jeanne Fagnani], the University of Trento (Italy) [Prof. Dino Giovannini] and the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) [Prof. Lis Hojgaard].

The purpose of this study is to examine people's experience of and response to family-friendly policies in their countries with a view toward facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life. The challenge which still faces even the most advanced of the EU member states is how to facilitate more egalitarian sharing of roles, that is to say, how to relieve women of the double burden of employment and domestic duties, while encouraging men to take an active part in family and domestic life.

EU policy in this area has played a significant role in harmonising social legislation in the member countries so that countries which were lagging behind have been forced to catch up with countries more advanced in this area. However, the concept of family friendly policies extends beyond the legislative area and includes the voluntary adoption by employers and employees both in the private and the public sectors of a range of practices designed to achieve a workable balance between employment and family life. The team of researchers involved in the project represent countries which have traditionally been at different points on the continuum, and yet are all currently grappling with similar issues, due to the convergence of social conditions in the Community. The varied expertise of this group identified the key issues concerning the reconciliation of work and family roles, with particular emphasis on how to involve men more in domestic and family activities. The research includes a focus on

- workplace policies;
- attitudes of men and women as workers and as parents; and
- social policies designed to address these issues.

The project provides an overview of the latest research findings, policies and instruments in four countries, each of which represent a different "experience" of the evolving gender role process. The research compares and synthesises the findings, leading to a current analysis of people's dilemmas and coping strategies in four different countries of the EU.

The project - through analysing national family workplace policies, as well as people's experience of these - aims to help us to better understand how we can more equitably help parents to get the work and family balance right and how, together with employers, we can help to make family-friendly policies work.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### **Background**

Demographic and social changes throughout Europe have led to a changing social situation requiring new policies. The increasing labour force participation of women, particularly those in the childbearing years, has been accompanied by increasing needs for childcare, flexible working arrangements and greater demands for equality in the workplace. The challenge which still faces even the most advanced of the EU member states is how to facilitate more egalitarian sharing of roles, that is to say, how to relieve women of the double burden of employment and domestic duties, while encouraging men to take an active part in family and domestic life.

The present study brought together an interdisciplinary team of social scientists who had been working in different countries with different experiences. Denmark is an example of a Scandinavian country with advanced policies in the childcare area, yet it is still struggling with the question of how to involve men in greater sharing of roles. France is also advanced in terms of provision of childcare, yet it has experimented with different forms of childcare policy than has Denmark. Italy has traditionally had lower rates of female participation, yet this has been changing, particularly in Northern Italy. Ireland has also had a relatively traditional pattern, however, in the last 30 years the labour force participation of married women has increased geometrically from 7.5% in 1971 to 46.4% in 2001, with an even higher percentage in the childbearing age group 25-34 (64.7%). The economy has recently experienced a boom and there has been an even greater demand for female labour. Yet the childcare issue is only recently being grappled with at a policy level, in spite of numerous reports in this area over the last 17 years, and the extent of leave available to women at childbirth is only beginning to catch up with that available in many other European countries.

### **The Study**

The purpose of the present study was to explore people's attitudes and experiences in coping with balancing work and family in four European countries: Ireland, France, Italy and Denmark, with particular reference to the different perspectives of men and women. Attitudes towards and experience of different workplace social policies was also explored. Another major purpose of the study was to develop new social indicators to measure issues of work life balance which could be utilised in studies with larger more representative samples in Ireland, in the other countries participating in the study and in Europe as a whole.

A comparative study was carried out on samples of 100 men and women in each of the four countries for a total of 400 respondents, all of whom were 1) employed, 2) living in a couple with a partner/spouse who was also employed; and 3) had at least one child under six. The sample was stratified by sex, socio-economic status and

employment in the public vs. the private sector. These sampling parameters held for all of the four countries participating in the study and hence the samples are comparable. All of the Irish respondents were from Dublin and the samples from the other three countries were also from major cities, i.e., Paris, Copenhagen and Bologna.

Prior to collecting the data a review was carried out in each of the four countries on national policies, the current availability, and attitudinal studies related to family friendly policies and work life balance. This also entailed identifying instruments and items from previous research, which had been used to measure the topics of the current research. A new instrument was then constructed which reflected the best of the items located in previous research in Denmark, Italy, France and Ireland, as well as in other countries, including the U.S., Britain, Canada and Australia.

