



**WORK-FAMILY BALANCE :  
WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF DIFFICULTIES AND WHAT COULD BE DONE?**

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**Canada Research Chair on the  
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### **1. Introduction**

Various studies have found that parents of young children feel that they have insufficient time (Descarries and Corbeil, 1995; Conference Board of Canada, 1994; Tremblay and Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2000) and a number of them show that a high proportion of employed parents feel stressed because they find it difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities. Moreover, the diversification of forms of employment (temporary, self-employed, on call, casual) and schedules (part-time, split schedule) is increasing the work-family balance problems experienced by parents even more. However, some of these studies show that the work-family balance measures most often sought by parents of young children involve flexible work arrangements, but arrangements chosen by the parents, not their employer.

When what are referred to as “work-family balance” measures exist in organizations, it appears that it is mainly women who make use of them; men sometimes would like to take advantage of them but fear that they will be more or less openly criticized in their workplace for doing so (Tremblay, 2003). Taking leave for family reasons or even leaving early to pick up their children, for example, may well be viewed as a lack of commitment to their work and employer. Uncertainties about the attitude of co-workers and supervisors in the workplace add to the real problems experienced by parents and it appears that this also increases the reluctance of some fathers to participate in the work-family balance program by taking advantage of flexible work arrangements. Despite everything, several young fathers are more and more actively involved in family life (Tremblay, 2003). However, it should be noted that although some fathers are more actively involved in parental responsibilities, this is not necessarily true of all fathers because society’s expectations about fathers and mothers do not seem to have changed as much as we are sometimes led to believe (L. E. Duxbury and C. A. Higgins, 1991; L. E. Duxbury, C. A. Higgins and C. Lee, 1994).

We therefore wanted to identify the sources of Work-Family Balancing problems for women as well as for men, since most research centers only on mothers (Descarries et al, 1995, 1995a, Méda, 2001, with the exception of Duxbury et al. 1991, 1994), or does not have enough male respondents to be able to observe significant differences (Chenevier, 1996).

It often seems that today’s organizations operate on a day-to-day basis according to an organizational model and management style that still presume that family responsibilities are a domain that is of no concern to the employer. It is as if the work-family connection, though it is discussed in the public arena, is still the domain of employees’ private lives or, in some circles, a “women’s issue.” However, the issue of work-family connection will only become more pressing in the future because more and more women have full-time jobs and this growth is particularly strong among women with children. Arrangements within the family will therefore become increasingly complex. Thus, so as to ensure that there is an equitable integration of both genders into the labour market and that they participate equally in parental responsibilities, it is important to identify the factors and measures that can facilitate work-family balance.



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It was from this perspective that we undertook a study aimed at increasing our understanding of the situations experienced by men and women in the workplace and the elements that may facilitate or work against the work-family connection, for example, work schedules, work time, and support from one's partner, supervisor or co-workers in terms of work-family balance. Thus, we hope to obtain a better understanding of the situation of fathers and mothers in the workplace and to identify the factors that can help workers to better balance their parental and work responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> In the following pages, we will first present a number of elements from our review of the literature and then some preliminary hypotheses, the research methodology and, finally, the results.

### 2. Literature review

As already mentioned, several studies have reported that parents of young children feel that they have insufficient time and show that a high proportion of employed parents feel stressed because they find it difficult to balance their work and family obligations. We conducted a review of the literature on the issue of work-family balance or "conflict"<sup>2</sup> and the stressors associated with this situation in order to refine our analysis and decide on the survey questions.

According to Carlson et al. (2000), studies to date have revealed three forms of conflict (Duxbury and Higgins, 1991; Frone et al., 1992; Kossek and Ozeri, 1998; Lee et al., 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Stephens and Townsend, 1997), that is, time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based. Time-based conflict, in which we are particularly interested, results from overload due to multiple roles and the difficulty coordinating their competing demands. Strain-based conflict results when the strain experienced in one role inserts itself into another role, thus interfering with the latter. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when the behaviour specific to a role is incompatible with the expected behaviour in another role and the person does not make the adjustments needed. While the latter two types of conflict are of particular interest to psychologists, we are interested in work-family balance from the perspective of what management and unions can eventually do to improve the situation in organizations.

As concerns work-family balance problems in general, some studies find that job characteristics are a key factor in work-family *conflict* and partner support is more important than organizational support (G. Gu erin, S. St-Onge, R. Trottier, V. Haines and M. Simard, 1994). Other studies focus more on socio-occupational category as

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the SSHRC which financed this research project as well as another project on other groups that had a similar although somewhat different focus.

<sup>2</sup> This term is more often used by psychologists who refer to role "conflict"; this is not necessarily the best way to view the phenomenon of work-family issues, as we observed in the qualitative part (interviews) of the research. In fact, parents generally do not identify with this expression. Nevertheless, we use it here when the authors themselves have used it. The expression of work-family balance is also often criticised, particularly in French literature (Barr ere-Maurisson, 2002, Tremblay, 2003b), where it is seen as giving a false picture of balance or equilibrium for a situation which is rarely balanced. The French expression of "articulation", used by many researchers is better to render the idea of a connection between work and family, as well as the necessity for adjustments and arrangements. We will keep here to the common expression of work-family balancing, but want the readers to keep the adjustment and arrangement view in mind.



