

Transitions

LITERATURE REVIEW

for the EU Framework 5 study
'Gender, Parenthood and the
Changing European
Workplace'

Executive Summary of Research Report #2
[Http://www.workliferesearch.org/transitions](http://www.workliferesearch.org/transitions)



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LITERATURE REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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December 2003

Published by: RIHSC: the Research Institute for Health and Social Change (formerly COP Research Group)

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RIHSC Research Reports and Occasional Papers

Published occasionally by the RIHSC: Research Institute for Health and Social Change

For information contact the publishers at the address below

ISSN 1359-9089

ISBN 1-900139- 41- 3

Printed by the Manchester Metropolitan University

RIHSC: Research Institute for Health and Social Change:

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Transitions is a research project funded within the Key Action, Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Union.

Transitions is a qualitative cross-national research project which aims to examine how young European adults negotiate motherhood and fatherhood and work-family boundaries in the context of labour market and workplace change, different national welfare state regimes and family and employer supports. The project is examining individual and household strategies and their consequences for well being at the individual, family and organisational levels. This is studied in the context of parallel organisational contexts and macro levels of public support in the 8 participating countries: France, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK, Bulgaria and Slovenia

CONSOLIDATED LITERATURE REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This literature review focuses on the transition to parenthood; i.e. the way new parents negotiate their work-family boundaries and the strategies they apply. The main objective is a review of recent European literature (since 1998) on organisational, gender and well-being issues in relation to the transition to parenthood and the negotiations of work-family boundaries. The review includes the eight European countries of the TRANSITIONS project: the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Bulgaria. It consists of eight national reviews and an introductory chapter considering comparative European studies. The countries included in the project represent a cross-section of policy regimes within Europe. The review is structured around four themes: young adults and parenthood; parenting strategies and work-family boundaries; workplaces and organizational change; and well being. Each national review addresses the four themes, and for each theme the main theoretical perspectives, main methodology used, main empirical findings and important gaps in research are discussed.

The postponement of parenthood and decreasing fertility rates has given rise to a large body research on the decision-making of young people regarding having children and the timing of family formation. Within existing research regarding young adults and the transition to parenthood the quantitative methodology is prevailing. Qualitative research is needed to enrich and complement existing survey data; in particular to open the black box of decision-making of couples on having children and the way they organize their work and family life. There is also a need for longitudinal designs following couples over time and to consider differences between young people, like class and ethnic background.

A lot of previous research on the combination of paid work and family life focus on women's experiences. However, there is a growing body of research focusing on the role of fathers. In addition, research more often uses a multi-actor design in which data on both partners are collected. Contemporary research shows that despite the increasing labour market participation of women, the unequal division of domestic work and care for children remains a persistent phenomenon. In particular, after the transition to parenthood, research shows consistently that gender roles become much more traditional.

Little research is done on the impact of labour market demands, organizational change, and new workplace practices on parenting strategies and work-family boundaries. Few studies address the question how, for instance, atypical work schedules, the development of dynamic organizations with flat and changeable structures, working from home affect parenting strategies to combine work and family life. This domain of organizational research turns out to be rather separated from research on gender issues, women's work, work-life issues and equal opportunity questions. New research that brings these two domains together is extremely relevant.

The concept of well being is addressed from a wide variety of perspectives: sociological, psychological and economical. The focus varies from research on living conditions or poverty to studies on stress, job insecurity or happiness. Most of the reviewed studies are of a quantitative nature. There are two distinct conceptions of well being. It is studied as an

objective and as a subjective concept. Objective well being is usually measured in terms of health conditions, while subjective well being is measured by asking respondents to reflect on their feelings. In several countries well being is not directly object of research. In Bulgaria, Slovenia, France and Portugal research is more concentrated on living conditions and the quality of life. In Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands well being is addressed directly, however in relation to parenthood there is not much research. In UK well being is studied the most explicitly. Organizational health and positive well-being are hardly addressed, however in the UK research on these topics is starting to appear. Research on the positive effects of work, family life, and the combination of the two is scarce.