

**Children, mother and father time management and perception of stress :
families in a rush**

ELSA FONTAINHA¹
ISEG - Technical University of Lisbon -

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Very preliminary and incomplete draft; Please do not quote or reproduce

(version 31 May 2005)

Abstract

The aim of the research is to study the effects of family environment on individual stress. Special attention is given to two-parent families with at least one child aged under 15, divided into two groups (until 6; between 6 and 14). Using Portuguese Time Use Survey data base (5000 households ;10000 individuals), was concluded that: parents inquired never or rarely had time to do whatever they want to do, stress affects more mothers than fathers and affects more the employed mothers than the non-employed mother, mothers' feeling of lack of time is usually during week end, time pressure in professional life is higher concerning fathers than mothers, children age seems not to have a large effect on fathers' stress, however is stronger among the mothers of older children. Factors as mothers' age and fathers less participation in the activities of this children group could be the reason explaining this result.

Introduction

The aim of the research is to study the effects of family environment on individual stress. Special attention is given to two-parent families with at least one child aged under 15, divided into two age groups - aged under 6 and 6-14 years old.

The parent-child relationship is subject to the constraint of time, which has an effect on the stress felt in relation to professional and personal life. This constraint will affect certain family types more than others, depending of time allocation of each member.

Frequently, time use surveys take extra information to understand people's subjective feelings about some or their time allocation. As a consequence, measures of *time-pressure* is at the present a common component of *time-use* studies (Michelson and Crouse, 2002). Others components for example are household production, labour market participation, well-being (Fisher et al, 2000). Different economic theoretical approaches of time use were surveyed by Hamermesh and Lee (2003), using time use data, developed what they called an Economic Theory of Time Stress, following the seminar work about time allocation of Becker (1965), and based

¹ Elsa Fontainha elmano@iseg.utl.pt , ISEG-Technical University of Lisbon , Department of Economics, Lisbon, Portugal; Adress: R. Miguel Lupi, 20 Gab.514, 1249-078 Lisboa, Portugal; Phone 351 213925993; FAX 351 213922808

on the assumption that “Stress” is “physical, mental or emotional strain or tension.” Time stress should thus be interpreted as strain or tension that is generated by feelings that the available time is insufficient to accomplish the desired activities. Time, like goods, is always insufficient—because time is limited, everyone is to some extent stressed”. Hamermesh and Lee (2003, p.6) . There are many other studies associating work performance and stress in an economic approach as Leontaridi and Ward (2004) who use data from International Social Surveys Program (ISSP) for 15 OECD countries, but where family characteristics are not included.

There is a growing literature which relate work-life balance and stress in economic as Ruhm, (2004) or sociological perspectives as Folbre, N. and Bittman, M. (2004) or Zuzanek, Juri (2001) . The present paper proposes a contribution to a better understanding of Portuguese labour market and family dynamics and characteristics analysing stress variables.

Data and Methodology

The research is based on data from the first national Time Use Survey conducted in Portugal in 1999, by the Office of National Statistics, which adopted the guidelines of the harmonised European Time Use Survey - Eurostat. The information was collected on the basis of household questionnaires, individual questionnaires and diaries (sample size: 5,500 household units and 10,000 individuals). The weighted data are considered to be representative of the nation as a whole. Analysis uses information from three databases (diaries, individual questionnaires and household questionnaires) and other socio-economic data. (INE,1999; Eurostat, 1999)

The subjective sense of being pressed for time or psychological stressed is evaluated by survey' results regarding perception of stress (now and over the last, three and five years), stress felt in relation to professional, stress felt in personal life and individual options about time management.

Respondents were also asked about time allocation and socio economic characteristics that are usually correlated with stress explanation. Time use information covers diverse activities: work time, household time, sleep time, traffic time, leisure time, socialising time, child care time. Analysis brings together individual and household information like employment status, occupation, income and educational level, sex, age, marital status and family characteristics.

The analysis discriminates the population according to employment status and family composition and tests for a number of explanatory factors. The aspects analysed in relation to families are composition, size, income level and sources.

Empirical Results

Time management and perception of stress - Families in a rush

The global results from Portuguese Time Use Survey reveal that there are great differences between employment status categories (employed, unemployed, household worker, student, retired worker) relating to the ways people allocate their use of time (i.e. their “free” time) and to their perception of time. In terms of feeling rushed, the highest values are from employed women (77% feel rushed, and 48% of these women feel rushed everyday). On the opposite situation are retired men, only 16 % feel rushed. In general, it is employed people that feel most rushed, and 50% of household workers claim to feel under stress. This is the situation referred 1999, but more than half of the respondents said that they believed that life would be less peaceful in the future.