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the differentiating factor in the participation of men and women in both parental and work responsibilities because these two elements are, as it were, communicating vessels. In other words, if a person participates more in one, he or she may end up participating less in the other. Of course, some couples manage to achieve balance and equal participation, but this is not always the case. Our research therefore examines these different dimensions in a large number of activity sectors (health, education, public sector departments and many private organizations).<sup>3</sup>

Researchers have grouped the many factors that serve to characterize the extent of work-family conflict into three categories: employees, work and family. As regards work, they took account of work environment and job characteristics. Work environment characteristics include “work-family” balance practices and the support of senior managers, supervisors and co-workers. Job characteristics include job type, nature of tasks and roles, number of hours worked per week and work schedule. We have included all of these elements in our own questionnaire so as to measure the relative importance of the various factors. In fact, like Barrère-Maurisson, we believe that: “It is not enough to study the effects of working life, for example, on family life, or conversely; rather they must be analyzed together as part of a single logic which gives both men and women their specific place within these structures” (1992: 30). [translation]

### **2.1. Job stressors**

Based on their review of the literature, Nelson and Quick (1985) set out a model of the job stressors experienced by professionals. Their model contains many variables related to the organization, but also elements associated with the specific job and the individual (for example, discrimination).

An American study carried out in 1997 by the Families and Work Institute entitled the *National Study of the Changing Workforce* examined, among other things, the effect of demanding jobs and low support by the employer on the quality of life of employees. Another American study (1998) of 1057 private-sector firms with 100 or more employees examined the different support programs offered to the family within firms. The results served to identify the characteristics of firms that offer these programs as well as the level of satisfaction of employers. Finally, a study carried out in 2001 with a representative national sample of 1003 American workers aged 18 or over examined the factor of work overload by evaluating different aspects of the job that make workers feel overworked: number of hours worked per week and their preferences, number of days worked per week and their preferences and, finally, employees who believe that they cannot modify their work schedule (hours and days) according to their preferences.

In their analysis of data drawn from Statistics Canada’s *1998 General Social Survey on Time Use*, Frederick and Fast (2001) studied respondents’ perceptions of

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<sup>3</sup> While several of the studies conducted in Quebec examined only one or a few specific large organizations, our study goes further by including a larger number of organizations and occupational categories.



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their quality of life based on indicators of work-family balance, time-stress and overall life-satisfaction. Also in Canada, Duxbury et al. (1993) studied the influence of type of job and family on conflict and the perception of stress.

In Québec, there have been few studies on this subject. In their study of 1345 CSN unionized employees who have at least one dependent child (75.6 % women and 24.3 % men), Guérin et al. (1997) focused on the effect on employees' stress levels of type of work, role conflict, work ambiguity, work overload, work schedule and travel to work. Within the same research team, Chenevier (1996) tested 16 determinants of conflict, grouped into the following categories: characteristics of the job, employee, and family. The study was carried out with 167 members of nine federations affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (Confederation of National Trade Unions - CSN) and from the occupational field of medical technologies. Unfortunately, the predominance of women in the sample meant that there were very few variables that could be identified as explanatory of significant differences.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.2. Family characteristics**

A review of different studies on the subject revealed several family stress factors. Guérin et al. (1997) examined the main factors related to (1) children (number, average age, presence of a disabled child, total work load attributable to children); (2) other people who do not live with the family but for whom the person is responsible; and (3) partner (single parenthood, number of hours spent by partner on his or her job and level of conflict between the partners).

A number of studies, for example by Guérin et al. (1997) and Caussignac (2000), found that work-family conflict increases with the number of dependent children. Guérin et al. add that the number of children cannot be dissociated from their age and that, in fact, the latter variable has a greater impact. While Chenevier (1996) did not find a significant relationship with number of children, other studies do provide ample evidence of such a relationship (Descarries and Corbeil, 1995a; Frederick, 1995; and Guérin et al., 1997).

As Maillé (1995) points out, the employer is often unaware that an employee has assumed the care of a dependent person. Sometimes, the immediate supervisor is informed of it, but not necessarily the employer or human resources department. According to Health Canada, approximately one quarter of women aged 35 to 55 assist older persons in carrying out their daily tasks free of charge. We also took this reality into account in our survey questions. However, because only 5.4% of our respondents were in this situation, we were unable to carry out a significant statistical analysis.

Partner support is another variable for which existing research results differ. Unlike the results reported by Caussignac (2000), research by Chenevier (1996)

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<sup>4</sup> Considering this as well as the specificity of family policy and childcare system (State financed system with limited contribution of parents - 5 \$ a day, increasing to 7 \$ a day in 2004 - , it appeared useful to study the work-family issue in Québec with a higher number of respondents.



