

**Explaining women's employment patterns in the local context:  
the role of education and local care policies in Terrassa (Spain)**

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**Work, Women, Class and Care:  
Working Women in Contemporary European Cities**  
RC32 on Women in Society

XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology  
Facing an Unequal World: Challenges for Global Sociology  
Yokohama (Japan) 13-19 July 2014

# Abstract

- Empirical research into the factors determining female employment has given rise to a lot of interpretations regarding the cultural, institutional and individual effects on women's employment patterns in different countries based on the analysis of individual characteristics and the effects of macro conditions (Del Boca et al., 2009; Fortin, 2005; Hakim, 2004; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; Pettit and Hook, 2005). However, very few studies have set out to combine both macro and micro perspectives by using discourse analysis to explore the heterogeneity of women's employment patterns over the family life course in different local contexts and among different groups of women (Steiber and Haas, 2012). In this regard, some studies have thrown doubt on whether institutional and cultural factors have the same effect on women's employment patterns in different contexts (Pfau-Effinger, 2004).
- In the context of challenges posed by different work-family arrangements, using a multidimensional approach and as part of the European FLOWS FP7 research project, this paper examines variations across different groups of women in the way that contextual factors shape their labour supply. In particular, we propose to analyse from a qualitative methodological perspective how women's education partly explains differential patterns with respect to employment, work-family balance and access to family help in the city of Terrassa (Spain). The analysis is based on information drawn from focus groups with different categories of women. Qualitative analysis is supplemented by the results of a survey conducted locally providing evidence of the relationship between employment and use of formal and informal care. The initial hypothesis is that women's employment patterns over the family life course are closely linked to preferences regarding jobs and the family, with education and the local care system playing a key role as both a mediating and differentiating factor in the formation of these preferences and values.

# Theoretical framework (1)

**Preference Theory:** The main determinants of women's diversity employment patterns and work history is different in the preferences for combining family work and gainful employment (Hakim, 2000). This theory identifies three main types of women who have different preferences and orientation to work (work centred women, home-centred women and, adaptive women).

## **Critics:**

- Women's employment choice should be understood as a result of a constraint and accommodate choice because of lack of alternative options (O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998; McRae, 2003; Gash, 2008; Walters, 2005).
- According to Pfau Effinger (2004) to analyze "gender arrangements", cross-national disparities in women's employment can be better understood. Importance of culture matters for explaining women's employment.
- Relevance of "gender roles values" (Croptom and Lyonette; 2005; Steiber and Haas, 2009; Fortim, 2005; Moreno Mínguez, 2010; Stam et al (2013)).

# Theoretical framework (2)

**Welfare regime and care regime theory:** Impact of family policy and care regime on women's employment

- **Incidence of gender regime:** "Gender regimes" are interconnected systems, through which paid work is connected to unpaid work, state services and benefits are delivered to individuals or households, costs are allocated, and time is shared between men and women in households as well as between households and employment (Pascall and Lewis 2004).
- **Incidence of care regime:** Ideas and ideals about care in the different welfare regime (care regimes) act as independent incentive structures that favour or constrain the women's labor participation (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004).
- **Incidence of family policy:** Family policies may support and/or supplement the women's employment and family in different ways, generating different models of combining work and family (Ejrnaes and Boje, 2009). Numerous investigations have highlighted a direct positive correlation between women's employment and the level of development of family policies depending on the model of welfare State (Moreno Mínguez, 2007; 2008; Ferrarini, Mandel and Semynov, 2006, Flaquer and Escobedo, Thenévon, 2012; Boje and Leira, 2000).

## **Critics:**

Similar family policies and care regime have different results in the women's employment among European countries (Jensen, 2008; Duncan, 2005).

# Theoretical framework (3)

## Human capital theory:

- Some researches emphasize that education is a strong predictor for women's attitudes and employment (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; Debacker, 2008; Van Well and Knijin, 2006).
- The high education has a positive impact on the women's employment (Cloin et al. 2011)
- Lower educated mothers are less likely to work because these women generally have traditional views of gender roles which have negative effect on their employment (Den Dulk, et. Al. 2003; Myers and Booth, 2002; Bolzedahl and Myers, 2004).

**Critics:** These theories do not consider the combined effects of the institutional and cultural factors on the decision of working.