## **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF MAIN RESULTS**

Below we present the key findings of the study with interpretation both from a social psychological and social policy perspective. Given the wealth and complexity of the data obtained in the study, it is not possible to do justice to the full implications of the findings in this short section. However, the data are here and we invite others to join us in more fully interpreting the implications of the results we have obtained. It is important to bear in mind that a main goal of the study was to develop measures – new social indicators – in the area of work-life balance. This study particularly focused on the work-life balance issues of parents with young children living in four European cities – Paris, Bologna, Copenhagen and Dublin. It is to be hoped that the measures we have developed will be used by other researchers on larger, more representative, national and cross-national samples.

We shall summarise and discuss below the key findings under the major headings of the study.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample consisted of half males and half females, all of whom were working parents with at least one child under six, living with their partner. Most respondents were in their mid-thirties, with a mean age of 35 years for all countries. Approximately three-quarters of the respondents were married (73%), and one-quarter co-habiting (27%). The highest percentage of couples co-habiting was in France, at 42%, and the lowest in Italy, at 11%. The socio-economic status (SES) of the respondents was one of the stratification variables in the sampling design. Thus 50% of the sample were “lower SES” and 50% “higher SES”. Sector of employment was also one of the key independent variables in the stratification design. Thus, we systematically selected half of respondents in the public sector and half in the private sector.

## **1. FAMILY LIFE, WORKING TIME AND THE BIRTH OF THE YOUNGEST CHILD**

Most of the respondents had either one or two children. The average age of the youngest child was 2 ½ and the average age of the next youngest child was 6.

- Following the birth of their youngest child, 50% of women and 27% of the men in the sample modified their working time. Danish women were least likely to do so (34%), compared with Irish, Italian and French women (54-56% of whom did) and French men were least likely to do so (8%) as compared to men from Italy, Ireland and Denmark (24-36%). The majority of those who modified their working time tended to decrease it. Almost one fifth of Irish and Danish fathers did so.
- Danish parents, both mothers and fathers, were more likely than any other group to temporarily interrupt their working activity over and above paid maternity leave, following the birth of their youngest child. This was true of 62.5% of Danish men and 92% of Danish women, whereas it only applied to 8% of Italian men, 16% of Irish men and to no French men. French women were also least likely to interrupt work on the birth of the youngest child; only 21% did so, as compared with 38% of Italian women and 46% of Irish women.
- Danish parents stood out on these measures as being the most likely to take time off work following the birth of the youngest child, and yet also experienced the fewest changes to their lives in terms of life habits, free time etc.
- The majority of respondents from all countries wanted to spend more time with their families: 52% wanted to spend “more time” and 23% said they wanted to spend “much more time.”
- There was also a wish expressed for one’s partner to spend more time with the family. In the all-country sample, 50% said they would like their partner to spend more time with the family and 18.5% said they would like them to spend “much more time”; female respondents were significantly more likely to express this wish.
- The parents in the sample also expressed a wish for more personal time; 59% would like “more time” and 16.5% would like “much more time.” French parents expressed the greatest wish for more personal time and the Danes the least.

## **2. DOMESTIC AND CHILD CARE ACTIVITIES**

One of the main areas of the study was an examination of domestic and child care activities and a comparison of mothers and fathers in terms of who did what and in terms of the reciprocal perceptions of who carried out which activities.

- The study found that mothers carried out significantly more of the domestic and child-care tasks in the home than fathers did in all of the four countries.

- There were large discrepancies between male and female perceptions of who did what. Fathers were more likely to think both of the partners carried out tasks than mothers did. Mothers were more likely to report that they carried out the tasks.
- Where fathers excelled was in relation to taking care of the children. This was true in the case of feeding, bathing, taking to school/crèche, and changing nappies. But most of all, it was true in the case of playing with the children.
- The more *both* partners carried out domestic and child-care tasks the greater their satisfaction with family life, relationship with partner, and with life in general. The greater the total amount of help received, the greater the satisfaction with the spouse/partner.
- The more *both* partners carried out domestic tasks and child-care, the more likely mothers were to report feeling satisfied with their family life, with their spouse/partner, and with their life in general.
- Receiving help with domestic tasks and child-care was found to be more significantly related to mothers' well-being than it was to fathers'.

