

Work/Life Balance: Gender-based Attitudes and Reality



ΣΕ ΟΛΑ ΜΑΖΙ

Implementation: Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)

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Funded by



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Context: The Breaking the Mould Project

The present study was conducted in the framework of the European project “Breaking the Mould”, the aim of which is the promotion of gender equality in Cyprus for the achievement of a satisfactory work/life balance. The project is implemented by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, the Ministry of Education & Culture, the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, the National Machinery for Women’s Rights, the Ministry of Justice & Public Order and IMH, and is co-funded by the European Union.

The main aim of the project is the promotion of flexible working patterns for men and women, in order that both may contribute equally to the requirements of family life. Furthermore, the project aims to encourage businesses and, in particular, the media, to take simple, family-friendly measures and to change the stereotypical view of housework as not fitting in with the traditional image of masculinity.

In the framework of this project, information campaigns and seminars were held for primary school teachers with the aim of raising awareness of issues pertaining to gender equality. Additionally, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) conducted a secondary study of existing national, European and business policies, legislation and academic papers on work/life balance. The present study, which follows the secondary one, focuses on the attitudes and practices of heterosexual couples regarding work/life balance. Specifically, it looks at the distribution of responsibilities regarding housework, childcare and caring for elderly parents, in relation to their respective professional situations.

Introduction – Theoretical Framework

The decision to conduct the present study in Cyprus stemmed from the degree of gender inequality observed in the workplace. Specifically, the wage gap, meaning the average difference between the hourly wage paid to men and women across the whole of the economy, is 14% in Cyprus, which is higher than the EU28 average of 12% (Eurostat 2017). So for every €100 paid to a man in Cyprus, a woman is paid €86. The average monthly salary for Cypriot men is €2,027 while for women it is €1,708 (Cystat 2017). Moreover, gender inequality is also seen in the fact that only 22% of management posts are held by women, while according to Cystat (2017), 16% of women are engaged in part-time work. Employment and salary inequalities impact on women’s lives. The risk of poverty is higher for women than for men. Specifically, in Cyprus during the period 2012-2015, some 17.2% of women were living below the poverty line, while for men the corresponding figure was 15.3% (Cystat 2015).

These instances of gender inequality against women have been recorded, despite the fact that: (1) there are more women graduates of tertiary education (46% of women are university graduates compared with 37% of men). (2) The workforce includes a high percentage of women (68% of women and 78% of men are in employment). (3) Our country has adequate legal safeguards against gender discrimination in the workplace. From the above, it is clear that the existence of such discrimination in the workplace stems from non-measurable factors that have to do with gender roles. Despite the fact that the labour market has opened up to women, traditional roles and expectations remain, forcing women to juggle their professional and personal obligations by working a “double shift” in order to respond adequately in both areas. As Leslie M. McIntyre has stated:

“Nobody objects to a woman being a good writer or sculptor or geneticist if at the same time she manages to be a good wife, good mother, good looking, good tempered, well groomed and unaggressive.”

As far as men are concerned, their role in bringing up children and undertaking responsibilities in the home tends to be an auxiliary one, i.e they “help”, as what they do is often described. It is a fact that women and men both come under equally significant pressure when it comes to time management so that they can respond adequately to their professional and domestic responsibilities (Jacobs & Gerson, 2006). Nonetheless, theoretical and empirical studies show that we are far removed from the idea of the equal distribution of housework and childcare, for which women are still considered mostly responsible (Daly and Palkovitz, 2004, Ranson 2012). Today, more than ever, the concept being promoted in public debate is one of fathers who play an active part in the raising of children and we are also seeing more and more affectionate and caring fathers (Arvanitis, Xydopoulou, Papayiannopoulou, 2007). It is also noteworthy, however, that in public debate, the term “working mother” is frequently used, in contrast with the term “working father” which is rarely heard. This lexical observation shows that in the West today, the transition from the traditional society in which the woman was in charge of the home and the man was the breadwinner has never been completed. While fatherhood is not thought to prevent a man from working properly, in contrast, in the case of working women, the areas of personal-family life and professional life are often viewed as conflicting (Garey, 1999).

The boundaries between work and home are not necessarily clear since one area affects another (Papazisi, 1999). The unequal distribution of responsibilities within the home would thus appear to leave less time for a woman's career. Furthermore, the social attitude that links women with taking care of the home and family and men with work is a root cause of inequality in the workplace (European Commission, 2010). As revealed by the statistics, despite policies aimed at securing a good work/life balance on a European level and the adequate legal framework that exists in Cyprus, inequalities in the workplace remain, in parallel and intertwined with the unequal allocation of domestic responsibilities. With this study, we wished to record with up-to-date data the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities among present-day Cypriot men and women since this also leads to structural inequalities in the labour market.

European Work/Life Balance Policies

The European Union has acknowledged work/life balance as a key prerequisite of equality since 1961. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right of working women to special protection and the right of families to the proper social, legal and financial protection. In 1989, it added mandatory maternity leave to the Charter, guaranteeing that "The family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection." Moreover, it states that, "To reconcile family and professional life, everyone shall have the right to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child."

It is worth noting that the first EU Directives make clear reference to, and focus on, maternity. From 1992, the recommendation of the Council of Europe refers to issues related to childcare and encourages initiatives by member states that allow both women and men to combine their professional and family obligations, including those pertaining to their children's upbringing, which is part of childcare. We therefore consider that the meaning of shared responsibility is incorporated more clearly than ever in the said recommendation. In 2000, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights recognized the right to motherhood, protecting women from being dismissed from work for reasons connected with maternity and, furthermore, recognized the right not only to maternity leave but to parental leave too. On 8 March 2010, a framework agreement on parental leave was signed, after negotiations with professional bodies including the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP), and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC/CES). The agreement refers to a commitment to implement minimum rules for parental leave and absence from work due to force majeure as a significant means of achieving work/life balance and promoting equal opportunities and treatment among men and women.

In 2016, a report was published to evaluate the implementation of the Council of Europe directive related to the revised framework agreement on parental leave. The report studies the implementation of the EU directive in 33 European countries, including Cyprus. In its conclusions, it calls upon the social partners, based on the planned implementation, to recognize the failure of the EU directive on parental leave to achieve its objectives regarding

work/life balance, the participation of women in the labour market, demographic challenges and the participation of men in household duties and in the care of children and other dependents. This failure goes against EU principles and values regarding equality between men and women. Consequently, it goes on, effective measures must be taken to encourage a fairer allocation of family responsibilities among men and women. The report stresses that the social partners need to activate the review clause of the directive. It underlines that the right to parental leave must be guaranteed for all without exception, irrespective of the terms of the contracts governing working parents' jobs.

The Legal Framework for Work/Life Balance in Cyprus

In Cyprus, the legal framework governing work/life balance policies is restricted to legislation pertaining to maternity leave, with Law 100(1) providing for the right to leave of a total of 18 weeks, of which 11 must be taken during the period that starts two weeks before the expected delivery. In the case of adoption, the employee is entitled to 16 weeks' leave, given that the child is under 12 years of age. During her maternity leave, the employee receives maternity benefit. Additionally, for the expectant mother, who should inform her employer in writing that she is pregnant, the law provides protection from dismissal from the start of the pregnancy up to three months after the end of her maternity leave (Article 4B). The prohibition of dismissal also applies to adoptive mothers. It also gives the right to absence from work, without any loss of earnings, for pre-natal screening. Finally, it provides for the facilitation of breastfeeding and increased childcare needs by permitting the mother to start work an hour later or leave an hour earlier with no loss of earnings. Law (47)I on parental leave and leave due to force majeure provides that "Every working parent is entitled to unpaid parental leave of up to eighteen (18) weeks due to the birth or adoption of a child, with the aim of caring for and bringing up the child."

Regarding the elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace in Cyprus Law 177(I) provides for equal pay for men and women doing the same work or work of the same value. Moreover, Law 205(I) on the equal treatment of men and women in work and professional education provides for men and women to be treated equally, with no discrimination as regards recruitment, promotion, the terms and conditions of work, participation in workers' organizations, access to education and training and protection from sexual harassment.

