

THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE IN THE FAMILY, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Traditional gender roles within the family have changed with the growth of double income households, thus changing relationships within this social structure and redefining the role of women in social and professional context. Employed mothers face a unique relationship between custody and employment expectations. Despite the importance of the role of women in the socio-economic life of the family and, consequently, of society as a whole, these relationships have not been subject of rigorous studies. Guided by the concepts of intense maternal ideology and workplace ideals, this paper addresses the new relationships created in the double income family as well as the new role of women in the social context and belief system that characterizes the Albanian post-COMMUNIST society. The study was conducted through the data collected from the realization of a qualitative study, the results of which identified that family sacrifices had a greater impact on employed mothers versus career sacrifices. They are willing to give up their careers and not fulfilling individual pleasures if family needs are required. This finding seems to indicate that mothers continue to compare themselves to the intense ideology of mothers and not the ideal worker rate. This research has important implications for understanding the new social context created as a requirement of the economic conditions within which the Albanian woman plays her multiple roles.

Keywords: Female, family, social context, faith systems, Albania.

INTRODUCTION

Society has a system of collective values that still relies on traditional roles for men and women. This system of values sees women achieving their individual realization in a non-traditional way outside the home as exemptions from the rule. The gender roles for men and women were direct, where men focused on paid employment and women focused on family care. Over the last decades, men and women have focused more and more on work and family, sharing duties and responsibilities and redefining their roles. But even though the composition and roles within the households have changed, expectations regarding the greatest parental responsibilities have remained unchanged.

Gender roles have changed dictated by new demands on the workforce of women outside the family, increasing inevitably the number of double-income households. Despite this new requirement, mothers continue to be more closely related to family custody than employed fathers, facing a unique relationship between custody and family expectations. In performing all these roles, many women feel powerful because that is what is expected from them (Mitchell, 1993: 118). Unlike men, women often have to choose between one role and the other, or otherwise, have to pay the price of fatigue if they choose both.

There can be no doubt that positions about the appropriate roles for men and women are gradually changing. Increased level of employment for women was not the result of the dismissal of men, but a consequence of a general increase in the number of jobs (Giddens, 2002: 176). Due to increased demand for employment, the traditional roles of women have already expanded beyond that of the girl, girlfriend, wife, and mother, including hired out-of-home employment (Haslett, Florence and Carter, 1993: 3). But women who are economically successful must fit in a world they do not feel completely belonging to. Their career is conditioned by the male concept that for women the work is secondary in relation to childbirth (Giddens, 2002: 178). Career and family women face conflict and competitive demands, asking for repeated responses to these multiple roles and responsibilities. The apparent presence of many models of the role of women's authority can change the perceived personality traits, increase career ambitions, self-confidence, independence from judgment, and leadership initiatives. In this context, current economic trends show that women's labor force participation will continue to grow, resulting in an ever-increasing stress and intensive social activity for employed women (Andersen, 1993: 139).

Previous studies have attempted to theoretically and empirically embrace these new roles of women in society by addressing specific aspects of such complex issues. This analysis tries to overcome the lack of such studies in Albania by providing insights into the conditions in which women are found and the problems that arise from family-work conflict. This approach discusses the circumstances, factors and cognitive structures that affect women to be employed outside the family to create a productive balance between family and professional life in accordance with the social context in which they live. Given these changes in the role of women and the lack of research studies to change this role in Albanian society, this paper examines the relationship between family and professional life influenced by the social context and belief system of Albanian society, using data collected from the realization of a qualitative study in the city of Vlora.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The treatment in this section provides a journey through literature, emphasizing that only recently, thanks to the influence of studies inspired by Gender Studies, the female component in social construct and reorganization of work became the subject of special attention. This fact is emphasized because, for years, studies on stratification of society were "blind to gender segregation". They were written as if women did not exist or, for purposes of analyzing power, wealth, and prestige, women were irrelevant and uninteresting (Giddens, 2002: 227). Moreover, their roles and duties were defined and could not go beyond the frameworks established and widely accepted within society. As a result of the various experiences of association, supported by general social stereotypes, members of each gender develop particular attitudes of behavior and are given different opportunities and privileges. Men and women usually grow up with different senses of right, exercise different degrees of power and have different experiences of life (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2008: 5). The perception of the social role of women as unequal to that of men has fostered an arbitrary construction of gender social roles between the two sexes, where men rank first in the scheme of things. Men dominate the economic sphere and political decision-making positions in society, while the role of women is placed in the domestic sphere, thus making place for gender discrimination.

Social gender constructivism comes from the general school of thought of social constructivism, which suggests that people know or see that "reality" is partially socially

determined. The social aspect of the gender goes beyond the categories and examines the intersections of multiple identities and the blurring of the boundaries between the essential categories, which are often assumed to be essential. Gender identity can be influenced and different from one society to another depending on how members of society appreciate the role of women and men. It can be influenced by the ethnicity of the group, their historical and cultural background, family values, and religion.