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showed that partner support has a significant effect on work-family conflict, hence our interest in including this variable. The quality of the relationship and interactions of the partner also have repercussions on work-family balance (Gu erin et al., 1997). Balance will be facilitated even more by support and task sharing between partners, elements that we considered in our research.

We included the basic elements of these variables in our own survey because they were highlighted in the literature review, but most of them could be validated in the studies by Gu erin et al. (1997), Chenevier (1996) and Caussignac (2000), making additional research necessary.

### ***2.3. Employee characteristics***

According to Descarries and Corbeil (1995, 1995a), single parenthood gives rise to differences in work-family balance and certain variables may influence the workload of single mothers, in particular age of children and mother's job situation, absence of a partner or even the fact that the partner works long hours and is rarely available to share responsibilities. Chenevier (1996), on the other hand, did not find a significant difference between the life situations of women in two-parent families and single parents. According to Duxbury et al. (1993), this variable is overdetermined by the person's occupational qualifications and type of job.

In Chenevier's (1996) sample, the respondents' age does not appear to have an influence on stress level and age alone could not explain the extent of the conflict. There seem to be other factors at play, that is, an atypical work schedule and partner support, which will also be examined in the present study. Caussignac (2000) found that commitment to work has a significant positive influence on work-family conflict.

On the basis of Duxbury and Higgins (1991), commitment to family is defined as follows: "[...] the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with family roles, the importance of the family to the person's self-image and self-concept, and the individual's commitment to family roles." (p. 62) Therefore, what they are referring to is psychological commitment as well as the importance attributed by the person to his or her family and his or her commitment to family roles. Based on her review of several studies which found a relationship between commitment to family and work-family conflict, Chenevier (1996) was unable to demonstrate this influence in the group that she studied, apparently because there were not enough males in the sample. On the other hand, the study by Caussignac (2000) revealed that the variable "commitment to family" had a significant positive influence on work-family conflict.

### ***2.4. Job characteristics***

Activity sector and occupational category are two variables that can influence work-family balance problems. Frederick and Fast (2001) noted that Canadian women who are professionals or upper managers are less satisfied with their work-



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family balance than unskilled workers and a much higher proportion of them (40%) have insufficient time.

A study by Boulin and Plasman cited in EIROnline (1997 no 9712170) showed that European managers have longer work hours than usual and this is a handicap for women managers who are trying to achieve work-family balance. Similarly, Galinsky et al. (2001) observed that managers and professionals feel much more overworked than do other employees. The number of hours that they spend on paid work is significantly higher than for those in other groups. Duxbury et al. (1993) note that those in professional jobs work more hours than do other groups of workers, which may exacerbate work-family conflict.

The results obtained by Prunier-Poulmaire and Gadbois (1999) reveal that the organization of work time is a stressor for supermarket employees since it influences their work life while interfering with their life outside work and weakening their health. Chenevier (1996) found no significant difference because of the lack of variance in her sample, which was largely made up of respondents who worked a regular schedule (86.8 %). Given the fact that the former study concerns only a single activity sector and the latter is not conclusive in this regard, we also included variables related to schedule in our study and thus have a more varied sample in terms of work schedule (11% have flexible schedules with core hours, 11% begin work before 7:00 a.m. or finish after 6:00 p.m., and 5% have completely flexible schedules).

### ***2.5. The presence of work-family balance measures***

Chenevier (1996) reviewed the literature on the positive effects on work-family conflict of workplace measures to support employees and their families. Guérin et al. (1997) found that the most popular of these measures are on-site day care, supplementary benefits and leave for birth of a child, voluntary part-time work and home working. Tremblay and Amherdt (2000) found that flexible work arrangements, the work-family measure most sought by parents, was only offered in one out of five organizations in Québec firms studied while leaves were offered in two-thirds of the cases.

The results of the Families and Work Institute research (1998) which included 1057 private-sector firms with 100 or more employees revealed that the most important determinants of the presence of programs, policies and support for the individual and families in the work environment are, in order of importance: type of industry, organization size, and proportion of women in senior management positions. Let us note that many smaller firms were thus excluded from this research.

#### ***Attitude of senior managers and supervisors***

Guérin et al. (1997) found that organizational culture influences the level of work-family conflict. Thus, when employees do not feel penalized because of what they do





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for their families, they experience fewer work-family balance problems. Conflict is also reduced when employees think that their supervisor is supportive or agrees to make accommodations to facilitate work-family balance. Chenevier (1996) reviewed three studies that report on the influence on employees and work-family conflict of negative attitudes or lack of flexibility on the part of supervisors. In general, a negative attitude on the part of supervisors puts stress on employees, making them feel dissatisfied and increasing their absenteeism rates. According to the results of the study by Caussignac (2000), organizational supportiveness significantly decreases work-family conflict. For the purposes of our study, this variable includes the support of both senior managers and supervisors, which we had originally identified separately in our own survey. However, since the two variables were highly correlated, only supervisor support was used in the regression models.