Research

Despite the existence of legislation, policies and public debate around work/life balance issues, gender inequality still exists in the workplace in the form of violations of the said legislation. Such inequality is fed, on the one hand, by the failure of social structures to support the family by providing quality and accessible care services and, on the other, by the way in which men and women participate as regards the obligations of family and personal life. The present research was designed in the context of the recognition that (a) personal circumstances affect working conditions and vice-versa and (b) that work/life balance is one of the keys to eliminating gender inequality in the workplace.

The aim of the present research was to study the practices and attitudes of heterosexual

couples regarding work/life balance. Specifically, their working conditions were studied, in conjunction with the distribution between men and women of obligations related to taking care of the home, looking after children and elderly dependents. The main questions were: To what extent do heterosexual men participate in taking care of the home and the family? How much time is spent, comparatively, by men and women on 'unpaid housework?' How do gender roles in society affect the amount of time spent with children? How do men and women feel about household chores? How do these affect job options?

Research Method

The study of practices and attitudes regarding work/life balance was carried out through the use of a weighted quantitative questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2) as a framework for the results of the quantitative research.

For the quantitative research, a questionnaire was drawn up, the content of which was linked to the research objectives and covered the following fields: demographics, working conditions, homecare, childcare, caring for elderly dependents, and attitudes. Many of the questions were based on those in a previous survey on the same subject ([EAAH 2007](#)) so that the results may be compared.

The qualitative part of the research, which was conducted through in-depth interviews, aimed at understanding the attitudes, values and behaviour regarding work/life balance. The sections into which the data has been placed correspond to the issues being examined in the quantitative research – taking care of the home and children and attitudes towards work/life balance.

Research Sample

The sample of the quantitative research comprised men and women from urban and rural areas and from the five towns and districts in the government-held part of Cyprus (Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos and Famagusta).

To recruit people for the sample, invitations were sent to companies, which were asked to forward them to their employees. Part of the sample was recruited through publicity about the research on social media. Some 530 completed questionnaires were received in electronic format, through the use of Survey Monkey. For the sample to include people who do not use computers, hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 50 manual workers. The questionnaire was published on 17 June 2016 and remained online for approximately four months, until 8 September 2016, when the required number of participants was reached.

The recruitment of participants for the qualitative research was also carried out through their companies. Participation was voluntary, following the completion of a consent form. The companies' premises were used for the research. Three group interviews were conducted: two with men and women together, one with men, and two individual in-depth interviews.

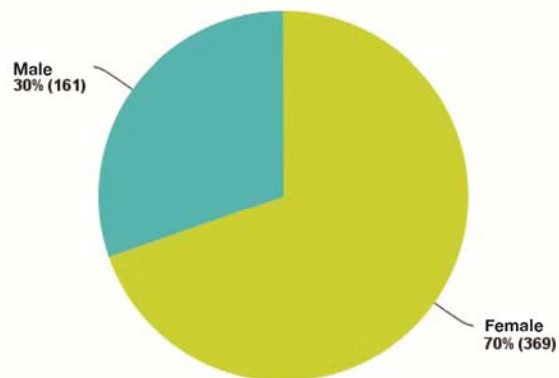
The results of the survey are presented by section. The quantitative data is presented, followed by part of the quantitative data for each section. It should be noted that in the sample, which was created using the stratified random sampling method, working conditions among women and men did not differ significantly.

Results of the Primary Research

A. Demographic Data of the Survey

Gender

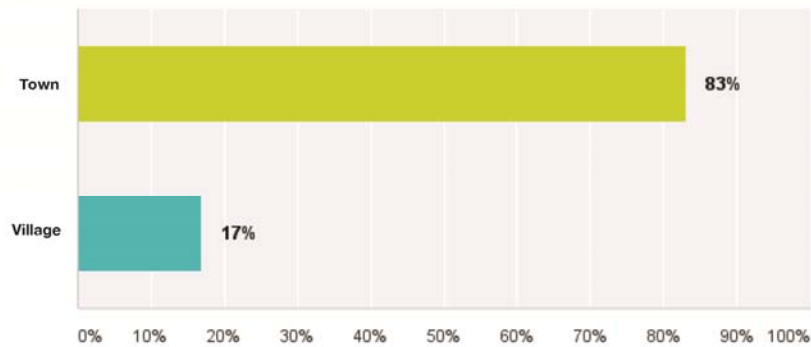
For the quantitative part of the survey, 530 people participated, of whom 369 were women and 161 were men.



The disproportionate number of women to men participating in the survey is interesting, given that the survey was distributed to a greater number of men. Despite this, more women took part, which indicates that they are more interested in the subject. The reason for this requires further study, although from the results of the study, it appears that women face more challenges regarding work/life balance and this may be the reason for their interest in the survey.

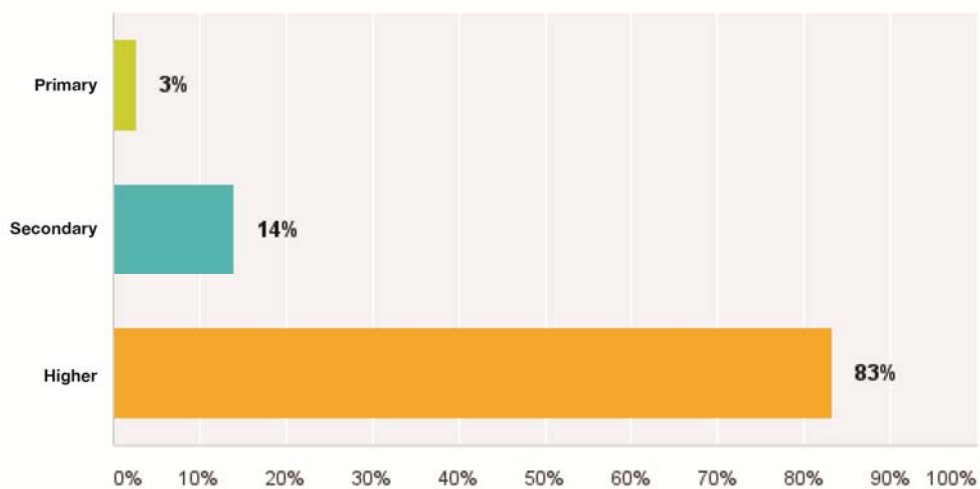
Place of Residence

The sample included people from the five districts in the government-held part of Cyprus (Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos and Famagusta). Regarding place of residence, most of those in the sample are from urban areas.



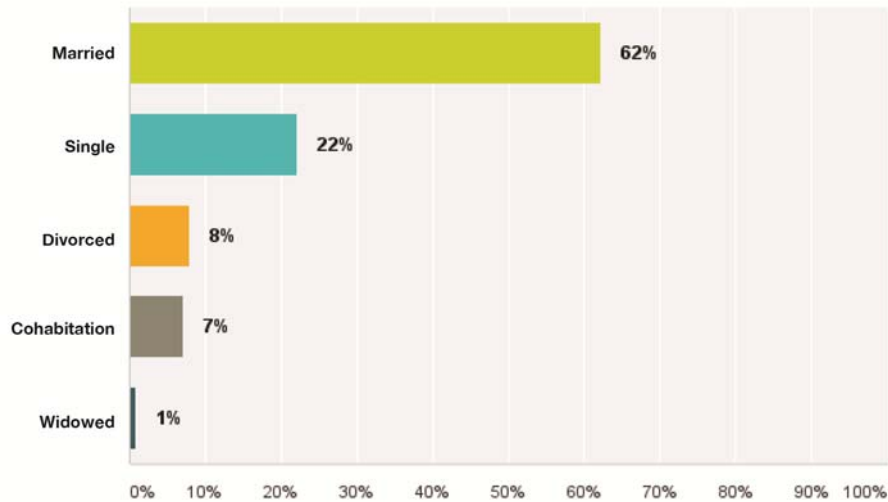
Education

The educational level of the sample is quite high, with 83% being university graduates. It is noted that, according to the Statistical Service of Cyprus (Cystat), the total proportion of Cypriot citizens who have completed tertiary education amounts to 46% of women and 37% of men, so we have a sample with a higher level of education than the overall population. The sample is homogeneous in this respect, since 83% of the women and 84% of the men participating are university graduates.