Our data show that, in all countries there exists a wide gap between what both partners express and perceive about the various activities they carry out in their daily lives. The results of the present study confirm what previous research work has shown (Bimbi, Castellano, 1990; Ventimiglia, 1994; Giovannini & Goriup, in press) regarding the fact that fathers are more likely to overestimate their contribution in the home and their participation in child-care, as compared with mothers. Bimbi (1990) suggests that fathers are aware of the "asymmetry" that is present in their family. However, they do not participate more and, in many cases, do not even show a willingness to change, except where child-care is concerned.

Like Bimbi, Castellano (1990) has suggested that we face a situation in which even those fathers who would like to spend more time with their family and with their children are nevertheless satisfied with the level of their contribution to the various household activities, and do not perceive they should be more involved in a domain that they do not perceive as pertaining to them.

Concerning the Italian context, the roots of such attitudes can be found in the comparison with an ideal model: some fathers who are in reality not very collaborative in the family domain may compare themselves favourably with their even more "housework and childcare-distant father", and will perceive themselves as much more "present" and, therefore, overestimate their contribution to the family. A further explanation for such male overestimation may be found in the relatively lesser experience of fathers with respect to household activities, which may lead them to think of their contribution as appropriate, when in fact it is quite limited, because they do not realise the totality of things it would be necessary for them to do.

## **Childcare Arrangements**

Childcare arrangements for the youngest child (under six) and the next youngest child (under 12) were ascertained. It was found that:

- The youngest child (aged under six) was most commonly cared for in a non-workplace childcare center/crèche/nursery or *école maternelle*.
- The majority of parents also used their partners or another relative to supplement their main arrangement.
- The second youngest child (aged under 12) was usually in school or a non-workplace creche during the day, and again, partners and other relatives usually supplemented this care.
- The vast majority (88%) of the Danish children were being looked after in public day care.
- The youngest children (aged under six) were in the care of someone other than their parents for an average of 33 hours per week, with a high of 37 hours per week in France and a low of 30 hours per week in Ireland.
- The mean cost of parents' childcare arrangements was €76 per week. Irish parents spent the most on childcare and Italian parents the least. In France and Ireland socio-economic status (SES) was an important factor: low SES French parents spent on average €40 per week; high SES parents spent €130 (before tax rebates). In Ireland, those in low SES jobs spent €57 and those in high SES jobs €116.
- The majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with their childcare arrangements. There was a significant difference between countries, with Italian parents reporting the least and Irish the most satisfaction.

In Denmark child-care is considered a public task and is the responsibility of the municipalities. Couples in France more frequently use public facilities than their counterparts in Ireland or in Italy, both countries where public provision for children is less developed and where the family network (in particular the grandmothers) plays a major role in childcare. Moreover, the *école maternelle* is a specific French institution which explains why Danish children are much more often looked after in childcare centres/ crèches than in France. In Italy and in Ireland, mothers work more often on a part-time basis, which accounts for the fact that respectively 22% and 23.5% of the fathers answered that their youngest child is cared for by their partner. Moreover, relying on a registered childminder is more common in France than anywhere else: there is an extensive network of childminders, in particular in the outskirts of Paris and parents who rely on them are provided with AFEAMA, an allowance which considerably reduces the cost of childcare.

### **Alternative Childcare Arrangements**

Respondents were asked about their back up arrangements when their usual child care arrangements were not available, such as during holidays, when the crèche was closed, grandparents unavailable, or the child was sick. It was found that:

- The most common option for when the usual childcare arrangements become unavailable was the use of another relative. Over 80% of Danish, French and Italians used this to some extent, but only half the Irish parents did.
- The Irish were, however, much more inclined to use annual leave than any of the other countries, although this was the second most common option for all the other parents.
- Informal arrangements were the third most used arrangement, though less so in Italy.
- Parental leave was the least used option in every country as an alternative childcare arrangement. Despite the fact that parental leave is designed for the purpose, very few parents reported using parental leave when their child-care arrangements broke down. The low usage of parental leave in Ireland relates to the fact that it is unpaid or to the fact that many employers require it to be taken in a block.

There were significant positive correlations between being satisfied with one's child-care arrangements and each of five measures of subjective well-being. In the case of mothers, satisfaction with child-care arrangements was significantly correlated with all five measures of well-being – not only with family, partner and life in general, but also with satisfaction with health and work. For fathers, it was only correlated with satisfaction with family, partner and life in general. It did not impinge on their health or work satisfaction, as it did for women.

