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Author(s): Maunula, Minna

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EXPERIENCES OF COMBINING DOCTORAL STUDIES AND EVERYDAY FAMILY LIFE

Maunula Minna

University of Jyväskylä, Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius (FINLAND)

Abstract

How to combine work and family life and find individually best solutions in everyday life, is a topical and globally significant subject. In this article I immerse to how the under 40-year-old female doctoral students with a family succeed in combining their important roles as a mother and a doctoral student in their own everyday lives.

Many simultaneous challenges encounter in the everyday life of an under 40-year-old female doctoral student with a family. In the examination I concentrate on the everyday challenges of the female doctoral student, on the interface of the family and the doctoral studies and on the choices made in everyday life.

Keywords: Doctoral studies, everyday life, family, experience.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 To study individual experiences

It is important to study individual experiences, the everyday experiences and contexts are significant for forming the expertise. Also individual experiences can help to develop academic practices. In general, planning is in central role and an individual is expected to plan their life course and working career carefully. Different choices that are made in everyday life spring partly from the evaluations of past events and from the anticipations of the future.

The doctoral studies have become more commonplace and can be reached by more wider group of individuals. The doctoral studies are a multi-dimensional process, which consists of different contexts and builds different wholenesses. In an individual everyday life doctoral studies are a significant part of the whole. Everyday life is strongly personal construction. The diversified everyday family life and expanding possibilities and limitations require the matters to be examined also as a whole.

1.2 To study everyday family life and change

In recent years have various international and societal changes intensified and accelerated. The development is reflected in many ways by individuals; also female doctoral students reflect their lives as part of bigger picture. It is evident that the actions of individuals shape social practices. The changes are holistic and systemic, numerous pieces form a continuous motion of the puzzles. [1.] Female doctoral students' everyday life with a family are placed in an interesting crossroads in the lifecourse, the topical phenomenons are realized and the whole is structured as the sum of its parts.

Examples of long-terming, wide-ranging and significant changes of the whole can be seen widely in the society: in families, in universities and in working life. The changes also touch individual everyday life, growing effectiveness, competition and individualization. Alongside the global development, women have taken over the traditionally masculine held areas of everyday life, and have been given new responsibilities [2]. Women combine in their everyday life a growing number of different factors, external requirements and objectives of self-reliance [3]. A number of large and simultaneous challenges condense in the everyday life of female doctoral student with a family, which makes everyday life close, individual and demanding.

2 METHODOLOGY

The subject of this study was female doctoral student with a family and the objective was to understand their everyday life experiences. I examine how female doctoral students with a family succeed in combining doctoral studies and everyday family life through their stories. The main question is: How does the female doctoral student organize her everyday life with family and connect the different demands? The examination is performed from the points of view of a family and doctoral studies, but in everyday living there are many simultaneous factors added.

The research material (Table. 1) consisted of 12 narrative interviews. Interviews progressed by themes, as well as analysis. The doctoral students were at different stages in their studies in different fields. The number of children varied from one to three. The interviewees' average age was 32 years. Majority of the interviewees were married. Seven of the twelve students conducted their research as paid work, two with scholarship, one student whilst being unemployed, one on a family leave and one in addition to other work. The everyday life situations change quickly because of fixed term employment, scholarship periods and family leaves.

Table 1. The studied female doctoral students background information.

N	Age	Children	Family	Main activity
1.	31	2	marriage	scholarship
2.	25	1	cohabitation	family leave
3.	33	2	marriage	in addition to other work
4.	27	1+	cohabitation	researcher
5.	26	1	single	researcher
6.	37	2	marriage	unemployed
7.	32	1	marriage	researcher
8.	38	2	marriage	scholarship
9.	37	1	marriage	researcher
10.	33	1	marriage	researcher
11.	32	3	marriage	researcher
12.	35	1	cohabitation	researcher

The objective was to understand the experiential stages of the female doctoral students' everyday life with a family. In this study the experiences of combining family and doctoral studies and other work are examined. In the examination also the use of time and dialogic nature of the topic are emphasized.

The research represents theoretically and methodologically hermeneutic, phenomenologic and narrative approach. The analysis was content analysis of themes which developed hermeneutically. The starting point is an individual experience from which the phenomenological tradition proceeds. The individual experience has a context where it takes place, where it is understood in hermeneutical dialogue. The narrative construction conveys everyday family life experiences.

Global and social changes, like the high-quality skills and the centrality of knowledge are emphasized in many ways in the life of an individual and at the same time also on a larger scale, for example in the global economy. In the lifecourse of the individual the doctoral studies are a significant position. In the shared examination of the macro and micro levels, attention should be paid to their intersection, the everyday and concrete level. Traditionally the individual experience of doctorate process is not seen central, but the change is obvious [also 3].