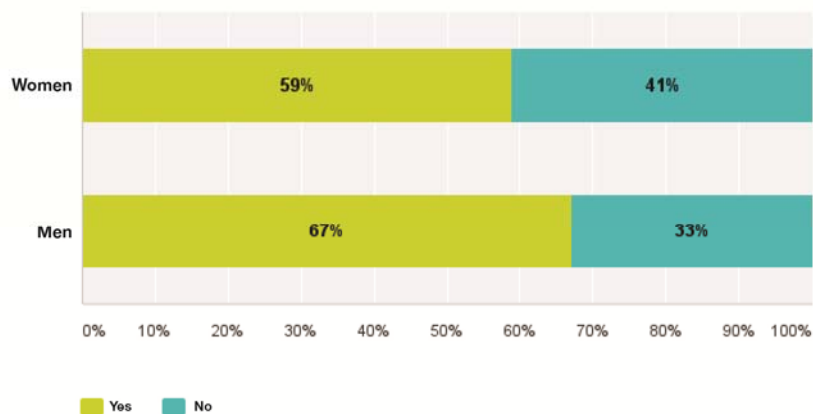
Marital Status

Most of the sample are married or living with a partner (69%), while 22% are single and 9% are divorced or widowed.



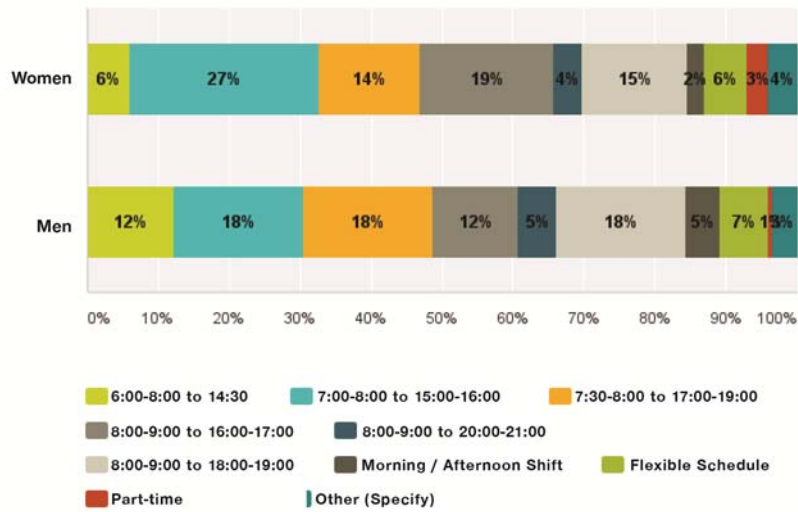
Children

Most of the sample – 59% of the women and 67% of the men – have children. As regards the ages of their children, the individuals participating in the survey have children of pre-school age (89%), at primary school (63%), secondary school (52%), university (40%), doing military service (18%) and adults (53%).



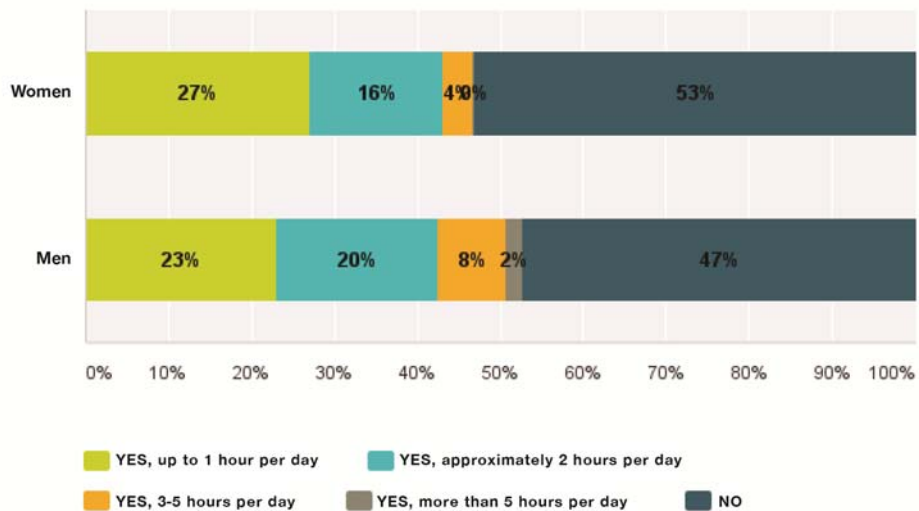
Working Conditions

Our random sample of the Cypriot population is relatively homogeneous as far as working conditions are concerned. Specifically, the following table shows working hours and frequency by gender.

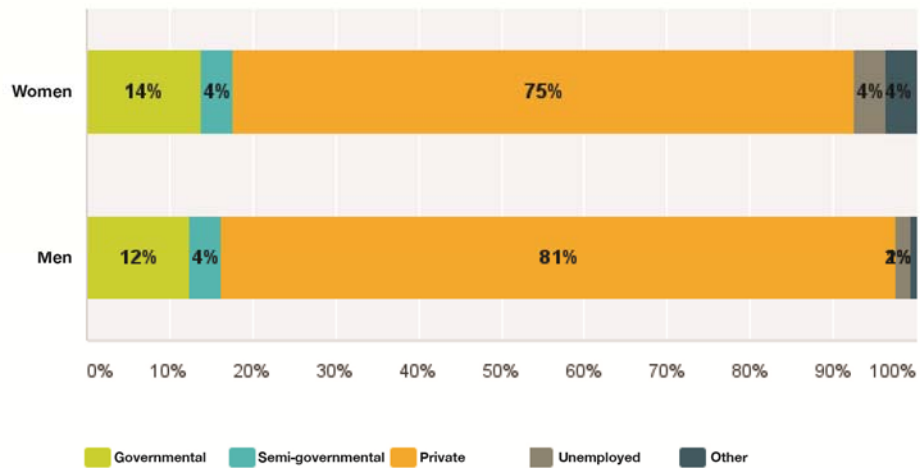


Given the homogeneity of working conditions among those in the sample, any differences regarding the undertaking of responsibility for child care and housework will be attributed, as we shall see below, to various gender stereotypes and traditional roles rather than to practical or job-related problems.

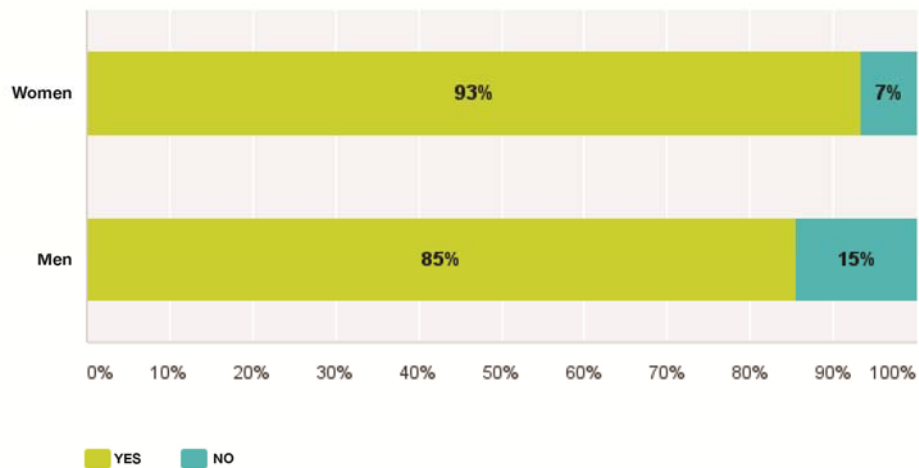
Almost half of the women and a little over half the men in the sample work overtime.



Relative uniformity among women and men is also seen the area of work. As can be seen below, most of those in the sample work in the private sector.