This suggests that to get child-care right is absolutely critical to mothers' well-being in all spheres. If this isn't right, all areas of a woman's life suffers, whereas for fathers, it would appear that they can compartmentalise at least health and work. This indicates the centrality of successful child-care arrangements to fathers' satisfaction in the personal sphere. However, for mothers it is central to all areas of their well-being.

## **3. THE WORKPLACE**

### **Commuting and Working Hours**

- Average commuting time was half an hour. The Irish time was the longest – average 39 minutes, and the Italian, the shortest at 24 minutes.
- In all countries the car was the most common form of transport to work. The Irish parents were the ones most likely to use a car – 70% usually did so.



- The average working time for fathers was 42 hours for mothers, 34 hours. Irish fathers had the longest working week (45 hours) and Irish mothers the shortest (32 hours) out of all the groups studied
- Seven out of ten parents worked typical hours - this figure rose to eight out of ten in Ireland (80%), and dropped to six out of ten (60%) in Italy.
- The fewer hours per week that one's partner worked, the greater the respondent's own satisfaction both with family life and with their relationship with their spouse/partner.

Ireland stood out from the other countries as having the longest commuting time, as having the highest number of people working typical hours and having highly sex-differentiated working hours. The great reliance on the car in Ireland relative to the other countries may be partly responsible for the longer commuting times due to traffic congestion. Those countries that relied more on trains and cycling and less on cars had shorter commuting times. As commuting time was a key predictor in successfully combining work and family, changes in transport modes may assist in this area.

Due to the long commuting time for the French parents interviewed, working parents living in the Parisian metropolitan area (a huge spatial area) are obliged to spend a lot of time outside of the home, in particular if they have a full-time job and they have to come to terms with a lot of spatial and time constraints. These working conditions have a strong impact on the daily life of their children who spend a lot of time either outside of the home or at home with a nanny. It is not surprising that 59% of working parents having at least a child aged under six declare that they don't see enough their child(ren), according to a recent survey (May 2001) conducted among 500 parents who were part of a representative national sample of the French population (Fagnani, 2002).

From a family perspective, it takes fewer working hours to support a family in Italy and Denmark around 74.5 hours a week - a little more in France 75.3 hours and somewhat more in Ireland namely 77.5 hours. However, the gap between fathers and mothers is smallest in Denmark – only 5 hours, as compared to 13 in Ireland, for example - not because the Danish mothers work so much more than the other mothers but because the Danish fathers work less. So the Danish fathers get a lot of help from the mothers in the economic support of the family – or put in another way - there is greater equality between the sexes with respect to labour market participation.

### **Attitudes in the Workplace**

Due to the fact that parents spend so much time at work, the workplace environment, both in terms of policies and attitudes is a critical factor in coping with issues of work-life balance. The study included several sets of questions to measure the degree of perceived acceptance of workers' family responsibilities. It was found that:

- Danish workplace attitudes were the most positive regarding parents' family commitments, followed by Irish attitudes.
- French parents experienced the most pressure in their workplaces around work-life balance, especially those in higher SES jobs.
- Parents working in higher SES jobs experienced more understanding in their workplaces around work-family issues than did those in lower SES jobs.
- Where there were sex differences, women generally tended to report more positive attitudes in the workplace than did male workers; however, in Italy women were *less* likely to report positive attitudes than were their male counterparts.
- Other groups who experienced less-tolerant attitudes were: men and people who were working in the private sector. The group that appeared to feel the least pressure was women in lower SES jobs.
- The attitudes of the Italians and the Danes appeared to reflect more accepting and relaxed workplace cultures, as compared with those of the French and the Irish, who experienced more stress in the workplace in relation to combining work and family life.

### **Flexibility in the Workplace**

Participants were asked first about what was possible or acceptable in their workplace regarding flexible working, and then they were asked about what kinds of flexibility they actually experienced. They were also asked about the existence of various family friendly policies in their workplace.

- The Danish parents reported both the most potential and the most actual flexibility. This can be seen most clearly in the measure 'bringing a child to work' where the Danes were the only ones to really do so, and it was only considered acceptable by them, whereas it was not in the other countries.
- The vast majority of respondents were able to make private calls at work; There was more variability in the possibility of running private errands. This was more acceptable in Denmark and in Ireland than in Italy or France.
- The French were more likely to have formal agreements of flexible working and the Irish more likely to have informal agreements of flexible working.
- French parents were least able to keep in contact their children and to be available to them during the working day and Danish parents were the most able to do so.