It is considered necessary to distinguish between sex and gender. Gender is not only a well-used role, but also part of the society's structure, both race, and class, and is a system of privileges and inequalities in which women are constantly disadvantaged. There is in fact between men and women a relationship of institutionalized powers with unequal access to potential economic and social resources (Andersen and Taylor, 2004). Gender as a social class and race can be used to socially categorize people and even lead to gender biases and discrimination, which primarily operate from the use of stereotyping thinking. Stereotypical ideas and beliefs about women, though altered and improved, are still visible in our country and in other modern cultures. In this context, the idea of a social construction of gender defines the framework of life and individual behavior within the social context in which it lives and not on the biological gender differences as a basis for gender identity (Anderson, Logio, and Taylor, 2005). Gender social building can be identified in the expectations that parents have over the behavior and actions of their children. From this point of view, we can say that men and women are indoctrinated from early life to different social behaviors based on gender roles in the family. However, gender building continues throughout life and affects our perspective and how we see things and situations. As society's awareness of the decisive role of gender has increased in recent decades, mainly due to increased female employment and feminist movements, it was found necessary to overcome gender inequalities and stereotypes that restricted the psychological functioning of both sexes to co-build new interactive models (Avis, 1996 in Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2008: 5).

Females and Their Role in the Family

As noted above, gender roles refer to social norms and behaviors that are considered socially appropriate for individuals of a particular sex. The gender role theory shows that boys and girls learn to perform biologically determined gender through particular behaviors and attitudes. This theory highlights the environmental causes of gender roles and the impact of socialization or the process of transferring norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors to group members by learning how to behave like a male or female. On the other hand, the theory of social role suggests that social structure is the fundamental force in gender differentiation and that differentiated behavior is stimulated by the division of work between the two sexes within a society. The division of labor creates gender roles, which lead to gender social behavior. With the popularization of social theories, it is important to recognize that all allegations about gender roles are cultural and historical contingents. This means that what may be true of gender roles for a cultural group is not true for another group. Similarly, gender roles have changed over time and there is no universal and generalized statement for gender roles.

In 1977, it would be Lawrence Stone, who outlined some of the changes that led from medieval to modern forms of family life. The family of openhearted nuclei is defined as the first type and is characterized by relatively small families, but immersed in relationships with the community. The second form is the limited patriarchal family, which spreads mainly to the higher strata of society and is defined as a transitional kind. The core family became a

more divided unit, distinct from relationships with other relatives and the local community. This stage of family development was associated with the growing emphasis on the importance of spousal and parental love, although there was also an increase in the authority of the father. A closed-ended family, a group with close emotional ties that has a high degree of family life and preoccupied with raising and educating children, increasingly replaced the patriarchal family. This form warned the emergence of affective individualism, the formation of marital bonds on the basis of personal selection, under the guidance of romantic love rates (Giddens, 2002: 376). We point out that a twenty-first century comprehensive family definition must go beyond traditional thought to include people who choose to spend their lives together in a kinship relationship despite the lack of legal sanctions or bloodlines. In the context of the above, we recognize that a family is far more than a wholeness of individuals that share a particular physical and psychological space.

In Albania by the late 1980s, the patriarchal family dominated, where 2-3 generations lived on the same roof. After the opening of Albania in 1990, emigration and migration from rural to urban areas accelerated the dissolution of the patriarchal family. However, the revival of patriarchal traditions combined with the problems of unemployment, poverty and personal security have restricted the fundamental rights of Albanian women and girls, mainly in rural and poor areas. Data on poverty in Albania show a feminization of poverty and an increase in the share of children in the poorer group. While from 2002 to 2005 the absolute poverty indicator fell by 27%, poverty reduction in the female and children population groups was not the same (UNICEF, 2007: 5). Women in Albania comprise 51% of the population and 43.4% of the total labor force is represented by women, 49.7% of women aged 15-64 are employed, 8.5% are unemployed and 41.7% are out of the workforce (INSTAT, 2017). The national trend towards full integration of gender roles is reflected in women's education, professional achievements and family income contributions.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study is to analyze the attitudes, responses, and perceptions of women employed outside the family on their role in family, society and work. Evaluating and analyzing the responses by the interviewed subjects on individual role and social context in their city carried out the study. The study assesses the prevalence of the system of values and beliefs on the role of women in society and explores their perceptions of the climate of the social environment where they work and live. Thus, the purpose of this study is closely related to the understanding of the personal experiences of each interviewed subjects.