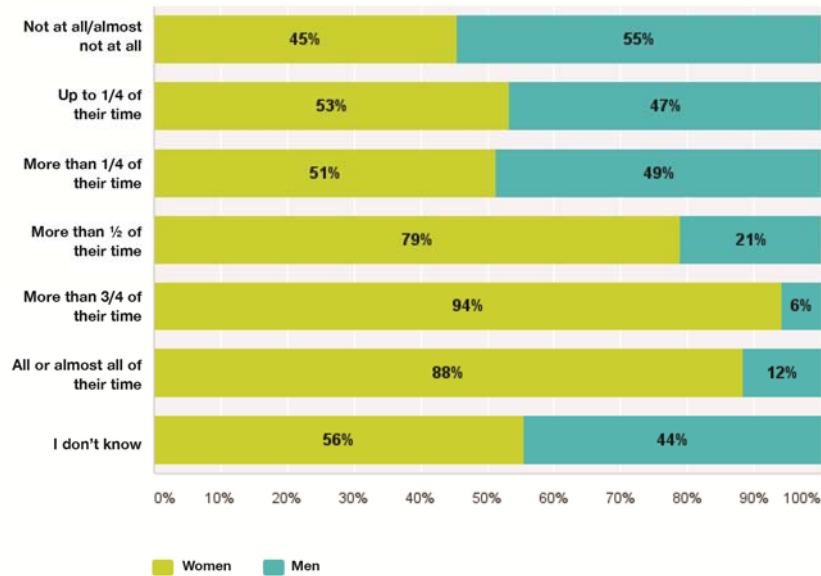


Most of those completing the questionnaire stated that their partner works:



B. Distribution of Responsibilities Within the Home

The results of the quantitative research show that there is not an equal distribution of obligations regarding housework among women and men, despite the fact that those in the sample – women and men – work similar hours. We asked the participants to calculate how many hours the members of the household dedicate, on a normal weekday, to housework, explaining that by ‘housework’ we mean cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of clothes, shopping and property maintenance. Based on the total of the hours calculated, our next question was how many hours they spent themselves and how many their partner spent. The table below shows the number of hours that women and men devote to housework.



We can observe a similar proportion among women and men who dedicate up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of their time (53% women, 47% men) and a similar portion among those who stated that they dedicate more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of their time (52% women, 49% men). However, in the categories of those who spend many more hours on housework, it appears that women have the leading role. Of those who spend more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their time, 94% are women, of those spending more than $\frac{1}{2}$ their time 79% are women and of those spending all or almost all their time on housework, 88% are women.

It is clear from the figures that, in spite of the fact that, today, more and more men are involved in housework, women continue to be mainly responsible, with men taking on an auxiliary role. As was stated frequently in the focus groups, women are “in charge of the home” while men “help whenever they can and whenever they feel like it.”

Here are some characteristic extracts:

I think that's how it is in most cases. The woman is mainly in charge in the house. My wife, for instance, wants her kitchen things to be the way she likes. So I might wash the dishes but she might not ask me to put them away. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. It's the same with me and my tools. I have screws and things where I want them and I'll get annoyed if someone moves them. My wife is the same in her kitchen.

Andreas 38

I think it's all about the dynamics of the relationship. I like to be in control of the house, I like things to be done my way so you can't be forcing the other person to do them in a certain way; a lot of the time, I prefer to do things myself and so he might have got used to the idea that it's my role. Now that I have a child, I can't manage to get everything done and my husband needs to help. Even if I don't say anything, he will start to do certain things by himself. So maybe we women are to blame if men don't want to do certain things in the same way that we do.

Anastasia 33

A general possessiveness in the home or around the house, as can be seen from the above examples, indicates that traditional attitudes linking the main responsibility for housework with women are still prevalent, thus the frequent references to “her house”, “her kitchen” or “getting him to clean for me”. This way of talking excludes men from the home and, consequently, from their portion of responsibility.

Furthermore, the social imperative that concerns the building of a woman’s identity as the main housekeeper is used to justify the unequal allocation of household responsibilities, by claiming that they undertake full responsibility and, in many instances, are either critical of their partners or prevent them from taking responsibility.

My wife likes cooking and she doesn’t let me cook.

Costas 42

The mentality of Cypriot women is to blame. We go crazy, we want a huge house, we fill it with furniture and we want everything to be perfect. We get ourselves into a panic and we spend time on pointless things. This is what tires us. It’s true that women have more responsibilities and they spend more time on housework than men and that’s normal. When you do certain things from the very beginning, such as tidying the wardrobe, there’s no reason to get your husband to do it and then see that he doesn’t do it properly so you get annoyed and waste time.

Xenia 35

The way women in Cyprus think means that they spend even more time on housework than they need to, which is longer than men take... Maybe this is a mistake that we, who are responsible, are making by rushing to do everything ourselves. If we didn’t do all the work, our husbands would have to fill the void and do some of it.

Elpida 35

From the above, it is evident that the unequal distribution of responsibilities in the home is a result of long-held attitudes as regards the distribution of household chores, which reflect the stereotype of the woman as caregiver who, having the main responsibility for the home, “does it better”.

Gender-based Distribution of Housework

It appears that in many couples there is a stereotype division of housework since there are jobs that are seen more as “women’s work” and more suitable to be done by women while others are more “men’s work”.

My husband and I are traditional types. I don’t mind doing housework. I enjoy it. I don’t want to see my husband holding a mop and running around the house but it he feels like cooking, which he likes and he’s good at it, I have no objection. I have never taken out the garbage. I don’t even know where the bin is and I don’t care. There are things that my husband does – sweeping the yard, cleaning the storeroom, carrying the shopping.

As a man, I'll do the jobs that you do, if something is broken, if you sweep the yard... I'll do them but not to a timetable.

Elias 45

My husband is more concerned with work and our finances whereas I'm responsible for shopping, cleaning, calling an electrician if we need one, etc. But when the electrician comes to the house, it's my husband who will talk to him and explain what's wrong. Women are better organized; men forget more easily.

Anna 35

The distribution of work and the roles of women and men in and out of the home is a cultural factor, i.e. a social construct (Bandura, 1977). Social and mathematical scientists appear to have agreed for decades that that gender roles have very few biological origins and are rather the product of different social adjustments (Lewontin 1991, Kimura, 2004). During the discussions that formed part of the interviews, the participants cited biology to normalise the socially constructed roles that men and women undertake in the home.

It's not very natural for us to hold a mop, to be perfectly honest... According to a survey that I read, there are statistics and a trend that says that women are better adapted to bringing up children and when the child is older, women have developed so that they have higher standards when it comes to cleanliness.

Pantelis 26

I believe that women have a greater awareness of cleanliness; it's something inbuilt like instinct and it's stronger than in men. That doesn't mean that there aren't exceptions or that it's true because it may not be true. But to my mind, women have a greater need to be in a cleaner, tidier environment while men may not be bothered about it.

Marina 32

The unequal distribution of household obligations is, in many instances, not even recognized by the couple. For example, one woman who participated in the survey said, "I take care of 70% of our household obligations". Elsewhere, she stated, "I have no complaints at home. We both work and get tired. I don't consider that it has anything to do with gender or being men or women."

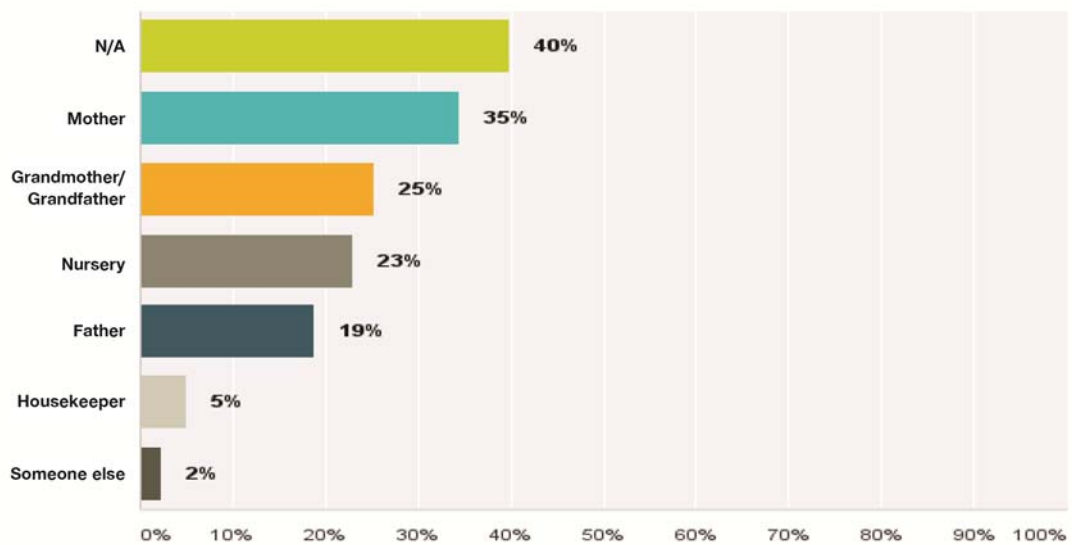
C. Childcare

Regarding childcare, the mother is totally responsible for all the needs of children and infants. The role of the father appears to be an auxiliary one and, in many instances, the father contributes less than the grandparents to the raising of children. It should be noted that our sample comprised women and men in similar professional circumstances, as regards their timetable and overtime. Consequently, any differences in the undertaking of childcare responsibilities may be said to stem from a particular mentality and from gender roles rather than from practical difficulties. In the following tables, percentages are shown with reference

to the undertaking of responsibility for childcare. Participants in the survey had the opportunity to select more than one of the available options (mother, father, grandmother/grandfather, domestic help, other person and nursery) or reply “None” to each question.