- Other factors associated with not being easily able to be in contact with one's children were being male, working in the private sector and being in a lower SES occupation.
- Irish parents had the most access to the total number of family friendly policies (barring certain key paid leave policies such as paid paternity leave and paid parental leave) and French parents had the least access.
- Parents in the public sector had greater availability of family friendly policies in the workplace than did people working in the private sector.
- Many parents did not know whether many workplace policies were available to them or not.
- The Danish workplace culture appears - all in all – to be more relaxed with respect to the daily work-family flexibility routines and more permissive (together with Italy) on questions of leave and career demands. This may help to explain other aspects of the study in which the Danish parents expressed somewhat different views to those of parents in the other participating countries on combining job and family life and in relation to satisfaction in various life domains.
- More Irish males reported that they would have taken parental leave had it been paid than in any other country – around three quarters.
- In Ireland, mothers have only recently been given a longer period of paid leave and also more unpaid leave and would appear to be grateful for it, since they didn't have it before. All of the Irish mothers in the sample expressed support for paid parental leave, as did 94% of the Irish fathers. Over 80% of fathers and mothers were strongly favourable. This policy is currently being discussed at policy level and clearly would find favour among Irish working parents.

### **Relationships between Flexibility and Well-Being**

Potential and actual flexibility in the workplace were examined in relationship to working parents' well-being. Several significant relationships were found:

- Potential Flexibility in the Workplace was significantly related to satisfaction with health.
- The level of Family Friendliness of the Workplace, as measured in terms of number of family friendly policies available in the workplace, was significantly correlated with work satisfaction of fathers and mothers, but more strongly for fathers.
- While Potential Flexibility was significantly related to measure of well-being, Actual Flexibility was not. This suggests that the freedom to have flexibility

has a salutary effect on health, even though one may not need to use that freedom

### **Workplace culture**

Participants were asked a series of further questions about the attitudes in their workplace towards people availing of family friendly policies. The reason for the inclusion of these items was to examine whether attitudinal barriers exist in this area and, if so, to what extent. This is important from at least two points of view. One concerns barriers to women's career advancement and the second relates to barriers to men's greater participation in family life.

- Perceived attitudes about women taking leave were more permissive than were those toward men taking leave. The least resentment towards women taking extended leave was in Italy, followed by Denmark. This may be because of the pro-family attitudes in Italy and the tradition of egalitarian attitudes and family friendly policies in Denmark. The attitudes in Ireland followed, and the French attitudes were seen as the least permissive by the respondents.
- French and Danish parents, particularly the fathers, thought there was a difference in how fathers and mothers are perceived – fathers were thought more likely to be resented and taken less seriously if they utilised work-life balance policies in the workplace. The Italians and Irish did not perceive a difference between how fathers and mothers were perceived in this regard.

One of the ways in which men and women can combine work and family is to work part-time or to job share. This practice is widespread for women in many countries. Indeed, women make up the majority of part-time workers and they are also more likely to avail of job-sharing options than are men. It was one of the aims of the present study to see if there were barriers to men availing of family friendly options such as these.

We found that there was a significant difference between countries in response to this issue. French and Irish respondents both agreed that men who participate in family friendly programmes (e.g. job-sharing, part-time work) are viewed as less serious about their career than those who do not, whereas both the Italians and Danes disagreed.

Male respondents were significantly more likely than females to think that men who participate in available work-family programmes (e.g. job-sharing, part-time work) are viewed as less serious about their career than those who do not participate in these programmes. These attitudes are likely to create a distinct barrier to men taking up the kinds of working arrangements which could facilitate work-life balance for them.

One of the problems in combining work and family life is the problem of work demands. In some jobs employees feel pressure to work over and above the normal hours and to bring work home. In some cases, employees feel that this is necessary in order to get ahead. Thus, not only can employees not contemplate working *fewer*

hours to facilitate work-life balance, in many cases they may be expected to work *more* hours. To what extent this was a problem was examined in this part of the study.

Participants in higher SES jobs were significantly more likely to perceive this kind of pressure at work. Participants in France and Ireland tended to agree that to get ahead employees are expected to work over and above the normal hours, whether at the workplace or at home, whereas those in Italy and Denmark were more likely to disagree that this was the case.

