

FACTORS LEADING WOMEN TO LEAVE THE LABOR MARKET AFTER THE BIRTH OF THEIR FIRST CHILD¹

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ABSTRACT

Women must work, be successful, and cope with multiple journeys. On the other hand, the traditional roles of women still weigh in their daily lives. Facing this scenario, many women have left the labor market after the birth of their first child. An exploratory research with in-depth interviews and a survey containing 120 respondents from the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre/RS was carried out, in order to identify the factors that lead women to leave the labor market after the birth of their first child. Less than half of the respondents considered they had faced dilemmas, and those who did, experienced dilemmas related to the dual role of mother and professional, and doubts about how to return work after the period dedicated to the child. In relation to possible advantages of leaving the labor market, the respondents pointed that the personal care and upbringing of the newly born as well as increasing the bond between mother and child were the main advantages identified. It is recommended that future studies include a sample with distinct characteristics that may reveal other information about the reality of mothers who work and perform double or multiple day's journey as woman, wife, mother and professional.

KEYWORDS: Labor Market, Motherhood, Mothers.

FATORES QUE LEVAM AS MULHERES A DEIXAR O MERCADO DE TRABALHO APÓS O NASCIMENTO DO PRIMEIRO FILHO

RESUMO

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As mulheres devem trabalhar, ser bem-sucedidas e dar conta das múltiplas jornadas. Por outro lado, os papéis tradicionais da mulher ainda pesam em seus cotidianos. Diante deste cenário, muitas mulheres têm deixado o mercado de trabalho após o nascimento do primeiro filho. Uma pesquisa exploratória, com entrevistas em profundidade e uma *survey*, contendo 120 respondentes da região Metropolitana de Porto Alegre/RS foi realizada a fim de identificar os fatores que levam as mulheres a deixar o mercado de trabalho após o nascimento do primeiro filho. Identificou-se que menos da metade das respondentes considerou ter enfrentado dilemas, e as que consideraram, vivenciaram, principalmente, dilemas relacionados ao duplo papel, de mãe e profissional, e dúvidas sobre como retomar o trabalho após o período dedicado ao filho. Em relação às possíveis vantagens em deixar o mercado de trabalho, as entrevistadas informaram que o cuidado pessoal e a educação do recém-nascido, bem como o aumento do vínculo entre mãe e filho foram as principais vantagens identificadas. Recomenda-se que estudos futuros contemplem uma amostra com características diversas que podem revelar outras informações sobre a realidade das mães que trabalham e cumprem dupla ou múltiplas jornadas como mulher, esposa, mãe e profissional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Mercado de Trabalho, Maternidade, Mulheres

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of women in Brazilian society has undergone many changes throughout history. Their entry and participation in the labor market have been marked by inequality and prejudice against male labor. Even with the ongoing evolution of women's work and the adherence to the principle of equality by the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, statistics still show relevant wage and opportunity differences (PNAD, 2015).

Women belonging to the economically less-favored social classes have always worked. In pre-industrial societies they carried out different activities, such as domestic tasks, childcare, agricultural work, etc. Since their activities were unpaid, they were not considered productive work, a concept that has been preserved for many years.

With the Industrial Revolution, more women entered the labor market, which led to an expansion of their activities beyond domestic duties. In this context, women began to engage in paid work and, as a result, to be recognized by many as productive people (COSTA, 2010). The figure of the imprisoned woman, homemaker, mother of the family, has also become associated with the image of the working woman, with multiple working hours (PERLIN; DINIZ, 2005).

Statistics on women's work in Brazil show that the growth of women's participation in the labor market intensified in the 1970s (BRUSCHINI; LOMBARDI, 1996), and this growth is linked to the reduction of fertility (CUNHA; VASCONCELLOS, 2016) – fertility rate reached 1.7 children per woman of reproductive age between the years 2010 and 2016 (RASEAM, 2020). However, the maintenance of a family model, according to which women are responsible for domestic and socializing responsibilities, requires them to constantly articulate family and professional roles. Thus, the difficulty of conciliation may limit the availability of some women to work (SANTOS, 2008). The double working day of women in relation to men is a factor that

evidences the inequality of gender in Brazil. According to PNAD (2014), 88% of employed women aged 16 and over performed domestic tasks, while among men the percentage was 46%. RASEAM (2020) describes that the average weekly journey of domestic activities and personal care between men and women is 11.4 hours longer for women.