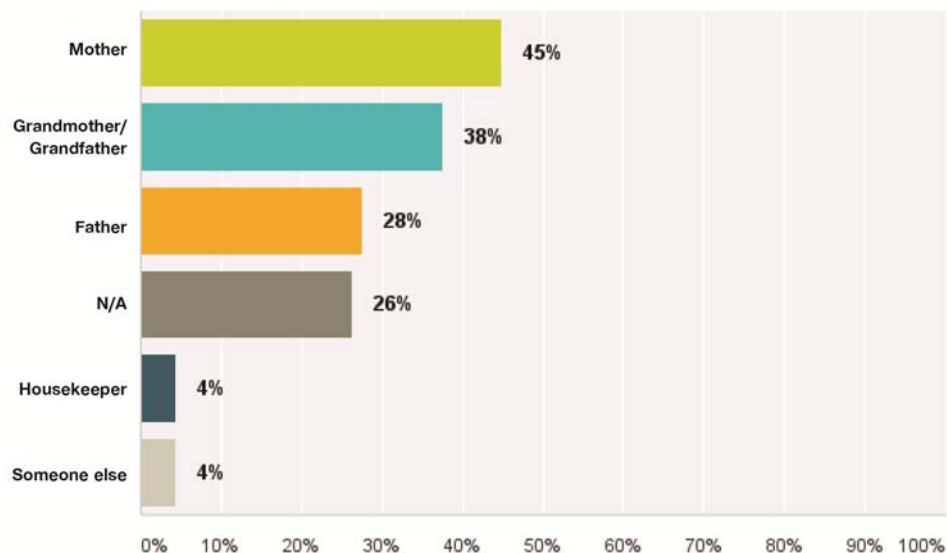
Babycare

The question about taking care of infants applied to 60% of the total sample – those who have or had infants and wished to reply. Most of them stated that babycare is mainly provided by the mother, followed by grandfather/grandmother, nursery, and with a lower percentage the father, followed by domestic help and other person at very low levels, as shown below:



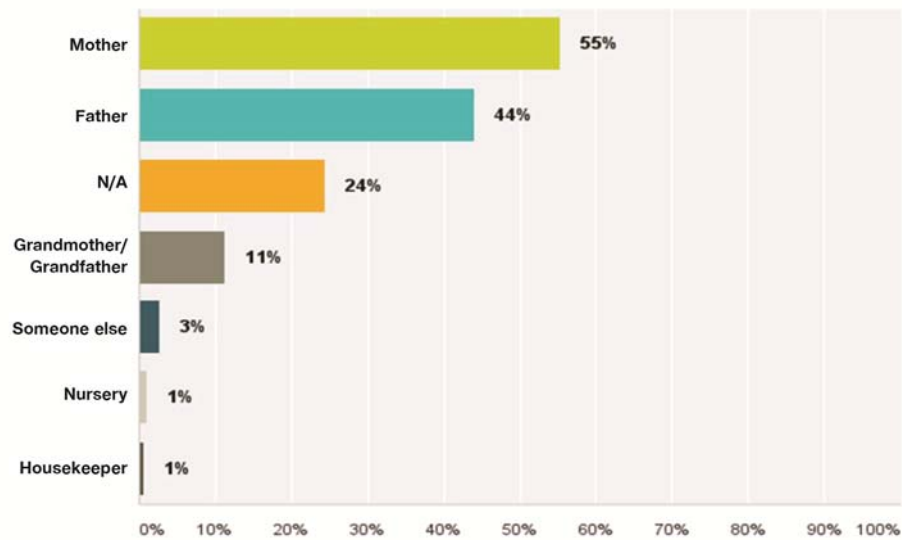
After-School Childcare

Regarding after-school childcare, we see that the mother comes first with 43%, followed by grandmother/grandfather with father in third place. It is worth noting the large statistical difference between mother (45%) and father (28%), with the latter having less involvement in after-school childcare than the grandparents.

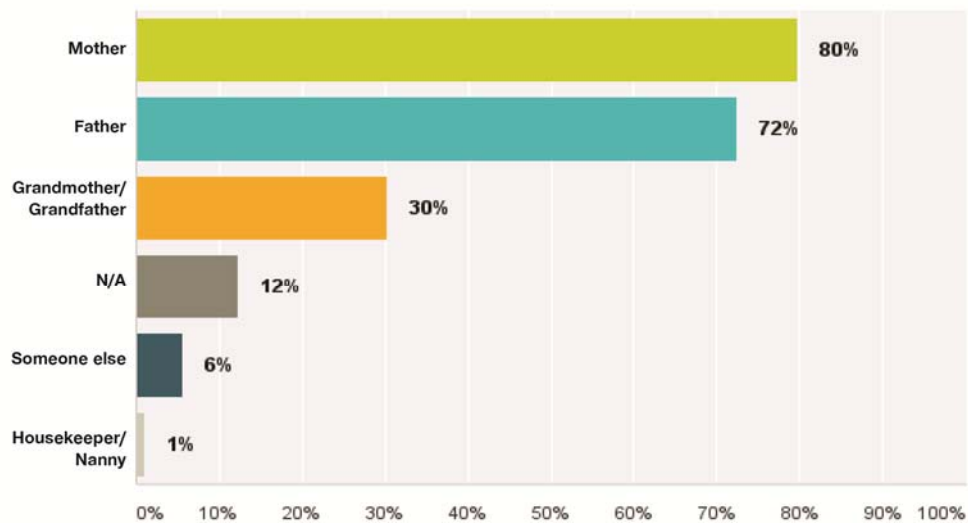


Taking Children to School

The questions about taking children to school and entertaining them revealed the smallest statistical difference between mothers and fathers, while the involvement of grandparents is smaller than in other childcare activities.