### **Summary of Workplace Attitudes**

The most striking impression to emerge from the data in this section is that the attitudes of the Italians and of the Danes appeared to reflect the most accepting and relaxed workplace cultures, as compared with those of the French and the Irish. In general the French tended to agree with the statements more than participants of the other countries – that there was resentment when people used work-family measures and that they were expected to put work above family. The Irish also agreed to some extent that there were these pressures in their workplaces. Those in higher SES jobs tended to perceive the most pressure of this type, as did those working in the private sector. Male participants perceived that there was less acceptance for men to partake of family friendly programmes in the workplace.

French and Danish participants, particularly the men, thought there was a difference in how men and women are perceived – men who participated in work/family programmes were more likely to be perceived as not taking their careers seriously than women were. The Italians did not see a difference between how men and women were perceived in this regard.

Due to the fact that parents spend so much time at work, the workplace is a critical factor in dealing with the dilemmas of balancing work and family life. The results of the study convey a picture of a more relaxed and permissive attitude towards child care responsibilities in Danish workplace culture - in comparison with the other countries. Hence, the results point towards a greater latitude for fathers in the workplace culture in Denmark. This may indicate an acceptance and encouragement of fathers and fathering but it may also be related to the relatively high gender segregation of the Danish labour market. A survey Csonka (2000) carried out among almost 3000 public and private companies found that three quarters of the companies were gender segregated, where segregation was defined as a gender majority of 60% or above - thus men tend to work with men and women tend to work with women. This means that work / family issues are more likely to impinge on female workplaces because mothers traditionally have been carrying most of the childcare responsibility – whereas this area is new in primarily male working environments and fewer fathers take advantage of the possibilities – perhaps making it easier to express an accepting attitude.

The results showed that the greater latitude for fathers with respect to daily work-life interferences did not hold when it came to taking leave and participation in work family programmes – a traditional perception of gender roles surfaces here – even in

Denmark where the labour market participation and the working hours are the most gender-equal.

In this climate, it will be more difficult to promote family friendly working arrangements and a greater sharing of gender roles unless there is attitude change.

#### **4. COMBINING WORK AND FAMILY AND OVERALL WELL BEING**

##### **Overall Well Being**

In the final part of the interview, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction on five measures of well being; 1) their health, 2) their work, 3) their family life, 4) their relationship with their spouse/partner and 5) their life in general. As they are global measures of well-being, these five measures, together constituted some of the key dependent measures in the study. An analysis of the results on well-being indicated that:

- Most parents reported being satisfied with their health, their work, their family lives, their relationships with their partners and their life.
- Danish parents were the most satisfied followed by the Irish, then the Italians, and lastly the French.

The following three factors can be seen as contributing to Danish parents' sense of well-being: (1) The relatively even distribution of working hours between the sexes (backed up by a more equal distribution of household chores between mothers and fathers), (2) A high level of relatively cheap public day-care provision, widely acknowledged and appreciated (in spite of a standing discussion on the quality) and a high degree of paid maternity and parental leave; and (3) A workplace culture exhibiting a relatively relaxed and permissive attitude towards the need for measures for reconciling work and family life. It is thus clear that the nature of the Danish workplace, and the greater public provision of childcare facilities and greater sharing of roles in the home is correlated with higher levels of well-being in several spheres on the part of the Danish respondents.

Measures of well-being (satisfaction with health, work, family, relationship with partner, life) were all positively correlated in all cases, except that for fathers, satisfaction with their work was unrelated to their satisfaction with family life whereas for mothers, it was highly correlated, suggesting that fathers may be able to compartmentalise to some extent, whereas it would appear from this, as well as some of the previous data presented, that for mothers their work and family lives are inextricably interrelated.

##### **Relationships between Attitudes in the Workplace and Subjective Well-Being**

In this section of the study we analysed the relationship between attitudes in the workplace and the subjective well-being of respondents. Several significant findings emerged.