# Theoretical framework (4)

## **Mediterranean model of women's employment**

- Increase of the female labor force participation from 1980 but low ratios of women's employment in comparative terms
- Relevance of cultural factors associated with the gender roles
- Limited development of family policies to balance work and family life.
- Problems to balance work and family.
- Regional and local diversity.

## **Problems:**

These comparative studies also have limitations. It not allows us to visualize the differences in each welfare system, in each country, and even in each local context.

# Theoretical framework (5)

## New approaches

### Agency Theory:

- This theory emphasises how women construct the dilemma women work / family from a micro perspective (Hobson, 2011). These qualitative analysis help explain female labor behaviour differential in relation to the so-called "adult work model"(Grönlund and Javornik, 2013; Daly, 2011; Fleckenstein, 2011, etc.).

### Local dimension

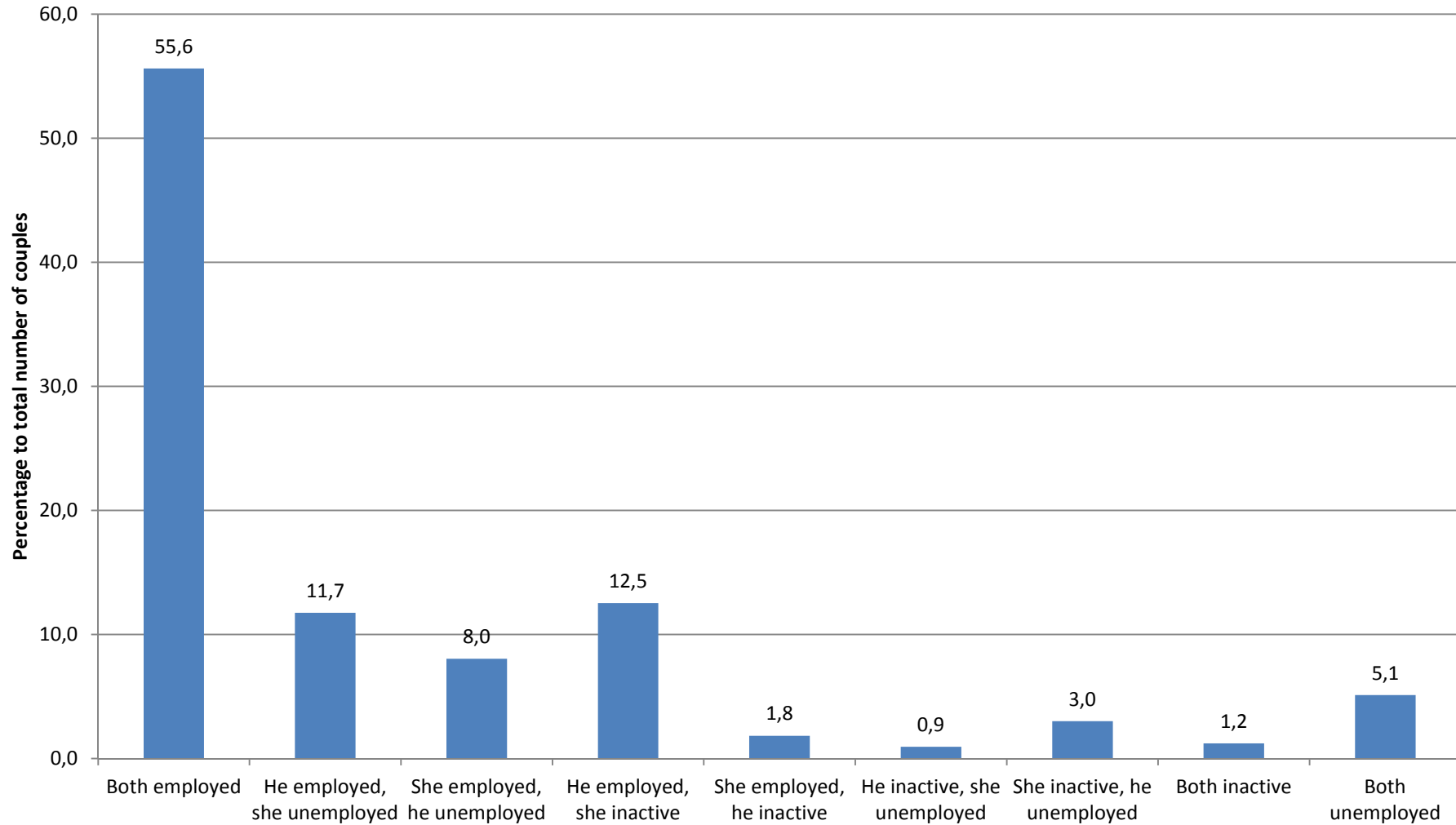
- The relevance of the local welfare state for women's employment decisions (integration of cultural values, education and social policies on elderly and children, production system from a local perspective). FLOWS project.