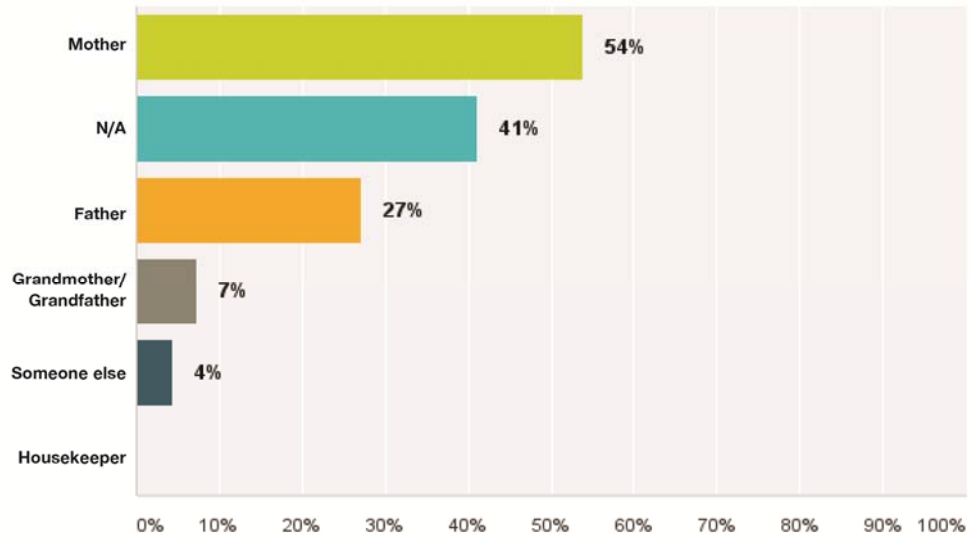


Entertaining Children

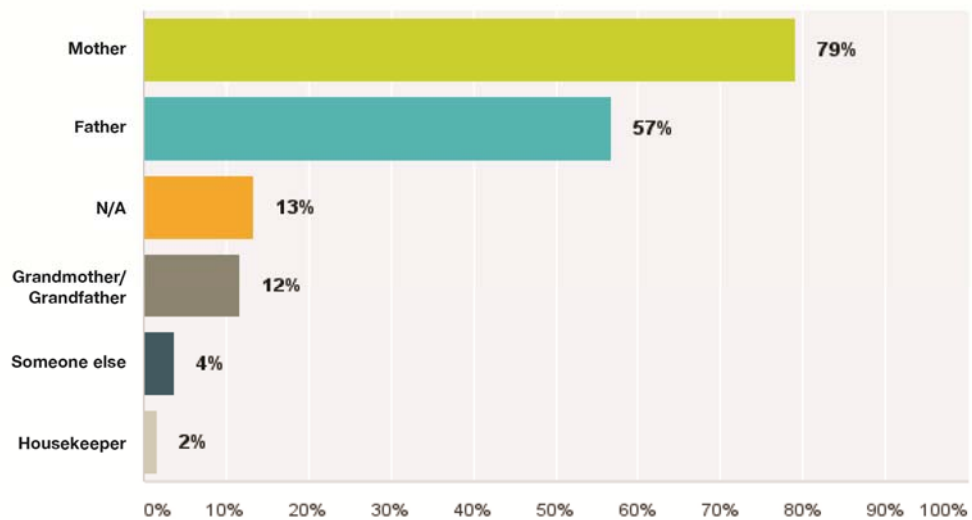


Children's Homework

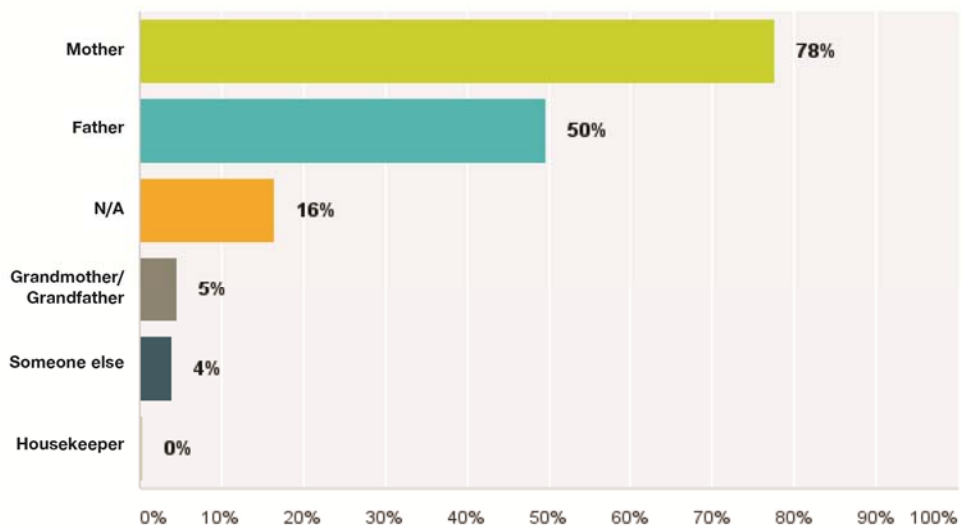
In the case of helping children with their homework, where this is applicable, the mother is responsible in the vast majority of cases – 54% compared with 27% of fathers.