### *Co-workers' attitudes*

While the support of co-workers seems to be an important variable, its effect on work-family conflict has received little attention in the literature. We integrated it into our questionnaire, as did Guérin et al. (1977), but as will be seen below, it did not emerge as a statistically significant variable in our study.

Thus concludes our review of the main literature on the factors that have a positive or negative influence on work-family balance. The behaviours of fathers and mothers in relation to work-family balance are obviously influenced by many factors, some of which go beyond the scope of the present analysis (education, tradition in one's own family, personal aspirations, etc.). However, a certain number of factors and constraints relate more to human resources management practices as well as job and work situation characteristics, and since this type of workplace practice can be acted upon, we included these elements in our questionnaire.

As regards work-family balance problems in general, as we saw above, while studies have highlighted a number of variables, to date they have not provided any definite conclusions on the key variables either because the studies were limited (one or two organizations studied) or because of a low variance within the samples. We have therefore taken a number of questions that were previously validated in other studies (Guérin et al., 1997, Chenevier, 1996, Caussignac, 2000) as well as from a European study of work time (see Boulin's works in references) since the workint time dimension came out amongst the main concern and demand of parents in various researches on work-family balance. (Tremblay and Vaillancourt, 2000; Lero et al., 1993, 1992).

## **2. Hypotheses**

Based on the literature reviewed and interviews carried out on the subject (qualitative component of the research; cf. Tremblay and Vaillancourt-Laflamme,



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2000; Tremblay and De Sève, 2002), we developed a number of initial hypotheses. However, we especially wanted to identify factors that would facilitate or work against work-family balance, using regression analysis and not excluding any variables for which we had data.

Our initial hypotheses were developed on the basis of the literature review and the variables that appeared to be important in terms of the characteristics of the employee, job and organization:

H1: level of partner support can facilitate or work against work-family balance: greater support facilitates balance.

H2: level of supervisor support can facilitate or work against work-family balance: greater support facilitates balance.

H3: work time can facilitate or work against work-family balance: longer work hours make it more difficult to achieve balance.

H4: socio-occupational category and educational level also have an impact: a higher educational level and higher occupational category within the hierarchy result in greater problems.

H5 : Size of firms has an impact on work-family balance; larger firms offer more measures, which facilitates work-family balance.

### **3.Methodology**

Since several studies on work-family balance have focused solely on women and since this issue concerns both fathers and mothers, we wanted to analyze work-family balance problems in different sectors and with both male and female occupational categories. We also strove to include a variety of different ages and other variables so that regression analyses and other statistical analyses could be carried out, thus allowing us to identify the variables that facilitate or work against work-family balance. The research was therefore conducted in collaboration with a number of professional organizations and unions, which allowed us to reach more respondents. The following organizations agreed to collaborate on the research, thus giving us access to a varied group of socio-occupational categories and a more representative sample in terms of age and gender: the Union of Québec Public Service, the Association of professional secretaries of Québec, the Federation of professionals of education, and the Federation of health and social services of the Québec Central of Unions (CSQ)<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that one of the limitations of this study is the fact that the respondents mainly work in the public and parapublic sectors, although a good number of secretaries do not (about one third).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec, the Association des secrétaires professionnelles du Québec, the Fédération des professionnels de l'éducation and the Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux, CSQ.

<sup>6</sup> However, we have just completed a similar survey in the private sector in collaboration with the Canadian Union of Public Employees which, contrary to what its name suggests, today includes many private organizations. See Tremblay, Amherdt and De Sève (2003), as well as Tremblay and Amherdt (2003, 2003a), which are available on the following site: [www.teluq.quebec.ca/chaireecosavoir](http://www.teluq.quebec.ca/chaireecosavoir).



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Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research. The qualitative methods included a dozen case studies of organizations in various sectors. These case studies were based on semi-structured interviews with human resources managers and union representatives of the organizations. In addition, two group interviews were conducted separately with the fathers and mothers in each organization (6 – 8 fathers as well as mothers per organization, interviewed in two separate groups).

In the quantitative component of the research, which is the subject of this paper, a postal questionnaire was mailed to a total of some 5000 people. It is difficult to calculate a valid response rate because the questionnaire was addressed to individuals without our having any knowledge of their family responsibilities, i.e. whether or not they have dependents. However, to complete the questionnaire, the respondent had to be responsible for at least one person (child or elderly, sick parent, or disabled child or parent). In any case, the rates calculated for the groups varied from 13 to 25% of the questionnaires mailed, for a total average of some 20 % (1045 usable questionnaires out of 5000). The questionnaires were distributed by regular mail using addresses provided by the participating organizations and once completed, they were returned to the university.

The questionnaire whose results are reported below included questions on work time drawn from the questionnaire designed by Boulin et al., as well as questions on work-family balance, the attitudes of supervisors and co-workers, drawn mainly from the questionnaire by Guérin et al. (1997). We added a few specific elements on arranging and reducing work time and on work-family balance based on our own literature review which was summarized above.