It can be said that currently, there is a responsibility, even if veiled, in relation to women. They must work, be successful, and be able to cope with multiple journeys. On the other hand, women's traditional roles still weigh on their daily lives. Faced with this scenario, many women have left the labor market and, in some cases, left their successful careers after the birth of their first child. Considering this context, our research question is: what factors influenced women's decisions to leave the labor market after their first child's birth?

Other issues for reflection: what has happened to the quest for equality in the labor market? What makes these women dedicate themselves exclusively to their households? Such questions underlie our objective, which is to identify and analyze what factors influenced women's decisions to leave the labor market after their first child.

The development of this research is justified mainly by the economic and social importance of women in Brazil, who represent 51.5% of the Brazilian population (PNAD, 2015). In 2012, for example, almost 38% of Brazilian households had women as the reference person, i.e., as the person recognized as responsible for the family (RASEAM, 2015). Even considering the historical inequality between men and women in the family context and the labor market, women have sought to raise the bar, having on average more years of study than men (PNAD, 2015).

It is important to understand the factors that lead these women-mothers to leave the labor market, as statistical data show that they are economically responsible for a significant number of families and have gone in quest of gender equality in the workplace (or even more than) men in the workplace. Ignoring the causes of this phenomenon limits the development of the labor market in Brazil, as well as the understanding of the field of management research on its role as a social science applied to business, which can be recognized as a theoretical gap to be explored.

In the next chapter, we discuss the role of women in the workplace and the relationship between maternity and work.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 WOMEN AND THE LABOR MARKET

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) defines work in economic activity as the practice of paid employment in cash, products, goods, or benefits - such as housing, food, and clothing - in the production of goods and services; paid employment in cash or benefits in domestic service; and unpaid employment in production, developed for at least one hour during the weekdays (IBGE, 2020). According to Pinheiro *et al.* (2016), this concept of work has limitations because it does not consider a good part of what is done by women in their daily life.

There is a great difficulty in describing the work as a commodity negotiated in the market place. According to this definition, it would be necessary to add value to its supply and demand (RAMOS, 2007). From a formal perspective, the labor market's fundamental importance is that it is the place where individuals negotiate the prices that will be paid for the services rendered and the activities they will perform. Thus, from this perspective, this market has an important relationship with issues such as poverty, equity and welfare.

From a more comprehensive perspective, Ramos (2007) describes that the labor market is considered a type of market that presents the same problems that exist in other markets since the wages can vary, but without presenting a direct link with supply and demand.

According to Antunes and Alves (2004), the working class comprises all wage-earners, women and men, who live by selling their labor force as merchandise in exchange for a salary. From the Classic perspective, Oliveira and Piccinini (2011) emphasize that work is considered a product, in which workers are sellers and employers act as buyers, with the market place as space where these transactions take place, and wages are considered the price practiced in this market. From a Neoclassical perspective, the authors describe that the level of employment results from the confrontation between supply and demand, and that salary, also seen as the price of labor, is the strategic variable that allows the achievement of equilibrium.

Women are a majority part of the labor market – 51.5%, according to PNAD (2015) – and this is directly linked to their growth and permanence over time due to better conditions and opportunities (METZ, 2014). Although many achievements have been reached, it is still possible to observe discrepancies experienced by women in the labor market. In this regard, Metz (2014) highlights the wage gap between men and women, which is evident in both the private and public sectors, as well as socio-cultural aspects related to gender and not to quality and professional competence that is taken into account in the competition for leadership positions. These are some of the invisible barriers faced daily by these professionals.

The female character has been directly related to the functions of wife, housewife and mother for many years. However, feminine commitment has also arisen in the professional sphere, in the sense of corresponding to a concern for herself and the desire for expression and personal realization (SMEHA; CALVANO, 2009). A new model guides women's role and social destiny, characterized by their autonomy concerning the traditional male influence and by the redefinitions and imaginary-social meanings of women (LIPOVETSKY, 2000).

To be or not to be mother, both experiences can provoke multiple feelings, coming from a particular experience crossed by their life history, allied to social influences. According to Mansur (2003), all women experience feelings of anguish, ambivalence and ambiguity in the face of a choice related to motherhood. However, due to their experiences and personalities, these emotions have repercussions in diverse reactions related to aspects of personality and personal circumstances.