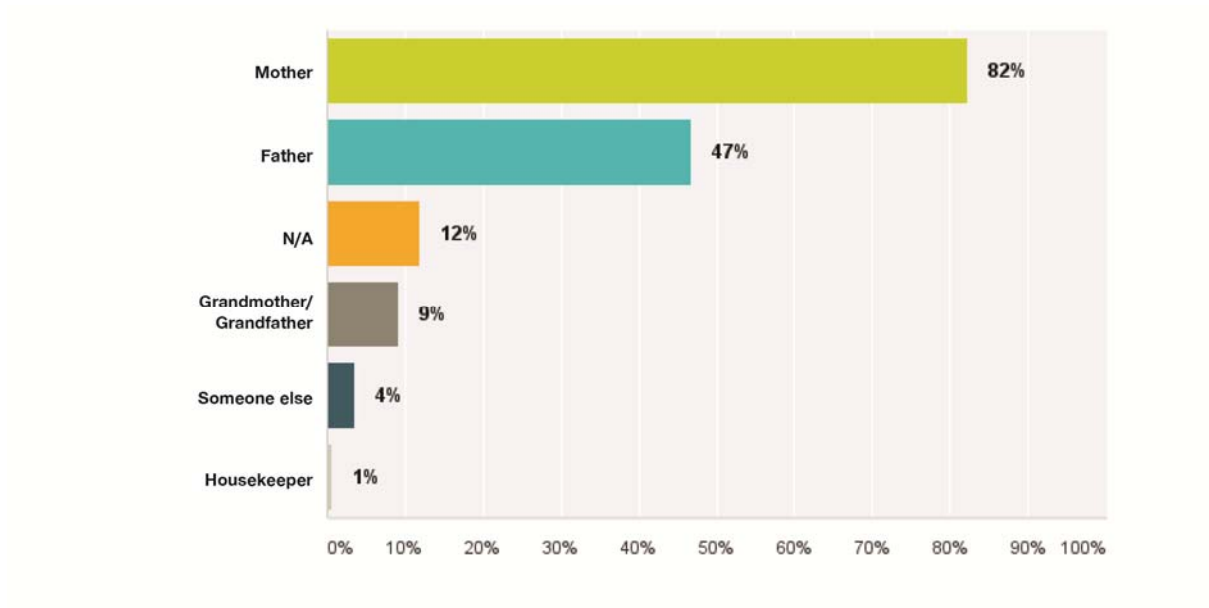
Taking Care of Sick Children and Babies



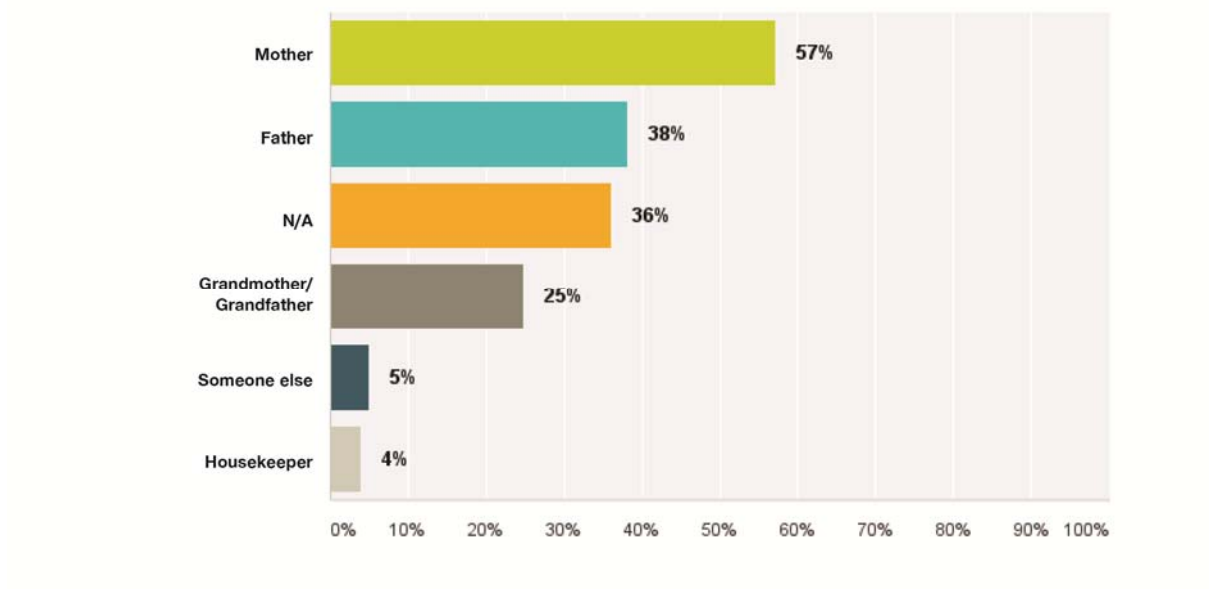
Contact With Teachers



Shopping for Children



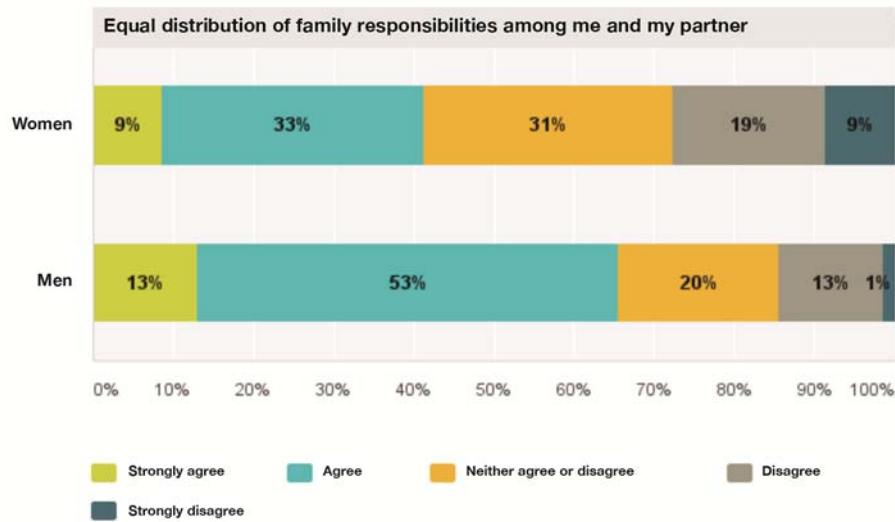
Childcare During School Holidays



D. Ideas Concerning Work/Life Balance:

Distribution of Family Responsibilities

The women in the sample seem to have a greater awareness of the unequal distribution of family responsibilities. The percentages in the table below show that it exists, that women are more aware of it and it is statistically at their expense.



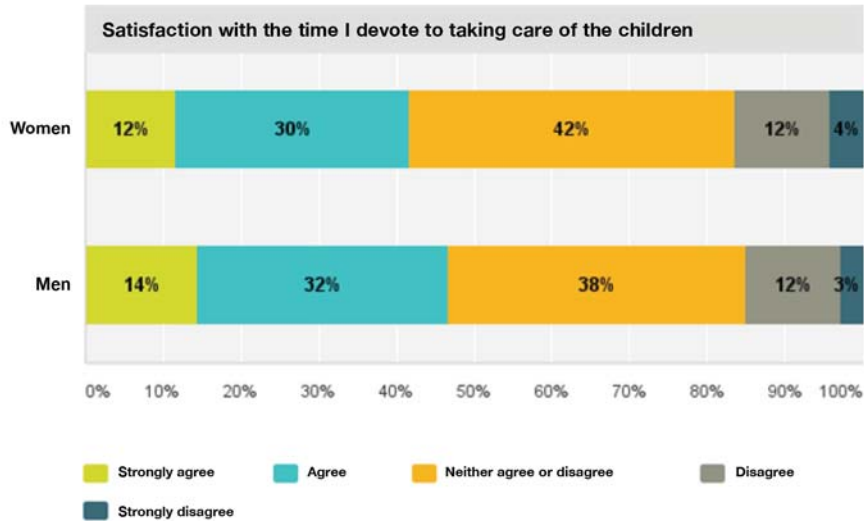
There is disagreement within couples about who takes on more family responsibilities and this is often the cause of rows. In one of the in-depth interviews, George (33) says:

Yesterday my girlfriend and I were at a party with friends and we had a row about this. I said, "I do more in the house than you" and she said, "No, I do more." The she said, "OK. We'll put a board on the wall and we'll note what we do. At the end of the week, we'll see who does more..." Well, a friend of mine came up to me afterwards and said, "Leave it, mate. Don't do it. You're going to lose."

George 33

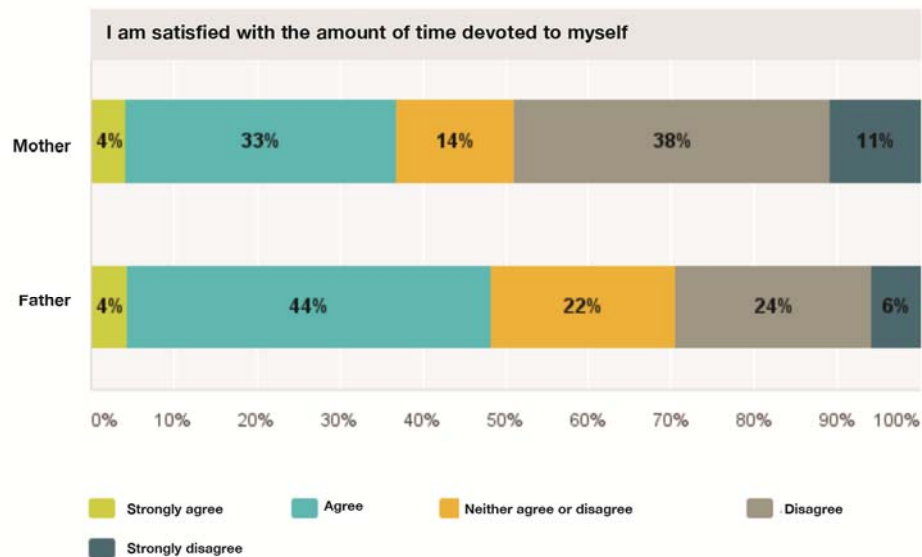
Time for Childcare

The women and men of the sample express a similar degree of satisfaction with the time they devote to childcare, despite the fact that the women actually spend more time on it, as shown above. It is worth noting here that, in response to the corresponding question in the [EAANH 2007](#) study, Cypriot men were more satisfied (by 13%) with the time they devote to taking care of their children.

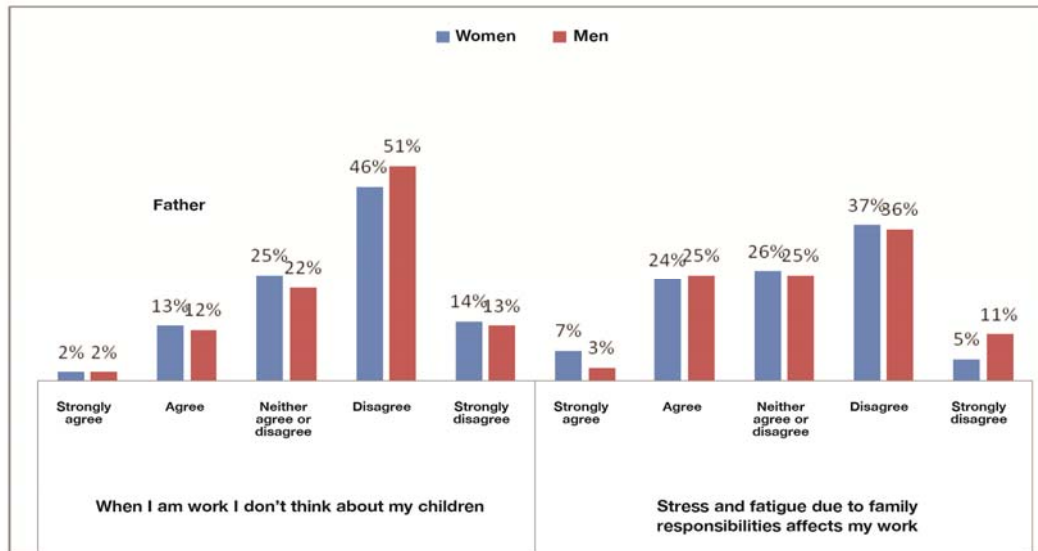


Time for Self

In response to the question about how satisfied they are with the amount of time they devote to themselves, men appear to be more satisfied, by a difference of 11% to the answer “I agree” and 14% to “I disagree”. This difference is considered logical since, from the analysis of the data in Chapters 1 and 2, men do indeed have more time for themselves while women are more active in taking care of the home and children.