The questionnaire was addressed to men and women because we do not want to limit the issue of work-family balance to women only and because more and more fathers would like to be more actively involved in their family (Tremblay, 2003a). Thus, even though many studies on work-family balance focus solely on mothers,<sup>7</sup> we preferred to integrate the opinions and perceptions of fathers and mothers precisely because few studies have examined fathers' perspectives on this subject. Our research on work-family balance examines the situation and perceptions of fathers simultaneously because we do not see the work-family connection as a "women's issue," but rather as a social issue which particularly affects parents, both male and female, as well as family members who care for disabled or older persons (approximately 5% of respondents).

### **4. Survey results**

This section sets out the results for the factors explaining work-family balance problems. Usable questionnaires were obtained from 1045 subjects, one third men, two thirds women.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Descarries and Corbeil (1995).



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The women who responded to our questionnaire included: clerical employees (50.5%), professional employees (35.5%), technicians (5.4%), support staff (5.1%), managers (1.4%) and workers (0.4%). The men were mainly professional employees (42%), technicians (16.8%), workers (13.2%), managers (11.4%), support staff (7.5%) and clerical employees (5.7%). Although these percentages are not a perfect reflection of the Canadian or Quebec labour forces, they are not too far off - except for the under-representation of female managers-

### *Significant differences between men and women*

Our first aim was to determine whether the means of the continuous variables differed significantly between men and women.<sup>8</sup> It was found in particular that the percentage of family responsibilities assumed by partners is significantly different, that is, 39.02% on average for male partners and 55.22% for female partners. Salaries also differ significantly, as do the perceived effects of a reduction in work time on working conditions. It is also interesting to note that women have more support than men from their co-workers and supervisor. However, this gap is not statistically significant.

The following results were obtained for the dichotomous variables that are significantly linked to gender: women more often refused work-related responsibilities because of their family obligations (27.9% vs. 17.9% for men), women are more willing to agree to a voluntary reduction in work time (57.6% vs. 50.3%), and it is more common for women than men to have staggered hours (54.9% vs. 47.3%).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, men work more often as part of a team in the evening, at night or on Saturday. Women more often have a self-employed partner (13.6%) and more women than men (39.8% vs. 25.2%) know their union's positions on work time (undoubtedly because this issue is more important to them). Finally, women have more work-family balance problems, and a greater number of women have insufficient time. According to our definition based on two questions (insufficient time and work-family balance problems form the variable DIFFCONC), 55.2% of women have work-family balance problems and lack time, while this is true of 42.6% of men, both percentages being quite high. The variable DIFFCONC was constructed using two questions to obtain groups whose situations are at either extreme of the continuum of work-family balance (i.e., at one extreme, people who have problems and insufficient time, and at the other, people who do not have problems and have sufficient time).

Lastly, we identified a number of nominal variables that are significantly related to gender. Thus, type of work contract, work schedule, use of breaks to catch up with family tasks, and transportation of children are all phenomena that are gender-differentiated; women more frequently hold precarious jobs (irregular work contract

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<sup>8</sup> Due to lack of space, the tables (continuous variables and dichotomous variables significantly linked to gender) have not been reproduced, but they are available upon request.

<sup>9</sup> It should be pointed out that a number of respondents are men and women who work in the health sector (hospitals and youth centres) where staggered hours –evening, night and Saturday—are relatively common; moreover, it is also one of our research subjects.



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and schedule), they use breaks more often than men to catch up with family tasks and they transport children more often. It is also more common for women to consider work-family balance problems as a reason to leave their job and they have less leeway than men in organizing their work.

### **Sources of work-family balance problems**

To determine whether men find it easier than do women to balance parental and work responsibilities, a number of variables were selected and used to explain work-family balance.

Thus, Question B10 was used to assess work-family balance problems: “On the whole, do you have problems in balancing your family responsibilities with your work responsibilities?” (yes/no). Since this is a dichotomous measure of work-family balance and only two categories are considered, the correlation analyses are less powerful.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a new measure of work-family balance, DIFFCONC, was created by combining B10 with another question, C24REC: “Today, has the time you spent at work left you ...

- 1 sufficient time outside of work (or too much time)
- 2 insufficient free time

We will now consider two groups that are most distinct from each other than those formed by using variable B10 only, that is, those who say that they have work-family balance problems and have insufficient time (DIFFCONC = 0 = 298 subjects) and those who say that they do not have work-family balance problems and have sufficient free time (DIFFCONC = 1 = 286 subjects). The main disadvantage of using this measure is that it excludes many subjects (457).

With few exceptions (COHORTE and SOUCONJI), the correlations which were found to be significant with B10 are even more so with the variable DIFFCONC. This is ample justification for the creation of 2 more distinct groups in terms of work-family balance.

The Pearson coefficient ( $r$ ) between all the pairs of non nominal variables is presented in the full report. Several correlations are significantly different from 0 (using a 5% significance level) but since there are many of them, we will present only those which are in the order of 0.25 and whose interpretation appears to be relevant.

