One in four women feels forced to choose between career and motherhood in Spain

In Spain, three out of four mothers feel they are discriminated against in the workplace and 28 percent feel they had to choose between their jobs and having children. These are the findings of a study that offers up 17 recommendations to improve the situation.

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According to a study on motherhood and professional development, prepared by IESE professor **Nuria Chinchilla** with **Esther Jiménez** and Marc Grau, three out of four mothers in Spain feel they are discriminated against in the workplace.

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In addition, 57 percent say they had to give up a job that was incompatible with being a mother and 53 percent say motherhood has limited their career development.

For 45 percent of respondents, this is compounded by harassment in selection processes, when they were specifically asked if they already had or were considering having children. Twenty percent of respondents say they were not allowed to return to their jobs following maternity leave.

The report, conducted by IESE in collaboration with Laboratorios Ordesa, also highlights the main obstacles for the advancement of working mothers: the distribution of responsibilities and duties at home, as well as the rigid hierarchical structures in companies.

The 17 recommendations proposed by the study include more rational work schedules, more flexibility and a revaluation of the role of families in society.

More work and fewer children

Even with full-time work, Spanish women do more childcare and home maintenance than men. In fact, they often end up with a second or even third shift after their jobs when they have dependents at home, which may include aging parents or in-laws.

The study notes that "micro-machismo" — i.e., subtle, daily gender inequalities — are a reality among 60 percent of married couples. Indeed, the survey shows that laundry, cooking, cleaning, ironing and other tasks tend to fall on women, and that mothers help twice as often as fathers when it comes to childrearing duties.

According to the report, half of respondents have had fewer children than they wished and more than a quarter have postponed or renounced having children in favor of their careers.

On average, women in Spain would like to have 2.52 children, but the actual birthrate is 1.32 children. This is an alarming figure in a society that has failed to achieve the minimum replacement fertility rate for three decades now.

Main barriers

Overall, 85 percent of those surveyed complain that their workplace culture is not sensitive to motherhood or parenthood. And although nearly half say their company has work-life balance policies, not everyone has access to them. Meanwhile, a third of women and a quarter of men surveyed perceive that there are negative career consequences to taking

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advantage of such policies.

Lack of flexibility within companies is frequently cited as an obstacle (91 percent). And an overwhelming majority calls for a "rationalization" of working times, and feels that school and work calendars do not overlap enough.

In addition, 97 percent of women consider that maternity support is sorely lacking. While EU countries overall allocate an average of 2.2 percent of GDP to help families, in Spain that figure is just 1.4 percent.

Baby steps

Based on the study data, the authors make a series of recommendations to improve the situation for Spanish families. These include allowing telecommuting, part-time workdays and business hours that allow employees to enjoy their families. They also recommend a return to the time zone that corresponds to Spain (which geographically should be in the same time zone as Portugal and the United Kingdom).

The experts also underline the importance of extending maternity leave to a year (it is currently 16 weeks) and promoting legislative changes to prevent part-time contracts from being more expensive, covering tax contributions during maternity or paternity leaves, officially establishing the value of unpaid domestic work and reforming the protected contract for those choosing to work part time.

In this respect, the government should lead the way toward equal opportunities by creating legislation that avoids discrimination.

Methodology, very briefly

The study was based on the opinions of nearly 8,500 people who completed the survey distributed through the Ordesa Club de Padres in Spain. The majority of the sample are women aged 25-45 with children under 12 years of age. (Ninety-four percent of respondents had at least one child, 92 percent were women, and 90 percent of both sexes were aged 25-45.) Most of the respondents are employed and either married or living with their partner.

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