The information collected and analyzed by qualitative interviews with women who develop active professional life in parallel with the family in Vlora helps to identify key issues and to undertake concrete steps for successful intervention to address the problem of social status for Albanian women. The potential for long-term social effects associated with multiple roles of women in society and the family requires a profound qualitative study to answer the key questions that arise as a direct consequence of these multiple roles. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews to give participants opportunity to freely express their opinion on the main topic. The collected data served two purposes: first, to identify the attitudes and perceptions of women about their role in society; and, secondly, to identify the problems faced by multiple roles.

The study was conceived around two research questions, which are the main focus of the analysis: What are the conflicts between being a family and being a career woman? How do the social context and the system of different beliefs affect the professional aspect of women?

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consists of all women employed outside the family premises in the city of Vlora. The sample set for this study is 30 subjects. It was selected in explorative way, as the most widely used form for small studies and qualitative data. The sample selection strategy is random; where it could not be predicted which of the women employed outside the home would become part of the study. The choice of this strategy was made in order to reinforce exploration features of the study. It was assessed that being a mother even employed outside the family premises was a favoring criterion, given the specifics of the subject in the study. However, interviews were conducted with female employees, but with a single civil status to assess the contribution of women to their family of origin. It was also considered to have a representation from different age groups in order to provide a more representative sample.

RESULTS

The first research question that this study identifies is: *What are the conflicts between being a family and being a career woman?* The answer to this question was given by gathering data on the contribution that women have in the family and their responsibilities, the balance between family and professional life, time management, and their social life.

All interviewees emphasize that they contribute to providing financial income and family care in order to ensure welfare. Civil “married” status entities claim to care to play their best roles as mothers and wives. Meanwhile, only one of the subjects with a single civil status claims that besides the economic aid, she also cares for other family members. From the collected responses, it is identified that the engagement of women outside paid family work is dictated by the family's economic needs and it is confirmed that families rely on two financial sources, where both spouses contribute to its well-being.

Subjects claim that they try to create a balance between family and professional life, managing time and separating them from one another. Time management is a major issue, however, subjects are trying to find the space to carry out all family and professional obligations, but also to find free time to dedicate to themselves and social life. What catches attention is that only one of interviewed subjects' claims that is continuously assisted by her spouse in the balance between family and professional life, as well as time management for fulfilling her obligations. This fact confirms the patriarchal structure of the Albanian family where the man perceives himself outside the home affairs, attributing them to the woman's obligation.

Asked about parenting, the subjects converge in their opinion that they have responsibilities and difficulties but are divided when asked if the difficulty is the same for both sexes and primary responsibility for childcare. In a reading between the lines in the given answers, the impact of the system of values and beliefs of Albanian society is identified, that the main role and responsibility in the family and childcare is female. These two intentionally formulated questions confirmed each other and no conflicts were identified in the answers provided by the subjects of this study.

The two questions below aimed at identifying the priorities women put in their lives: family or career. First, they are asked if you would have a spouse or partner whose income will fully support them, will you continue to work full time. All subjects when asked what is most important in your life, family or careers gave priority to the family considered as the most important in their lives and that professional life lies in a second plan. Interviewees emphasize that they would pay attention to their career depending on the time they allow family engagement and that this would always be in order to ensure greater family well-being. Regarding the role of women in the family, the subjects' claim that the main change that has occurred is that, like their husbands, they contribute to income security and are more engaged outside the family environment. They also identify that today women are more educated, stronger, more independent, freer and fair, more politically represented, but at the same time more stressed and with much room for improvement.

The second research question that this study identifies is: *how do the social context and the system of different beliefs affect the professional aspect of women?* Responding to this question was provided by collecting data on the gender-based bias on the division of labor, equal opportunities for both sexes in advancing in professional life, the impact of social context on the professional affirmation of women and the level of satisfaction for current achievements. Subjects' opinions are divided into two groups when asked whether the balance of professional life remains a specific gender issue. 50% claim that this balance remains closely related to gender issues and 50% disagree with this opinion. Interestingly, subjects who think that there is no gender issue belong to people over the age of 40. Such a finding can be related to the work experience, security, and affirmation that over 40-year-olds have gained during their lifetime. I think this would be an argument because if we were to look at the context of the beliefs and prejudices of the Albanian society where women are closely related to the family environment; such a finding would be a contradiction.

In reinforcing the above question, subjects are asked whether the social context provides an opportunity for a woman to grow professionally. 3/5 of subjects who thought the balance of professional life were not a gender-specific issue confirmed that according to their perception, the social context provides opportunities for professional growth of a woman and only 2/5 perceive the opposite. Other subjects' feel that the opportunities for professional growth are not provided, reinforcing their previous response. Thus, it is identified that the social context is essential for the professional affirmation of women in our country.