Because some of the links observed are quite obvious, for example, the correlation between salary and job satisfaction, we will highlight certain relevant links rather than discussing all of them (see Appendix 1). A number of other links will emerge from additional analyses which are presented further on and can be interpreted even more clearly. For example, the following can be observed :

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<sup>10</sup> It is reasonable to think that the “Yes” group includes subjects whose degree of work-family balance is quite similar to that of some subjects in the “No” group and conversely subjects within a group can be different from each other. The use of a dichotomous measure forces us to consider the same gap in each of these cases, which is to be adjusted by the use of a second question combined with the first.



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partner's work schedule (G58) is correlated with percentage of family responsibilities assumed by the partner (D36); workweek (A4) is linked with work-family balance problems (DIFFCONC); work-family balance problems (DIFFCONC) is linked with having considered leaving one's job (B12) and being interested in a voluntary reduction in work time (B17); there is a correlation between transporting the children to school or day care with doing so in the evening; and there is a correlation between work-family balance problems (DIFFCONC) and considering that a reduction in work time or rearranging work time would result in improved quality of the work provided (RTT1 and ATT1).

It is also observed that the statements associated with the variable created to represent the partner's concrete (or physical) support are correlated with the fact that the partner assumes family responsibilities (D35) as well as with satisfaction about task sharing. These are basically the most significant variables in terms of correlation and subsequent analyses will provide more precise and relevant variables on this issue.

### **5. Predictive model for work-family balance**

The development of a multivariate model allows us to assess the effect of each of the identified variables on work-family balance. The multivariate model allows us to choose all the variables which, when brought together, best explain work-family balance or work-family balance problems.

It should be recalled that we have two measures of work-family balance (dichotomous): B10 and DIFFCONC. The first allows us to use a maximum number of subjects but does not distinguish between the two groups as clearly as DIFFCONC does. However, by using the latter variable, we are forced to exclude many subjects from the analysis.<sup>11</sup>

We used logistic regression and the backward elimination method to select seven variables that help to explain work-family balance as measured by B10. This analysis is based on 819 subjects (570 women, 249 men). These factors are, by order of importance: supervisor support (SOUSUP1), mean age of children (AGE\_ENF), partner's physical support (SOUCONJR), type of job (PROF\_CAD), workweek (A4), subject's age (g50REC) and, lastly, subject's gender (G49).

This means that an increase in the supervisor's support, in the partner's concrete (not only moral) support, and in the mean age of children facilitates work-family balance. On the other hand, the increase in the number of hours worked and a status of professional employee or manager work against work-family balance just as the fact of being a woman makes work-family balance more difficult. Thus, our hypotheses are confirmed. Supervisor support and partner support facilitate work-

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<sup>11</sup> High values for DIFFCONC and B10 are associated with a greater degree of balancing of parental with work responsibilities.



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family balance whereas longer work hours and a status of professional employee or manager make it more difficult. Moreover, it was also observed that as children grow older, work-family balance becomes easier.

The results regarding age show that individuals aged 36 to 45 have more work-family balance problems than do those aged 35 or under. On the other hand, there are no significant differences between this latter group and the group of those aged 46 or older. Achieving work-family balance is perceived to be easier for men than for women; indeed, fathers indicate significantly lesser degrees of difficulty and less lack of time.

### **5.1 Explanatory model of variable B10**

The education variable was replaced by the variable PROF\_CAD which indicates if the employee is a professional or a manager. Indeed, when the two variables are entered into a selection process for a regression model, PROF\_CAD is chosen while education is not. We also found that this variable better represents what we wanted to examine using the education variable. The link between education and work-family balance was interpreted as follows: better educated people hold more demanding, and therefore more stressful positions and this has negative effects on work-family balancing. In this sense, PROF\_CAD appears to be linked more directly with work-family balance while education is also linked but via the position held.



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### Results of logistic regression B10 (819 subjects)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
A4	-.0286	.0105	7.4325	1	.0064	-.0719	.9718
AGE_ENF	.0813	.0202	16.2063	1	.0001	.1164	1.0847
SOUSUP1	.2814	.0641	19.2664	1	.0000	.1283	1.3250
G49(1)	.4062	.2069	3.8525	1	.0497	.0420	1.5011
G50REC			6.5010	2	.0388	.0488	
G50REC(1)	.5564	.2255	6.0869	1	.0136	.0624	1.7444
G50REC(2)	.1217	.2633	.2137	1	.6439	.0000	1.1294
SOUCONJR(1)	.6634	.1789	13.7585	1	.0002	.1059	1.9415
PROF_CAD(1)	.6238	.1684	13.7261	1	.0002	.1057	1.8660

Our interpretation of the results indicates that an increase in the mean age of children, partner's concrete support (the scores in favour of work-family balance are nearly twice higher among subjects who have a high level of partner support) and supervisor support increase the chances of successfully balancing work and family. Conversely, an increase in the workweek makes work-family balance more difficult.

Subjects aged 36 to 45 are those who have the most work-family balance problems (1.75 times more than those under 35).