# Presentation of Terrassa

- Terrassa is a city in Catalonia, a region in the northeast of Spain. It is part of the greater Barcelona area, the capital of the region and second most populous city in Spain after Madrid. Terrassa has 213,000 inhabitants (January 1, 2010) and is the 24th most populated city in Spain. In recent years the population growth has been steady and high. With an increase of 24 percent in the last decade it has gained 41,000 people during the period.
- The boom of residential construction, very significant from 1998 to 2007, and the arrival of a large number of immigrants have played a great part in this population growth. From 2002 to 2009 foreign population has increased from 4.9% to 14.8%. Most migrant men come from Morocco and the majority of migrant women come from Latin America, especially from Ecuador. The number of foreign women has remained for long below the number of foreign men.
- Terrassa and other neighbouring cities played an important part in the industrial revolution in the 19th century. The main drive at the time was textile industry and its weight in the economy continued well until the late 1970s when an economic restructuring took place. However, in Terrassa there is still a significant presence of industry, testimony to its past, so that the share of workers in the industrial sector (18.2%) and also in the construction (12.7%) is much larger than the Catalan and Spanish average.
- The expansive business cycle came to a standstill in 2007 as a result of the international financial crisis in connection with the collapse of the real-estate bubble. Male early school leavers and foreign workers have been more severely hit by the crisis than women as they already had higher unemployment rates. This background may contribute to illustrate the rise of unemployment in Terrassa. From 2005 to 2010 unemployment rate has risen from 9.4% to 17.8% . Although in general the economic crisis has tended to reduce the unemployment gap between men and women, this has been much less the case in Terrassa.
- The city of Terrassa displays a longstanding tradition in progressive governments. From the first democratic election in 1979 the city council has been ruled by left-wing coalitions under socialist leadership. From the 1990s Terrassa has been one of the leading Catalan cities to implement policies for gender equality. With an emphasis on time use and gender mainstreaming, a number of strategic goals have been defined: the promotion of equal opportunity between men and women; the struggle against the feminisation of poverty; and social inclusion for women.



## Distribution of couples aged 25-54 years by status employment of partners Catalonia, 2011



Source: ECVHP 2011

# Family models and work-family arrangements

- Terrassa is one of the FLOWS cities with higher female activity rates and yet one of the cities with lower female employment rates. This paradox is explained by the high incidence of unemployment. Terrassa has severely been hit by the financial crisis and this has resulted in soaring unemployment rates affecting a mass of people in their prime of life. Catalan unemployment rates for the age group 25-54 years are 17.8% for men and 17.1% for women. Despite their harshness, these rates are well below the Spanish average (LFS data for 2011).
- Terrassa has been historically more generous than the regional and national average in public provision and supervision in childcare.
- Catalan survey data show that dual-earner households are an overwhelming majority (80.5 %) in contrast with an insignificant share of male breadwinner households (15.5%). These percentages correspond quite well to the distribution of ideal family models reported by survey respondents.

# General findings from focus groups

- Education attainment has a significant impact on the work-care choice for mothers and decisions about work.
- In relation to work-care choice, meaning of work and father involvement there is a stronger influence of socio-cultural factors for lower educated mothers than for higher educated mothers.
- The adoption of strategies on how to reconcile family and personal life depends to a great extent on the education of both father and mother and so does father involvement.
- The role of local childcare available for women's employment decisions and choice of childcare arrangements varies according to the education of mother.
- In relation to the meaning of work women with a low educational level tend to value their economic aspects, whereas those with high educational level mostly appreciate the independence conferred by employment and the self-realization that enables.

## **Decision making on employment and childcare among employed women with lowest education level and with a pre-school child**

- For women from this group work is seen as a relief and a respite from domestic burdens as well as a way of enlarging the scope of their social contacts beyond the family circle.
- Fathers play a secondary role due to long working hours and their very low level of involvement. The low profile of the father's role is one the features that confirms the persistence of traditional gender roles.
- Relatives' support plays a medium role in women's childcare arrangements. Grandmothers are "used" to fill in the gaps not covered by parents and school services.
- These women express a high work-family conflict because the flexibility in the workplace is not a common trend among this group.
- Concerning family policies they emphasise three ideas: working and school times, school conditions and maternity leave.