The present paper will study the perception of stress in more detail, looking into the family/household data. On the issue of the lack of time and the sense of perpetually being in a hurry, how is this perceived by family-members?

With regard to the mothers, the situation varies depending on the age of the children. In the families where the children are older (6-14), the employed mothers feel that they are "*in a rush*" more frequently (92% against 73% in the other families with younger children) but with a lower increase compared with the previous years (in 1994, 1996 and 1998). (*Table 1*)

The responses revealing a perpetual lack of time to carry out all the tasks of private life and working life are markedly higher in this type of family. The family-members also lack the time to carry out everything they intend to do during the weekend.

Thus, the lack of free time is not surprising; 91% of the employed mothers of children between 6 and 14 never have "*free time without knowing what to do with it*". If they had some spare time, they would use it either to do "*nothing at all other than rest*" (21%), more than to socialise with the family (16%). The choice of spending spare time "*doing nothing other than resting*", is correlated with more working hours (paid or unpaid). A frequent trade off exists between this passive option of leisure and

the desire for conviviality with the family .A greater need to attend to the younger children, seems to be reflected in the preferences expressed regarding the allocation of free time by mothers of younger children. These results seem to support Bianchi (2000: 403) thesis about time invested in children by women into paid work.

The large majority of parents of this kind of families are always or often in a hurry. Many of them felt more rushed now than in the last year and 3 and 5 years ago. Therefore, more than a half of those parents have no intentions of slowing down in the future. The lack of time is felt in the different spheres of life and invades what is assumed as leisure days for the generality of people, the weekend. About 50% of mothers and fathers are not always or frequently able to finish all the tasks they have, either in professional life or private life². The time pressure in professional life must be analysed knowing that the working week in general has more than 35 hours.

Free time is a very scarce good, more than 70% of parents inquired answered that they never or rarely had time to do whatever they want to do.

Time constraints are also present resulting from administrative services timetables and kindergarten and child school timetables.

In general, phenomena associated with stress affects more the mothers than the fathers and affects more the employed mothers than the non-employed mother.³ There is a very large difference between fathers and mothers regarding stress perception during weekend. The mothers' feeling of lack of time in usually non-working days (week end) , is double to the one felt by fathers. The weekend data from TUS- diary reveals that week end is also a period of hard work at home.

The time pressure in professional life is higher concerning fathers than mothers, perhaps because they set high careers goals than mothers.

Children age seems not to have a large effect on fathers' stress. Only the attitude regarding the future slowing down is different and exists also a slight difference concerning time pressure in private life. The time pressure and the feeling of rush, however is stronger among the mothers of older children (6-14 years). Factors as mothers' age and fathers less participation in the activities of this children group (less time and less frequency of fathers presence) could be the reason explaining this result.

² On Grebner (2004) a detailed analysis of the relation between stress and both life and work aspects.

³ The non-employed mother's information is sometimes insufficient to conclude with a acceptable variation coefficient.

Socialising with family is one of the activities that this parents want to do if they had more time, specially in the case of families with one child under 6 years old (38% and 32% respectively to fathers and mothers). In second place comes “doing nothing, only resting”, and household and family care come next. Socializing with friends, entertainment, tourist travel and sports are others alternatives free time allocation. ⁴

The age of children seems to have influence on the preference for allocating more time on socialising with friends. Parents of children (aged 6-14) and specially mothers present a large preference for “doing nothing/only resting” perhaps in result of a high stress level as referred.

Families with one child aged 15 years or older - is stress a heritage?

This analysis of the perception of stress is approached from two perspectives: that of the parents and that of the children. Only in this case we can analyse together the perception of stress of parents and children, because the complete⁵ TUS individual survey is addressed only to individuals with 15 years or upper.

The child feelings of be in a hurry is less frequent than the one felt by parents, but the gender difference is present in both groups. The attitudes concerning the slowing down in the future are similar to parents and children. (*Table 2*)

Concerning free time children in general they answer that they know what to do when they have free time, in a very different way of parents in this kind of families. This could be interpreted in two ways either children have more fertile imagination than parents or they even less leisure time than parents. In this families parents have less time constrains imposed by several services timetables.