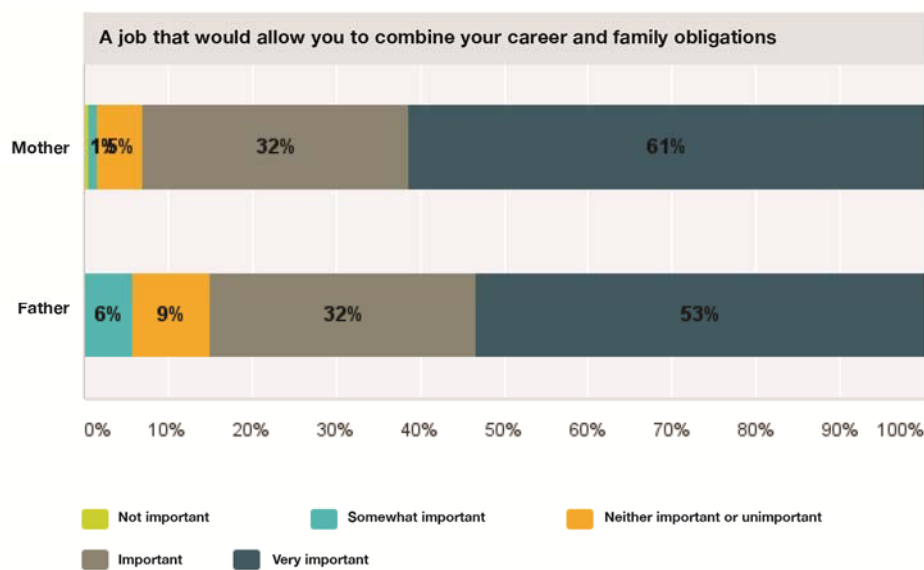
Specifically, in response to questions concerning the degree to which both parents think about their children when they are at work, and on the effect of stress and fatigue due to family responsibilities on work, women and men replied in a similar way:



Criteria for Choice of Career

There is also a relative uniformity of attitudes regarding the criteria for choosing a career, with a majority of the sample stating that they would opt for a profession that allowed them to combine their professional and family obligations.

From the results of the quantitative research, it would seem that the men and women of the sample work under similar conditions and therefore have a similar amount of free time for their personal life. In reality, there is an unequal distribution of obligations regarding care of the home and children. Paradoxically, both women and men would like to devote more time to this and, in their choice of criteria for work, they all appear to have the same amount of concern about its compatibility with their family obligations.



A similar survey carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2016) revealed that children have similar attitudes towards the gender-based unequal distribution of responsibilities among women and men. Despite the fact that there are certain jobs that a majority of children (5-8 out of 10) see both men and women doing, quite a large percentage of children see only women cooking (3-5 out of 10 children), looking after a sick member of the family or helping children with their homework (2-3 out of 10) and shopping at the supermarket (1-3 out of 10). Similarly, 3-4 out of 10 children see only men being in charge of paying bills and taking out the garbage.

In many instances, women’s unequal responsibility for bringing up children creates problems within the family, related to the realization by fathers that they are missing out on a large part of the magic of seeing their children grow up. As Constantinos (42) typically admits:

The arrival of a baby brings changes to the way you think about everything...In my case, where there was such a big age difference between the two children, it was a totally different experience...how I experienced the birth of the first and how it changed my world, compared with the birth of the second... Now I understand my priorities better... My only concern then was that I needed to work to earn money for the family. Now I still think that, yes, I have to work to earn money for the family but I also have to give

the baby the right amount of time so that it grows up properly. My first child was raised on automatic pilot... lots of time spent with the grandmothers, lots of time and it's something I feel bad about today and I don't want to make the same mistake a second time... That's it. I feel that I missed out on years with the first child; not days, not hours but years.

Constantinos 42

Commentary on the Survey Results

The results of the survey show that the mass integration of women into the labour force has not led to the mass integration of men into taking care of the home. Thus, the concept of work/life balance has not become a reality for the population as a whole. Our survey reveals that the time women devote to housework is far more than that spent by men, even when women and men work similar hours in their job. The fact that women work outside and inside the home leaves little room for their professional advancement, given that they have to manage their time in such a way as to respond in both areas. According to our qualitative research, the main causes of the unequal distribution of responsibilities in the home are the deep-rooted attitudes towards a gender-based distribution of household duties, with women still seen as the main caregivers of the family. The role of men in the home and in childcare appears to be an auxiliary one – they ‘help’ as is often noted. So due to a lack of time, women frequently fail – or are unable – to apply for higher managerial posts, which in many instances demand additional working hours.

The participants (women and men) complained about the lack of quality and accessible childcare services and similar ones for the elderly, the lack of parental or paternity leave, and the short duration of maternity leave, which does not even cover the breastfeeding period. The State's inability to support families was evident from the fact that grandparents devote many hours to looking after children, in some cases more than those spent by the father on this. As the participants in the survey mentioned, today's parents are obliged to burden grandparents with babycare since, from the 4th month of the child's life, mothers are obliged to return to work, and there are no provisions for paternity leave or extended parental leave. If one of the two parents is forced to cut working hours, it will be the woman, as participants stated, since she is paid less as a rule (see ‘pay gap’).

Furthermore, our survey showed that companies in Cyprus have a problem understanding the value of work/life balance, despite a plethora of surveys that show how members of staff who are able to fulfil their personal and family obligations with pleasure and without pressure are also more productive regarding their professional obligations (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Moreover, there is a trend towards implementing work/life balance ideas without studying the needs of the company and its personnel. These policies either fail to facilitate employees or, in some instances, produce new or consolidate existing inequality at the expense of women. For example, a company's policy of offering a reduced working timetable to young mothers might be viewed as an “unwanted gift” or even double discrimination if it is not accompanied by proper planning. A reduction in working hours means reduced earnings but often the workload remains the same. Thus, many women are

obliged to work from home. As one of the female participants in the survey says: *“I had to hold the baby’s bottle in one hand and answer an e-mail with the other...and be paid less, even though I was doing the same amount of work as if I was at the office full-time.”*

Our survey shows that both men and women would like to have more time for their personal lives and for taking care of the home and the children. The women and men in our sample express a similar degree of satisfaction with the time they devote to taking care of their children, despite the fact that women spend more time on this, as noted above. It is worth mentioning here that, in response to a similar question in the EANH 2007 survey, Cypriot men were considerably more satisfied (by 13%) with the time they spent looking after their children. Also, when men and women choose the criteria for a job, it appears that they have the same level of concern about their compatibility with family obligations. Today, more than ever, due to the child-focused structure of the family, women and men would like to have more time to take care of their children and the home. This indicates that work/life balance, in addition to being a measure to remove gender inequality, is a desire of citizens for a better quality of life.

Conclusions

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), like a plethora of social scientists and activists, stresses that work/life balance policies are essential institutional factors and measures that encourage employees and broader society to move in the direction of gender equality. Work/life balance has often been viewed as the key to eliminating many instances of gender inequality and also to improving workers’ welfare and productivity. The effectiveness of work/life balance policies depends on their multi-level implementation in the workplace, on their design, on the policies of a large number of private sector companies and on the mentality of the workforce. The European Institute for Gender Equality recommends work/life balance policies that provide parental leave, quality and accessible childcare services and those for the elderly, the promotion of policies that enable flexible working for every employee and the systematic collection of data related to gender equality on a national, European and global level.

At the same time, it is clear that policies need to coexist with the cultivation of a culture of gender equality and shared responsibility for household and childcare obligations. Social and stereotype gender roles serve to maintain structural inequality at the expense of women in both the workplace and the home, which cannot be eliminated through the mere existence of work/life balance policies. For example, in countries where there is a policy of granting parental or paternity leave, it has been observed that men are hesitant to take it despite their ability to do so. Similarly, one of the participants in our survey stated that, even if he was entitled to paternity leave, he would not take it. This indicates the need to raise awareness and, at the same time, to bring about change on a cultural level. In Denmark, for example, TDC, the country’s largest telecommunications company, has a policy of granting 12 weeks’ fully paid leave to each parent following the birth or adoption of a child. At first, this policy proved to be inadequate since the take-up of leave by men was only 13% in 2012. So the company, convinced that employees (men and women) who succeed in achieving a

good work/life balance become more productive, carried out an awareness campaign entitled “A hug from Daddy” to promote the take-up of parental leave by Danish men. The result of the campaign was impressive: the percentage of men taking advantage of parental leave rose from 13% to 80%.¹ It appears that policies and attitudes need to change together to bring about social change in the direction of work/life balance and, more generally, gender equality.

In conclusion, work/life balance is key to the achievement of gender equality, economic recovery, balance within and outside the home, increased employee productivity and citizens’ welfare. The goal remains and requires multi-level teamwork by the state, business and citizens.

¹For more on business policies, legislation and best practices related to work/life balance, see the secondary research [here](#)

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