Another interesting observation is that it is easier for men to balance work and family life (variable G49 = gender). With other factors remaining constant, the scores in favour of work-family balance among men are 1.5 times higher than those for women. While this may not be surprising, it is interesting that the data clearly confirm what we would naturally expect. However, it is particularly interesting to note that partner's concrete support, like supervisor support, is a determining factor. This aspect will be dealt with further on in the analysis.

It should also be added that the model fits the data (according to Hosmer and Lemeshow's goodness-of-fit test = 2.5934;  $p = 0.9572$ ) and accurately classifies 70.33% of subjects.

We now examine the explanatory model calculated with the variable DIFFCONC which, as we explained above, was created from the responses to two questions.

### 5.2 DIFFCONC explanatory model

As was mentioned previously, because only extreme cases are included in DIFFCONC, it applies to only 460 subjects, which is a great loss. The model retained is more or less the same as for B10, since DIFFCONC was initially used to bring out the links in a smaller sample (when we had only 450 respondents).





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However, with our larger sample, these two measures are very similar. The main difference is that education is selected instead of socio-occupational category (PROF\_CAD). This does not mean that the latter variable does not help to explain work-family balance problems (DIFFCONC) but rather that it does not contribute anything more than education in this case. When education is excluded from the model, socio-occupational category (PROF\_CAD) is selected.

Results for education must be interpreted in relation to the reference category chosen – in this case, the “master’s/doctorate” category. With other factors remaining constant, the scores in favour of work-family balance are approximately three times higher among subjects who have completed Secondary V or less ( $p = 0.0029$ ) and three times higher among individuals who hold a diploma of collegial studies or a university degree ( $p = 0.0014$ ). However, there is no significant gap between subjects who have a bachelor’s degree and those who have a master’s or doctorate degree ( $p = 0.4967$ ).

Moreover, the model fits the data (according to Hosmer and Lemeshow’s goodness-of-fit test = 5.2964;  $p = 0.7255$ ) and accurately classifies 70.87% of subjects.

### **5.3 Analysis of results**

The following variables in the regression model allowed us to explain work-family balance problems: partner’s concrete support, supervisor support, age of children, length of workweek and educational level.

While people cannot necessarily go back and change their educational level retroactively—and they would probably not want to do so in order to improve work-family balance—other variables can be changed. Similarly, people cannot change the age of their children, though they age “naturally” thus facilitating work-family balance over time.

The other variables that explain work-family balance problems that can be acted on include the length of the workweek, partner support and supervisor support.<sup>12</sup> Some of these variables were identified in Guérin et al. (1997) but have not been validated when tested in their group’s studies (Chenevriér 1996, Caussignac 2000), hence the relevance of a study focusing on other groups, other industries and other types of workplaces.

Partner’s concrete support (i.e. contributes to domestic work and responsibilities) thus emerges as an important variable in our model. In this regard, it should be underlined that organizations have a role to play since some studies (Tremblay, 2003a) indicate that men are less likely to use work-family balance measures and sometimes feel that they are not justified in doing so. Partner support can thus be

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<sup>12</sup> Partner support was also identified by Guérin et al. (1997) who did not, however, differentiate the measures in the same way as we did, that is, between “moral” support measures (supporting the fact that the partner has a job, etc.) and concrete or physical support measures (“doing something to make things easier, sharing tasks, etc.”).



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facilitated if the partners' organization offers flexible work arrangements or leaves that allow him to assume his share of tasks. Similarly, supervisors may be more understanding in organizations whose management philosophies and policies are favourable to balancing work and family activities. Therefore, it can be concluded from this analysis that the provision of work-family balance measures is in fact a good thing because it facilitates reconciling work with family activities. Lastly, reducing work time could facilitate work-family balance since the workweek is one of the main variables explaining difficulties in work-family balance which correlates with the desire to reduce work time.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we would like to determine whether some of the preliminary research hypotheses put forward in our research project have been supported by the data presented here.

First, it was pointed out at the beginning of the article that some factors could facilitate or work against work-family balance. The literature review brought out the various variables identified in other studies as having an impact on work-family balance: partner's support, supervisor support, size of firm, workweek and educational level, amongst others. Our analysis confirmed that these variables – except for size of firm - have the greatest impact on work-family balance problems. Partner's concrete support and supervisor support can decrease the problems whereas the increase in work time and educational level can increase the problems. Moreover, as children grow older, the work-family balance problems decrease.

In our research design, it was hypothesized that work-family balance practices would be more common in large firms. We were unable to confirm whether this is indeed true based on our statistical data and case studies<sup>13</sup> since size of organization does not emerge among the significant variables. In fact, according to our case studies (the qualitative part of the research), small organizations seem to often allow informal arrangements which are ultimately the main means by which parents "cope!" In the statistical study presented here, the data indicate that supervisor's attitude is one of the factors that have the most impact on work-family balance and, as shown in other studies, this attitude may be more flexible in small organizations (Tremblay and Amherdt, 2000).