Some of these results could mirror different generation attitudes and conflict behaviour. If the parents had more time, the preferred allocation to it is socialising with family (20%). But if the children had more time, the preferred allocation to it is socialising with friends (20%) reflecting the peers' group phenomenon. Entertainment, touristy travel and sports are activities equally preferred by both parents and children. Household and family care are less relevant in these families

⁴ Notice that respondents can only choose an alternative.

⁵ There is a special TUS questionnaire to children 6-14 but data and results are unpublished.

than in the other two categories previous considered, perhaps because there is less housework to do and more ways of share it.

Conclusions

Using Portuguese Time Use Survey as main data base, combining household and individual questionnaires on families with three members we concluded that:

The perception of stress is different by gender, employment status, family characteristics and children age.

Parents inquired never or rarely had time to do whatever they want to do and stress affects more mothers than fathers and affects more the employed mothers than the non-employed mother.

Mothers' feeling of lack of time is usually during weekend, time pressure in professional life is higher concerning fathers than mothers.

Children age seems not to have a large effect on fathers' stress, however is stronger among the mothers of older children. Factors as mothers' age and fathers less participation in the activities of this children group could be the reason explaining this result.

There are signs that stress is installed, is growing and is gaining the new generations, from parents to children as a heritage.

Acknowledgements: I thank helpful suggestions received to my paper "Time Allocation, Time Pressure and Stress – family composition matters" from the attendees of 6th Conference of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology organized by the Institute of Work, Health and Organizations (University of Nottingham), Oporto, November 2004. I also thank comments received to my paper "Parental Time, Family Composition and Labour Market Participation" from the attendees at the conference on "Time Pressure, Work-Family Interface, and Parent- Child Relationships: Social and Health Implications of Time Use", University of Waterloo, March 2002, organised by the Research Group for the Study of Time Use, Life Stress and Work-Family Interface (University of Waterloo) in co-operation with the International Association for Time Use Research (IATUR), Policy Research Initiative, Health Canada and Statistics Canada. I acknowledge Portuguese Statistics Office (INE) that made possible the availability of unpublished data of Portuguese Time Use Survey – INE. Previously, partial availability of unpublished data was made possible by Commission for Equality in Work and Employment (CITE)- Portugal (Research Project: Gender and Time Use - the value of unpaid work – CESIS). This paper is a component of a global sabbatical research supported by the Portuguese Science Foundation (Fundacao para a Ciencia e a Tecnologia FCT - Ministerio da Ciencia e da Tecnologia) Sabbatical Grant # BSAB467 and CISEP-ISEG Centro de Investigação sobre Economia Portuguesa Project # 2351 to which I would like to express my gratitude. The participation in this IUSSP Conference is supported by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Finally, I offer my appreciation to the Time-use Research Program, Sobey School of Business Saint Mary's University, Halifax Canada and its Director Dr. Andrew S. Harvey for making available, during my visit there, resources and support for my sabbatical research.

References

- Becker, G.S. (1965), "*A Theory of the Allocation of Time*", *Economic Journal*, vol. LXXV, September, p.493-517.
- Bianchi, Suzanne M. (2000), "*Maternal employment and time with children: dramatic change or surprising continuity?*" *Demography*, vol. 37, 4, November, 401-414.
- Eurostat (1999) *Harmonised European Time Use Surveys*
- Fisher, K., Gershuny, J., Gauthier, A., Victorino, C. (2000), "*Explaining new grounds for using the multinational time use study*", Working Paper of the ESRC Research Centre on Micro Social Change, Paper n. 2000-28.
- Fontainha, E. (2005), "*Social cohesion across Europe. Does time allocation matter?*" *European Review of Labour and Research*, Spring, vol. 11, p.97-112.
- Folbre, N. and Bittman, M. (2004) (Eds.) *Family Time – the social organization of Care*, Routledge.
- Grebner, Simone and all (2004) "*Stressful Situations at Work and Private Life Among Young Workers : an event sampling approach*", *Social Indicators Research*, 67, p.11-49.
- Hamermesh, Daniel S. and Lee, Jungmin (2003) "*Stressed out on four continents: time crunch or yuppie kvetch?*" National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper Series, n.10186, December.
- INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística (1999), *Inquérito à Ocupação do Tempo*.
- Joyce, M. Stewart, J. (1999), "*What can we learn from time-use data?*" *Monthly Labor Review*, August.
- Juster, F. e Stafford, F. (1991), "*The allocation of Time: Empirical Findings, Behavioral Models, and Problems of Measurement*", *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XXIX, June 1991, pp.471-522.
- Leontaridi, Rannia M. and Ward, Melanie E. (2002), "*Work-Related Stress, Quitting Intentions and Absenteeism*", IZA discussion Papers, May.
- Michelson, W. and Crouse, D (2002), "*Changing Demands on the Time-use Analysis of Family, Work, and Personal Outcomes in Late-Century: Implications for Trend Analysis of Time Pressure*", paper presented to the conference on "Time Pressure, Work-Family Interface, and Parent Child Relationships: Social and Health Implications of Time Use", University of Waterloo, March.
- Ruhm, Christopher J. (2004), "*How well do Parents with Young Children Combine Work and Family Life?*" National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper Series, n.10247, January.
- Zuzanek, Juri (2001) "*Parenting time: enough or too little?*" , *ISUMA Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2(2), p. 125-133.