Individual experiences can be seen as valuable information on doctoral education and the interaction between academic and working life. On the other hand the researched experiences of the individuals from the academic environment and contradictory expectations make the academic world more understandable. Doctoral student should perform effectively from studies and acquire relevant work experience and useful expertise, and also live ordinary everyday family life.

3 THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE

Alongside the general education policy and the economic research objectives, attention should be paid to the doctoral student's individual and everyday life perspectives. For example, women no longer need to make a choice between a career and a family. Nowadays there are better opportunities than before to choose them both and to build individually functioning everyday life which is, however, marked off by certain realities. The problems associated with combining the family and the demanding academic work have been thought about for a long time but the subject is still topical, for example, for the sake of global competition development and increasing individuality.

The individual and diversified lifecourse does not offer traditional, ready models for busy everyday life. Indeed the individual objectives strongly direct the everyday operation, where the compulsiveness and methodicalness of choice are emphasized. [1.] Simultaneously, the challenges of everyday life are increased by the constantly changing conditions, the life's changing structures of foundation and the updating of individual priorities. The uncertainty and difficulty in anticipation requires the adoption of a revised attitude. [4.] Continuous changes, competition and choices present in female doctoral students everyday life in many ways.

The constant balancing in everyday life was closely present, the individual everyday life consisted of individual choices. The everyday life is ordinary, habits and practices as well as gendered operation [5]. The compulsion of choice becomes concrete when the wholeness of everyday life is examined. The everyday challenges of a female doctoral student were connected to limited time resources and difficulties in combining the separate roles: the family, studies, work and spouse demand the investment.

Doctoral study experience is an individual one [6]. It is affected by the earlier experiences of studying and research, expectations, visions, the field and situation in life. Numerous factors are reflected in the experience and it is not possible to individually identify all of them. The women's experiences of the doctoral studies were connected to the stage of studies. The research work proceeds in cycles and sometimes one's own knowledge and skills were put to the test.

Female doctoral students were happy about the opportunity to take the solution they evaluated to be the best from the point of view of the wholeness. In the pressure of the different demands related to work, career and family many women suffered from a guilty conscience when they experience that they were not fulfilling good enough all the demands of their own and others [also 6; 2; 7].

4 DOCTORAL STUDIES IN FEMALE DOCTORAL STUDENTS EVERYDAY LIFE

According my research material the women regarded the roles of mother and doctoral student as the most important. These two roles were supporting one other, not opposite. But in different everyday situations the significance of the family was twofold: it gave counterbalance to the intensive doctoral studies but at times the family took too much time away from concentrating on the study. The female doctoral students' everyday life with a family was bound by the everyday commitments and emotional boundaries. In the families different decisions were made, but still women had the main responsibility

for the everyday life of the family, and the man concentrated on his own career. Equality was aimed, and for example, the use of time and the family's best interest were discussed.

The women regarded the support from their spouses as important even though all the spouses were not familiar with the reality of the research work. The support was versatile, both emotional and concrete. Some of the women mentioned that their spouses were in responsible positions in the working life and invested a lot in their work. Because of this the mother of the family was left with the main responsibility for everyday life at home. The members of the family discussed the situation and about their use of time. The women told, that they tried to pay attention to everyone's wishes and the shared benefit. Some of the women left out the whole doctoral thesis from the internal discussions of the family and from the everyday life. The relationship was overshadowed, which caused the interviewees some guilty conscience. The female doctoral students regarded their relationship as happy, however pressured by everyday life.

The female doctoral students with a family arranged and organized their everyday life actively and individually within the conditions. The everyday life conditions form the wholeness in which the family, doctoral studies and sometimes even another work are at the centre. The organization of everyday life was determined essentially whether the doctoral studies were undertaken as work or in addition to other life. The internal motivation towards the doctoral studies and the positive thoughts about future were reflected positively in the everyday organization. According female doctoral students they experienced the research work as a balancing factor amongst other busy aspects of their life. In practice, the working days were efficient, compact and short.

The choices about the usage of time, the constant lack of time and the organizing of time between important matters were everyday life for the female doctoral students [also 8]. Even though the women were flexible and experienced and they were able to make individual decisions, their choices were fairly limited. The starting points for the women in my study was the combining of important matters and the effect where they support one another.

