

The work–family relationship – what is the role of men?

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Scholars, politicians and practitioners are paying increasing attention to the work–family relationship. Work and family (and non-work life in general) have a significant yet complex interdependency. Various changes in societies explain this attention, such as women's participation in work life, the blurring of gender roles, shifts in employees' values, the development of technology that enables work from home, the COVID-19 pandemic that has pushed employees to work from home, the blurred boundaries between work and non-work lives in general, and so on.

In work life, the effective management of the work–family relationship is a key aspect of socially responsible human resource management (SR-HRM). Taking care of this relationship is crucial to employee commitment, satisfaction and performance (Heikkinen et al., 2021). Employees who are offered opportunities to balance their work and family responsibilities successfully experience security in their life, enrichment of their personality and an enhanced sense of well-being (Greenhouse & Powell, 2006; Hobson, 2011; Graham & Dixon, 2014; Pučetaite et al., 2020), which is a measure of quality of life. Greenhaus and Powell (2017) stressed that an individual's experience of having balance between work and home reduces work–family conflict and increases work–family enrichment.

In recent years, work organisations have developed multiple work–family arrangements as a part of their SR-HRM practices that make it easier to balance the work and family domains (Butts et al., 2013). The arrangements can include practices such as flexible work hours, childcare services, teleworking, working part-time, having meetings during the daytime and so on. For example, in a study by Nie, Lämsä and Pučetaite (2018), it was shown that SR-HRM practices can be beneficial because the work–family integration plays a significant role in reducing women's turnover intentions. Moreover, this study showed that supervisor gender makes a difference in the relationship between the organisation's work–family practices and female employees' turnover intentions: female supervisors have a stronger and more significant

impact on the relationship than male supervisors. In general, the work–family relationship includes gendered conventions that tend to be taken for granted by individuals and organisations (Carroll et al., 2008; Kangas & Lämsä, 2021).

Due to the fact that many women work outside the home nowadays and their participation in work life is important to themselves, their families and society, working women tend to face a double burden. This refers to the phenomenon whereby women who work full time in the labour market tend to face a second work shift at home. The double burden occurs because the woman is considered the primary caregiver in the family and responsible for the household (Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017; Pučetaite et al., 2020; Heikkinen & Kivijärvi, 2021). Therefore, despite her work outside the home, the unpaid care responsibilities at home tend to be assumed to be solely her duty.

Despite increasing transformations in gender identities and family models (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Kangas et al., 2019; Pučetaite et al., 2020) in academic, practical and political discussions concerning the work–family relationship, family issues are viewed from the viewpoint of women, as if the relationship was not relevant to men at all (Pučetaite et al., 2020). Thus, their fatherhood tends to remain invisible (Özbilgin et al., 2011; Heikkinen et al., 2022). The pervasiveness of traditional gender ideologies and patriarchal social norms seems to still prevail in discussions on the topic. The invisibility of men in this respect constrains women’s possibilities in work life and career, as well as men’s possibilities to participate in family life (Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017).

Recently, research has begun to make visible the work–family interface from working men’s viewpoint. Many of the studies are conducted in Western and European Union contexts but also elsewhere. Some examples from the Rainbow partner societies – Finland, India, Spain and Austria – are highlighted here.

The study of Kangas, Lämsä and Heikkinen (2017) among male managers in Finland showed that father managers can construct their fatherhood by drawing on the traditional masculine ideology. In this research, the men adopt the model of *breadwinner fatherhood*, where the man is regarded as the primary breadwinner in the family and his work and family are rather separate areas in their life. However, this study also showed that men can construct other gender roles. In *uncommitted fatherhood*, the man’s absence from and noncommitment to his family are understood by the man as the normal practice in his life. The wife is seen as equally career-oriented as her husband, in sharp contrast to the breadwinner father’s wife, who gives up her own career to support her husband’s career. Yet, the working wife needs to take care of children and the household and thus faces a double burden. In *best bits of fatherhood*, the father–manager’s children occupy a significant place in his life. However, fatherhood in this case does not mean doing any concrete childcare tasks at home, but the father participates mainly in the

more pleasant elements of parenting (e.g. nice hobbies), whereas it is the mother who takes charge of the rest at home. Finally, *hands-on fatherhood* means that the father is an active and caring parent. This type of fatherhood resembles traditional motherhood. The relationship involves nurturing, caring and fostering a deep emotional connection with the children, all of which are considered crucial for genuine fatherhood.

An investigation by Rajadhyaksha and Velgach (2015) used a sample of working men and women in India. This study showed that no significant difference exists in the levels of work-to-family conflict between working men and working women. Yet, family-to-work conflict was significantly higher for Indian women than for men, which can be an extra source of stress for women. Chapman and Mishra (2019) argued that the dominance of the traditional masculine norms and ideologies in India is one main factor that hinders women's participation and career progress in the labour market and similarly excludes men from care responsibilities.

A study in Spain (Moreno-Mínguez et al., 2019) found that attitudes towards gender roles and family model preferences are influenced by socio-structural factors and general socio-cultural norms and values. These researchers argued that this influence differs for men and women in Spain. Compared to men, Spanish women are less likely to prefer the traditional male-breadwinner family model. Moreno-Mínguez et al. (2019) concluded that some changes in attitudes towards gender roles and preferences for family models other than the traditional model in Spain are emerging. Preference for the family model of the part-time mother and father is growing in younger generations. Moreover, the preference for a model in which the mother and father work full-time is also increasing among young people but only for women. Consequently, the younger the women, the higher their preference for a model that offers the same work situation for men and women when there are small children in the family. Men's choice of the more egalitarian family model depends on their education level and age: high education and young age are linked to this model.

Buber-Ennse (2015), who relied on the results of a systematic OECD survey, said that a combination of mothers' part-time labour participation and fathers' full-time employment is a dominant model of parents' labour participation in Austria. Austrians are aware of fathers' presence and need for an active role in childrearing. Regarding attitudes towards the employment of mothers with small children, large differences between women and men exist: men agree much more often than women that children suffer from fathers' concentration on work. The report by Buber-Ennse (2015) shows that the time devoted to childcare has increased in Austria (as in many other Western countries), especially among fathers employed full-time who have non-employed partners and housewives.

When young women's participation in work life and career advancement is in the focus, the topic is difficult to understand and tackle without a view of the work–family relationship and its

complex gendered nature. Women do not live in a vacuum, but many issues related to family affect their careers and possibilities to pursue a career. In particular, the role of the husband and his orientation and devotion to family is crucial when we speak of heterosexual couples (Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017). Moreover, preferences and values related to family models, as well as organisational, social-cultural and legal norms, affect the career possibilities of women. Therefore, instead of solely focusing on women, it is important to pay attention to men's role at the interface of work and family (Heikkinen et al., 2022). To gain a proper understanding of the topic, we believe that this issue needs to be studied and discussed at multiple levels: individual, social, organisational and societal. For example, fatherhood tends to be invisible in organisational practices and processes, even though the topic is of interest to individual people.

In the Rainbow countries, the preference for a family model seems to vary, and this has an impact on women's careers, as well as men's participation in family life. India can be considered a traditional male-breadwinner model. Austria has moved to a more modern combination model, in which mothers' part-time labour participation and fathers' full-time employment are preferred. In Spain, especially among young and educated women and men, shifts towards a more egalitarian family model are occurring. In Finland, the egalitarian family model is stressed: Finnish mothers and fathers work full-time, and childcare services are offered and economically covered by the state's social security programmes.

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