The difficulties that entities identify as an obstacle to their role in Albanian society are closely linked to the social context: prejudice and mentality, the lack of knowledge of women's contribution to society and the difficulty of the professional career. The answers are given to this question claim that women still face a system of cultural values and beliefs that hinder women in affirmation and full integration within Albanian society. The difficulties identified by the subjects of this study can easily be classified as discriminatory for women within Albanian society. But, on the other hand, it is identified that overcoming the artificial obstacles imposed by prejudice is closely linked to the individual formation of everyone.

70% of interviewees would not compromise on the quality of the professional life balance for the sake of the social context in which they live. Such a report of responses confirms that the perception of professional affirmation has been strengthened and that women are separated from the social context that surrounds them, giving priority to their individuality. While the question of *whether it is difficult to have a family and to work full time*, the subjects of our study claim: "it is very difficult but not impossible." They do not identify significant conflicts

in the work-family relationship. However, 60% of them claim to push their career aspirations, giving priority to their family and needs. This high percentage of women who would cease to work professionally for the sake of better family functioning confirms once again the Albanian social context within which the family is paramount.

DISCUSSION

Women have basically gone a long way in the change that began in the 1960's and which has led to its emancipation within the family context, the role it plays in society and in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to gain an insight into the lives of female employees and to investigate more deeply the impact of social constructivism and the system of beliefs of Albanian society: how to be a mother / wife influenced their careers and family choices; as well as investigating its multiple roles in socio-economic and professional terms. Literature research identified that traditionally it was expected that women give priority to their family before anything else, including themselves, their educational needs, and individual careers (Spreadbury, 1983), and finds support in the Albanian reality through the study carried out.

Early strata of social stratification as "blind to gender segregation" (Giddens, 2002: 227) have now changed and women are increasingly actively involved in society but always ignoring their role of family care and the wellbeing of children. For their affirmation within society, women have gone through a road where they are dedicated to the family and housework have gone to high levels of school education and slowly entering the labor market world. Thus, the roles and duties of women in today's society have been reformulated and have begun to be accepted within society as such and necessary for the new labor market demands.

As a result of the strong patriarchal traditions of the Balkans, males have historically dominated Albanian society. Women have long been dictated to accept the role of submitters. During the communist regime, a deep gap was formed between the theory of women's emancipation and its daily reality (UNICEF, 2007: 5). In 1991, after the overthrow of the communist regime, Albania passed a period of profound structural changes that led to the destruction of state-owned enterprises where women were the largest amount of labor force. As a result of these changes, the economic situation of women declined and their dependence on men increased (IFAD, 2009). In this context, gender equality is for the Albanian society a new principle that has not yet been recognized by a significant percentage of the population.

Unfortunately, women have always had to face the barriers created by society itself, mainly with regard to areas closely linked to work. The remaining stereotypes and whether they relate to the long-term economic and social transition has contributed to the slowing down of the integration of women's position within the active social life of Albanian society and the labor market cycle. Often, governance reforms are not gender-responsive and, consequently, special attention is required to promote it. In part, this has to do with the fact that most of the objectives, systems, and services of government at all levels are defined, designed and managed under men-dominated terms and, consequently, reflect their priorities and perspectives. Common governance reforms threaten to underestimate, eliminate and exclude the realities and needs of women (UN, 2012: 9). Albania has adopted a national strategy, which contains objectives and initiatives for gender equality. However, the national plan does not reflect specific local socio-economic realities and does not provide orientation to transform national targets into concrete gender interventions at the local level (UN, 2012: 36). From the field study it is identified that the gender policies undertaken by the institutions

and the assessment made by recognizing the individual contribution of each employee are not in favor of the professional development of women. Harmonization of gender policy requires that all policies, programs and processes take into account the potential impact on males and females.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this analysis, we assert that: as in the western countries and also dictated by the new socio-economic conditions of the country, Albanian women should be more integrated into the professional and active life in the social life of the country, promoting a more harmonized cooperation and an equal division of work with male colleagues. But before that, it is the woman herself who has to break away from the stereotypes created for her role and remove the fear of unfounded and improper prejudices in her life, placing the primacy of individual well being and realization as primary goal. A significant number of psychosocial, physical and professional effects identified as a result of lack of a professional life balance affect the quality of family, professional and social life of women.

For the above, it is identified that the role of women in all contexts requires good management and coordination in order to avoid the effects that could disturb the balance of these roles. It is imperative that women rely on performing their roles from all another family, social, and institutional actors. The re-evaluation of institutional policies and the abolition of discriminatory barriers constitute a key step in the career development of women; raising the consciousness of society and the collapse of the system of patriarchal values that sees a woman "within the home" is the key factor of the social context; increasing cooperation among family members in sharing "homework" would result in a mother and a more present and less stressed spouse.

Regarding the empirical study, we state that it is characterized by a limited time span and spatial scope, which does not allow us to make generalizations and to make firm conclusions on the issues dealt with. Therefore, it is suggested to undertake research initiatives that would look at this issue in a wider context.

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