In the different lifecourses the doctoral studies are in any case a challenging project, where the commitment to them is a precondition for success. The individual doctoral student should realize wider lines of development and perceive oneself realistically as a part of the wholeness. The doctoral studies are a part of the individual lifecourse and everyday life in which different factors and stage weave into wholeness. Surprises are part of life but rapid changes require planning and spontaneous activity. In female doctoral students life there are both the factors which represent the continuity and the ones representing the unpredictable breaks.

5 CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The doctoral studies are a demanding project for a woman with a family, the commitment to them is condition for success. The female doctoral students told that they experience enthusiasm and commitment towards their projects, even though the everyday life and the future seems to be challenging. The female doctoral students have simultaneous several projects which required time and input in their lives. They tried to solve every day practical challenges individually and find the best solutions for them. Sometimes they succeed well and sometimes not so well.

For the female doctoral students the hardships of the different sectors of life were reflected dialogically in the wholeness. Negative experiences of the doctoral process were connected mostly to too sparse time resources. The interviewees mentioned the use of time as one of the everyday challenges [also 8]. The families negotiated and agreed on the use of time together, but still mainly the woman was responsible for the organizing the families' use of time [also 8]. Women arranged their studying and working hours according to the benefit of the family, even though they emphasized their commitment to their study and/or work. The women were satisfied with the meticulous use of time but it also partly annoyed them. Family restricted the time used for work. The considerations concerning the use of time were strongly conflicting.

In addition to a busy family life, the academic career required input and the competitive culture forced onto the effectiveness. Individual choices about the use of time, the lack of time and the organizing of time are everyday life for the female doctoral students. [also 8.] So, the real possibilities for individual choices are limited, even if women felt they were able to make own decisions.

Female doctoral students told about their needs for encouragement and understanding. Their different and individual situations needed to take account also in supervision, they had special supervisory needs for their choices. Also the experiential peer support was estimated important. The awareness of the others limitation and solutions was regarded empowering. The female doctoral students who lived in a pretty similar everyday family life situation experienced each others' experiences good examples and good practices were openly shared. Still everyday family life solutions were strongly individual and constructed to help own lifes fluency. The women with a family told they needed versatile and extensive information for the comprehensive development of a doctoral career. Women would benefit from more specific guidance or mentoring in their doctoral studies in addition to the general supervision of studies [6].

Female doctoral students' everyday life solutions were based on their aware reflection of the values. They reflected the values and their own everyday actions. At the same time they were aware of the different possibilities to manage their own and family time and the use of time in the everyday life. The idea of combining doctoral studies, family and even other work varied according to the overall situation in life. In spite of the pretty exact boundaries, at times the work took resources from the family and from the other aspects of life. The taxing phase was exhausting and caused uncertainty also about motherhood. Too demanding study or work and intense everyday family life could become a too heavy burden which slows down recuperation.

According to women, finding a meaningful field and study subject defeated the everyday adversities and challenges that belonged to the work, such as financing worries, slow progress and constant lack of time. The pleasure that was received from working with a meaningful study subject, publications, financing and the insights into contents were significant everyday experiences which encouraged them to continue. At the same time, it was important to pay attention to the changing world according to the women— both large and smaller contexts are changing constantly. The globalization and the different network based solutions make it possible to get to the core of the own discipline, also from the middle of the commitments of everyday family life. According to the women, the research was not separate from everyday life, something that takes place in the researcher's chamber or is mystical.

The flexible individual orientation of doctoral studies points to the importance of continuous learning, not only completing the degree [also 9], one important skill is to use limited time resources wisely. The female doctoral students' attitude towards the future was mainly trusting, it was believed that things would work out in one way or another.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The female doctoral students constructed their life actively as directed by their family and their doctoral studies. According to this study it seems that the female doctoral student succeeds most in accommodating the family and private life, if she is working as a full time researcher and doing regular working hours. Doctoral studies in addition to work and family life causes stress, inadequacy and congestion in everyday life.

The women experienced the family as a limitation and even slowing them down but, on the other hand, supporting resource which balanced the doctoral studies. According to them the family was important and they had organized other aspects of life according to it. The women wanted to and were able to organize their life within certain limits. The flexible nature of academic work eased the management of everyday life, the combining of family and work. Even if the academic work would in principle make flexible working possible, the wholeness of several factors and the routine structures of the society direct the everyday use of time of those with a family.

The operator who is central in the doctoral studies is a human being, an individual. Often doctoral students are perceived as a homogeneous group: their role is marginal and often narrowed to the context of studying. However, doctoral students are individual, they come from individual starting points and they have individual objectives. In doctoral students life, the doctoral students role is only one role among many others, especially with family life. At the individual level carrying out the major lines is eventually everyday actions. The concrete level and its development are the dialogue of major and smaller lines.

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