



Marija Tereza Portelli

Do you wish to be a working mother? Or did you always think of staying at home? There has been a conflict in the past, present and will also be in the future on women being active in the labour market and managing career and family life

Should I work, or should I not?

In Malta, inactivity in the labour market is much higher for women, and it is deemed highly pertinent to address this situation. Persons who are inactive in the labour market are defined by the National Statistics Office as all persons who are not classified as employed or unemployed. This effectively refers to the section of the population aged between 15 and 64 who are not in paid work and who are not actively seeking work in the formal economy.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) conducted an intensive study to analyse the inactivity of women in Malta. Part of this study consisted of a quantitative research with 600 inactive females hailing from Malta and Gozo which examined inactivity from a gender perspective, identifying, understanding and validating the reasons underlying it. This research forms part of an EU co-funded project entitled ESF 3.47 Unlocking the Female Potential.

NCPE's research study shows that inactive women come from all walks of life, localities and levels of education. The majority have a secondary level of education, although there are some with degrees and diplomas at tertiary level. The vast majority of inactive women are married and have children.

Women and men behave differently in the labour market, often following traditional gendered norms and expectations which are socially constructed and which can change over time and place. Gender roles and stereotyping are still hampering women from achieving financial independence and men from being more involved in caring for the family.

Therefore, the most common reason for inactivity is a perception that either the family or the career should take priority (but not both) and the resulting conscious choice to give up work and dedicate maximum time and effort to the family. This seemed to be largely determined by Maltese culture and traditions, which still dictate that the man should be the breadwinner and the woman should be the homemaker in a family.

Other less common reasons for inactivity were to take care of elderly or sick relatives or to support other family members with childcare.

Nearly three quarters of respondents agree that it is possible for a woman to be a good mother and to have a career at the same time if she has support. Over half of respondents who participated in 'Unlocking the Female Potential' Research Study claimed that they agree or strongly agree that both men and women should work, while they disagree with statements about traditional gendered roles, namely that men should work and women care for the family. Less than half of respondents (40%) agree or strongly agree that mothers of young children should not work.

There was a fair level of awareness about childcare facilities and facilities for elderly or disabled persons, but the research clearly showed that they were not always considered as relevant, affordable or practical. The most apparent issue was that both



Reason	Total (%)	15 – 34 years (%)	35 – 59 years (%)
To take care of my children	37.7	38.8	36.9
To take care of my parents	6.0	2.9	8.2
To take care of another relative	3.0	-	5.1
Because for me the family is the main priority	13.8	4.5	20.3
I can afford not to work (financially)	10.8	6.9	13.5
I feel too old to look for work	11.8	0.4	19.7
My husband/other family members do not want me to work	5.5	2.0	7.9
Not motivated	13.2	7.3	17.2

Maltese and Gozitan females were convinced of the importance of taking care of their children and relatives themselves and the unwillingness to let 'strangers' handle them. Family values appeared to be extremely strong and the concept of childcare centres seemed to be partially incompatible with the Maltese and Gozitan culture of extended family.

They remarked that childcare arrangements are lacking and that flexible hours and temping work is rare. Just over a third claim that there

are no childcare services in their town or village. Less than half are willing to use the services of a childcare centre. Less than 50% believe that if they take their children to childcare they would feel as though they are 'abandoning' their children and hence they would not consider themselves to be good mothers for doing so.

There are other services or possibilities that would encourage more mothers to work which were proposed by the survey respondents. The vast majority of women agree with telework-

ing and with reduced working hours, and agree with tax or financial benefits in the first five years for inactive women who return to work. Awareness raising about these possibilities is continuously important with 70% of inactive women agreeing with educational campaigns to change traditional gendered roles.

Those interested to acquire further information about Unlocking the Female Potential Research Report contact NCPE on equality@gov.mt or 2590 3850.

Health

fitness & wellbeing

Pullout

Out **15 July 2012**

To advertise please call Paula Bugeja on 21345888 ext 136 pbugeja@independent.com.mt