- The more acceptable it was to leave earlier or arrive later due to childcare problems, the more likely the respondents were to express satisfaction with work and with life in general. The relationships were stronger for males than for females.
- The feeling that it would be considered acceptable by one's colleagues to bring a child to work was highly significantly correlated with work satisfaction on the part of fathers, as well as to their overall life satisfaction.
- For mothers, managers' attitudes were more important than those of colleagues; their acceptance was significantly related to mothers' work satisfaction and overall life satisfaction.
- The better one's colleagues, supervisor and employer were perceived as taking into account one's child-care responsibilities the greater the work satisfaction of fathers. For mothers this was true also, but it also extended into all of the other areas of their well-being as well – their satisfaction with their health, their family life, their relationship with their partner and with their life in general.
- The less working parents perceived resentment towards parents who take extended leave for child-care, the greater their sense of well-being.
- The more acceptance there was in the workplace of job-sharers and those working part-time, the greater the likelihood that respondents expressed higher levels of well-being.
- It was found that for both fathers and mothers, if they felt a sense of pressure that they needed to work over and above the normal working hours and to put their jobs ahead of their families, this resulted in lower well-being, on almost all of the measures, particularly life satisfaction, satisfaction with family life and to some extent, work satisfaction, particularly in the case of mothers.

### **Predictors of Ease Vs. Difficulty in Combining Work and Family Life**

The ease or difficulty in combining work and family life was also a major dependent measure of overall well-being in the study. In an analysis of predictors of successfully combining work and family, the following factors emerged as significant:

- The Danish parents found it significantly easier to combine their jobs with their family lives than did people in the other countries.
- Parents working in low SES jobs in the private sector found it the easiest to reconcile work and family life, and parents in high SES jobs in the private sector found it the most difficult.

- The longer the commuting time, the less easy it was to combine work and family life.
- The more the hours that parents worked created problems in their child-care arrangements, the more difficulty they had in combining work and family life.
- The more hours a person worked per week the more difficulty they had combining work and family.
- The more help with domestic and child care activities parents received, the easier it was to combine work and family.
- If working parents felt if they brought their child to work for an hour on occasion it would be accepted by colleagues in particular, but also by their managers, they were more likely to say that combining work and family was easier.

#### **Relationships between Combining Work and Family and Well-Being**

- The less one's working hours created problems with childcare arrangements, the greater one's well-being.
- The easier it was to combine work and family life, the greater one's well-being.
- When the hours fathers worked created problems with child-care arrangements and if they had difficult combining work and family, the less satisfied they were with their family life.
- For mothers, ease vs. difficulty in combining work and family life was very strongly related to satisfaction with family life, health, work satisfaction and to satisfaction with their relationship with their partner.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS AND SOCIAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

It is clear that parents are under pressure, both time-wise and in terms of work pressures and are finding it difficult to combine work and family life. There were differences between countries, with Danes on the positive side of the continuum in terms of supportive workplace attitudes and policies and, it would appear the French on the more negative side of the continuum in terms of workplace attitudes and time pressures. Although, it must be said that the French child care policies, both facilities and subsidies, are very advanced and help considerably in enabling parents to combine work and family life.

The issues of time which were present in the data in various ways, from working hours to commuting time, to difficulty with the hours of child care, were significantly correlated with ease vs. difficulty in combining work and family life. This points to the need for better transportation systems, notably in Ireland, where the commuting



time was the longest and where the use of the car for commuting was the highest. It also points to the need for greater availability of flexible working arrangements – which could be flexible hours, shorter days, fewer days, etc.

Another key area for social change concerns the attitudes in the workplace. People generally were more likely to see barriers to men's taking extended leave for child care reasons and to their working part-time or job sharing. Sometimes these attitudes were held by men and not by women, suggesting that men's attitudes need to become more relaxed in this area, so that they can allow themselves and each other the kinds of flexibility which will enable them to more optimally balance their family and work lives.

Attitudes of others in the workplace were also found to be very important. This included colleagues, supervisors and employers. Where these were found to be positive, the well-being of the employees ensued – often in many spheres of life, not only work satisfaction, but satisfaction with health, family life and life in general.

The results illustrated that men do not contribute as much time to the household activities and child care as do women. This is not news. But what is interesting is that men perceive that they are giving more than women think the men are giving. If men had more flexibility at work, they could perhaps give more to their families. It is apparent that they want to, as a large majority expressed the wish to spend more time with their families. The more that men contributed to domestic and child care tasks, the more women expressed well-being. However, it is not obvious that men want to contribute more to domestic tasks. Their primary input in the home is in the area of child care and primarily playing with children. Given that women's well-being was related to how much help they receive with domestic tasks and child care, it is clear that men need to begin to contribute in more ways than simply child care, important though this is.

Reconciling work and family is now on the social and political agenda. It is to be hoped that EU and national policies encourage measures to promote work-life balance, for, as we see from these cross-national results, people's well-being very much depends on it.