## **Decision making on employment and childcare among employed women with highest education level and with a pre-school child**

- Women from this group address the importance of working to improve their family relationships. They prioritize their jobs as a way to enhance their individuality as well as to single out their personal independence from family status.
- For these women grandparents and other relatives represent only a little part of childcare and they try to cover their needs using as resources work and school time schedules and father involvement. Father involvement plays an active role for this group of women, although it is not enough.
- These women express a low work-family conflict thanks to the flexibility of their work time schedules allowing to meet family needs.
- They use nursery school local provisions including preschool centres and babysitters.
- In connection to family policy reform they emphasise the importance of the quality of nursery schools and pre-school centres and of the improvement of work time schedules. Paid parental leave is not discussed because it is not on the political agenda.

## **Decision making on employment and responses to eldercare needs among employed women with lowest education level and with dependent elder relatives with care needs**

- In general, caring is understood as an obligation for women of both educational groups. In the case of women with low educational levels, they feel obliged to care because they are women. The gender factor is especially important in this group when it is compared to women with high educational levels
- Women with low educational attainment mainly focus on the difficulties to reconcile work and family life, especially when it comes to meet dependent elder relatives' care needs.
- Opportunities for social contact and attention to personal and psychological aspects are relevant aspects to take into consideration for women with low educational level.
- When discussing current work regulations, they raise the possibility of reducing working time (with a corresponding reduction of wages). Part-time work is not mentioned.

## **Decision making on employment and responses to eldercare needs among employed women with highest education level and with a dependent elder relatives with care needs**

- Women from this group discuss the extent to which caring for their elder relatives have affected their working lives and working conditions.
- They focus on professional issues related to work and on the need for retaining their employment in order to keep contributing to family income.
- They complain about the insufficient provision of services, which results in an inadequate help received from public and private agencies.
- They highlight the negative effects that the lack of affordability of care services has on working conditions
- Finally, they pay attention to a certain extent to personal and informal relationship between employers and employees, which is seen as an opportunity to strike a better balance.

# Points for discussion

- The study points to the continuing importance of informal care (grandparents) among lower educated mothers.
- Women's work-family conflict is higher among women with lower educational levels due to inflexibility of time schedules and long working hours.
- Traditional gender roles persist among women with lower education. In this group father involvement is minor.
- At equal levels of childcare the educational level of mother tends to a great extent to shape decisions on employment and childcare arrangements.
- Work-family conflict is explained by the gap between care needs, available childcare services, the level of father involvement and realities of modern work as seen in the light of mother's education. The role of the local childcare available for women's employment decisions and choice of arrangement is much less important than education.
- The gender factor is especially important among employed women with lowest education level and with a dependent elder.



# Some relevant FLOWS conclusions

- The structure and level of female employment is primarily demand-side driven. Factors favouring female employment are: economic growth, low levels of unemployment, and a large service economy. Preferable, the service economy should be publicly organized, as the public sector offers reasonable work conditions conducive for social cohesion. In the FLOWS cities a correlation exists between female employment levels and the size of the public sector. From a social cohesion perspective the major problem is that the demand for women is especially high in secondary labour markets offering precarious-like types of jobs.
- Demand side factors, including growth in the public sector, is of major importance for women's employment. Thus, the financial crisis and welfare state retrenchment threatens women's employment opportunities. This furthermore indicates that a supply side oriented social investment strategy can't be expected to foster growth in women's employment unless connected to demand side initiatives (FLOWS final report).

# Conclusions

- In Terrassa the level of educational attainment has a significant impact on mothers' decisions about work and on work-care choices.
- Different meaning of work for categories of women by level of education: work as self-realization vs work as a respite.
- Different strategies for reconciliation of women with lower educational levels (informal/family based) and higher educational levels (family services).
- Demand-side factors rather than supply-side factors are essential for the creation of new jobs.
- In Spain the regulation of the labour market (flexibility of working times, precariousness connected with insider/outsider duality) is far more important than family policies.
- Mismatch between citizens' aspirations and family policies in Spain (Pfau-Effinger, Flaquer and Jensen, 2009).