Table 1 - Feelings of Time Crunch by Employment Status and Family

Family size and composition: Couple with one child less 6 years old (3 members); Couple with one child 6-14 (3 members); **Couple with one or more children, at least one of whom is under 15 years (3 or more members)**

	Couple + 1 child (<6 years old)		Couple + 1 child (6-14 years old)			Couple with one or more children, at least one of whom is under 15 years	
	Parental Employment Status		Parental Employment Status			Parental Employment Status	
	Employed Father	Employed Mother	Employed Father	Employed Mother	Mother out of Labour Market (*)	Employed Father	Employed Mother
Feel rush	68#	73#	66#	92	66#	68	81
Feel of "being in a hurry" always or often (%)	76#	82#	78#	82	..	74	82
Feel more rusehd than:	47#	52	43#	32#	..	39	39
- last year	52#	67	55#	47#	..	51	53
- 3 years ago	73#	76	56#	60#	78#	58	67
- 5 years ago							
No intention of slowing down in the future	73#	75	33#	68#	69#	65	68
Time Pressure							
Professional Life (always +often)	50#	38	53#	41#	-	48	39
Private Life(always +often)	54#	53#	48#	58#	..	51	59
Week-end (frequently +sometimes)	29#	68	29#	72#	..	67	74
FREE time(never and rarely)	84#	90#	83#	91	72	52	61

.. Variation coefficient equal or upper 25%

Variation coefficient between 15% and 25%

- No applicable

(*) To the youngest group of children, Mothers out of the labour market (housework's + unemployed + student + retired +other non-active) are not represented because the variation coefficient is equal or upper 25%.

Table 2 - Feelings of Time Crunch Parents and Children
Family: Couple with one child upper 15 years (3 members) (*)

Unit: valid %

	Parents					Children (=+ 15)		
	Parents (F+M)	Employed Father	Employed Mother	Out of L. Market Father	Out of L. Market Mother	Children (S+D)	Son	Daughter
Feel rush	56	61	82	21#	44#	59	54	66
Feel of "being in a hurry" always or often (%)	76	74	80	71	73#	65	63#	68#
Feel more rusehd than:	32	36#	29#	..	33#	46	47#	46#
- last year	42	41#	45#	..	41#	70	64#	76
- 3 years ago	50	51#	54#	..	46#	82	76#	87
- 5 years ago								
No intention of slowing down in the future	65	63	62#	..	69#	67	58#	74#
Time Pressure								
Professional Life (always +often)	37	35#	43#	-	-	39	41#	37#
Private Life(always +often)	48	47#	58#	45#	40#	41	41#	41
Week-end (frequently +sometimes)	62	68	75	..	40#	71	68#	75
FREE time(never and rarely)	49	42#	56#	..	57#	74	72#	75

.. variation coefficient equal or upper 25%

variation coefficient between 15% and 25%

- No applicable

(*) The Marital Status was the way adopted to proxy the parents or children status (The married members of the families are assumed to be the parents and the single to be the children; the error introduced with this methodology was analysed and is not very representative). In this category of families, the children (+ 15) could participate in the labour market, and employment status is not useful to identify parents/children case as it had be done in the previous tables concerning families with one child < 15. Childcare arrangements and time related with childcare activities is not available in relation with this children category, that cover a large (and very heterogeneous) scope of ages.