Another hypothesis was that parents would be more inclined to make use of work-family balance measures if they have active support from managers, their supervisors, union delegates and co-workers and if they are less concerned that their use of work-family balance measures will negatively affect their future career. This study found that supervisor support seems to be essential. Indeed, it emerged

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<sup>13</sup> It should be pointed out that a dozen case studies and in-firm interviews were conducted. They have not been dealt with here, for fear of lengthening the article too much. Moreover, separate research was conducted on the measures offered in organizations (Tremblay, 2003; Tremblay and Amherdt, 2000). These studies showed that, contrary to our hypothesis and to other research, size of firm was not an explanatory factor in the greater presence of measures.



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as one of the statistically significant variables that can decrease work-family balance problems. In addition, the statements used to create the variable supervisor support<sup>14</sup> reveal how in fact supervisors can facilitate work-family balance, for example, by accepting changes in work schedules (flextime or other), discussing the work-family balance problems, and applying the measures offered in the organization.

The research conducted has thus helped to identify a number of factors which can be acted on. The particular variables on which organizations can take action are length of working time and supervisor support. As regards partner support, organizations that are more open, offer more measures and allow fathers as well as mothers to take advantage of these measures, can certainly foster more equitable participation by partners, but sometimes changes in mentality may also be necessary. Thus, there are at least two organizational variables that can help to improve the situation: reducing the length of working time and ensuring supervisor support in balancing work with family activities.

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<sup>14</sup> Based on validated statements by Guérin et al.(1994, 1997)



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### Appendix 1

#### The Strongest Correlations

Variables	N	r	Variables	N	r
A3,A4	983	-0,233	A4,D36	767	0,257
A3,SECTEUR	421	0,289	A4,G49	979	0,303
B9,DIFFCONC	562	0,264	B10,C24REC	1020	-0,308
B10,SATISFAC	1037	0,230	B10,QUITTE	1041	0,231
B12,SATISFAC	1039	0,372	B12,DIFFCONC	583	0,286
B17,DIFFCONC	579	-0,312	B17,RTT1	1020	-0,356
B20.5,SECTEUR	393	0,241	B20.6,SECTEUR	393	0,272
C31.1,SALAIRE	1027	-0,238	C31.1,SECTEUR	424	0,267
C31.2,SECTEUR	424	0,236	D36,D37	803	-0,362
D36,G49	809	0,426	D36,SOUCONJ1	797	0,500
D36,SOUCONJ2	798	0,276	D37,G49	832	-0,242
D37,SOUCONJ1	827	-0,585	D37,SOUCONJ2	827	-0,269
D37,DIFFCONC	460	-0,254	G49,SALAIRE	1024	0,317
G49,SOUCONJ1	998	0,415	G49,SOUCONJ2	999	0,266
G50,COHORTE	1040	0,261	G50,SALAIRE	1026	0,376
G50,AGE_ENF	953	0,656	G50,A5REC	1020	0,267
G50,TPLIBRE	1010	0,249	G50,TPREAM	992	0,244
G50,TRANS_AM	1001	0,316	G50,TRANS_PM	999	0,318
G50,SECTEUR	422	0,261	G55,G61B	944	0,374
G55,COHORTE	1033	0,545	G55,SALAIRE	1022	0,662
G55,SECTEUR	420	0,842	G61,COHORTE	1024	0,312
G61,SECTEUR	419	-0,351	G61B,COHORTE	948	0,452
COHORTE,SALAIRE	1027	0,478	COHORTE,SATISFAC	1039	-0,405



**Work-Family Balance :  
What Are The Sources Of Difficulties And What Could Be Done?**

SALAIRE,A5REC	1007	0,345	SALAIRE,SOUCON J1	986	0,256
SALAIRE,SECTE UR	420	0,730	AGE_ENF,TPLIBRE	931	0,258
AGE_ENF,TPRE AM	914	0,269	AGE_ENF,TRANS_ AM	940	0,485
AGE_ENF,TRAN S_PM	939	0,528	ATTIDIR,SOUSUP1	970	0,526
ATTIDIR,SOUSU P2	965	0,404	ATTIDIR,SATISFAC	989	0,311
ATTIDIR,DIFFC ONC	551	0,281	RTT1,RTT2	1023	0,469
RTT1,ATT1	995	0,627	RTT1,ATT2	991	0,343
RTT2,ATT1	995	0,354	RTT2,ATT2	992	0,610
RTT2,SECTEUR	417	-0,271	ATT1,ATT2	995	0,487
SOUSCONJ1,SO UCONJ2	1001	0,869	SOUSUP1,SOUSU P2	971	0,615
SOUSUP1,SOU COL1	985	0,297	SOUSUP1,SATISFA C	986	0,342
SOUSUP1,DIFF CONC	556	0,287	SOUSUP2,SOUCO L1	975	0,290
SOUSUP2,SATI SFAC	979	0,271	SOUSUP2,SECTEU R	406	0,233
SATISFAC,DIFF CONC	582	0,307	SATISFAC,SECTE UR	423	0,304
QUITTE,DIFFCO NC	583	0,333	TPLIBRE,TPREAM	982	0,657
TRANS_AM, TRANS_PM	1000	0,674			