For Badinter (1985), maternal love is a human feeling like any other, fragile and uncertain, and may or may not exist. The myth created around motherhood, that the feminine nature is ready for motherhood, that all women were born to be mothers, and above all to perform this role with excellence is, according to the author, nothing more than a distorted view on motherhood.

As maternal attitudes and the mother's role have been undergoing constant changes throughout history, it can be inferred that maternity is a social behavior that fits the historical context (BADINTER, 1985).

The fact that women have entered the formal labor market late, due to society's concept that the resource provider is the man, means that still in this context, women need to make a more incisive effort than men to seek equal wages and hierarchical equivalence with men in their activities (METZ, 2014).

According to Carvalho, Carvalho and Carvalho (2001), discrimination against women in society, and therefore in the labor market, is part of the historical context. The exclusion of women from organizational decisions is a prejudice rooted in organizations (STEIL, 1997), and occurs because of the patriarchal culture, which acts as creating and maintaining structures that preserve male interests, even if these structures conflict with the interests of the organization.

The biological factor also becomes discriminatory in organizations, because, according to this thinking, motherhood can "disturb" or influence the female professional career. The biological factor related to childbearing is very delicate in women's life, especially for those working and building a career because their professional ascension can be compromised with the decision to have children, as well as following a professional career and dedicating more to work can strongly influence the decision not to have children (BRUSCHINI; LOMBARDI, 2002).

There are still labor issues related to maternity and paternity leave in Brazil, which have quite distinct characteristics and can influence when men and women compete for the same job opportunity. Men may take 5 to 20 days of paternity leave, while women may have 120 to 180 days of maternity leave, depending on the organization, whether private or public (CLT – BRAZILIAN LABOR CODE, 2017).

2.2 WOMEN AND THE DECISION TO LEAVE THE LABOR MARKET

Motherhood plays an essential role in a woman's life, and there is also the social pressure for a woman to be successful, invest in her career, and be financially independent (BIASOLI-ALVES, 2000). Even today, a large part of the responsibility for the care and education of children still falls on women, which means that even with high professional qualifications, they give up their careers, even temporarily, due to the birth of their children (ROCHA-COUTINHO, 2005).

The dedication of women from all social classes and mothers of small children to domestic tasks influences the woman's choice to stop working or not (BRUSCHINI, 2006). It is important to mention that these women have entered the labor market and have remained so since the 1980s and that many of these women face high workload and difficulties in balancing family and professional responsibilities.

Ceribeli and Silva (2017) observed that the women's decision to interrupt their professional careers usually occurs after their child's birth, and to better understand the motivating factors for this decision, these authors divided the respondents into two groups: women with and

without higher education. The results pointed out that women with higher education were motivated to interrupt their professional careers by the difficulty of reconciling work and motherhood, as well as by the desire to provide better care to their children.

In the case of women without higher education, the decision was also motivated by the desire to accompany their children's early years but influenced by the impossibility of bearing the costs of a paid nanny or a private childcare facility. In addition to these factors, these mothers' insecurity in leaving their children with others was also weighed in their decisions.

The anxiety and anguish feelings experienced by married mothers for spending less time with their children and not having temporarily interrupted their work (career), cited by Beltrame and Donelli (2012), can also be felt by the mothers who left her jobs to dedicate themselves to their children, especially in regards to her acceptance back to the workplace and professional achievement.

Tanure, Carvalho Neto and Andrade (2006) researched the challenges to executive women's careers in large companies. Some of the significant points are child care, which falls on women versus a very long working day, and difficulties with their partners.

Fiorin, Oliveira and Dias (2014) investigated the meaning of paid work and its relationship with maternity for women and confirmed the above results, indicating that women tend to perceive maternity as a sacrifice due to the renunciation they need to make in their professional careers, as a result of the attention that a child requires. A viable alternative proposed by the authors to reduce this feeling would be an equal household tasks division. This would allow mothers to experience their professional growth, without giving up the motherhood they wish for.

Fleck, Bidarte and Mello (2018), in turn, identified factors that motivated women to leave the labor market in the city of Santana do Livramento, state of Rio Grande do Sul, and found that family factors are the main responsible for the transition from the labor market to the household activities. They explain that this phenomenon occurs because the home is considered the private space destined for women historically, while men are destined for the public space.

Our research contributes to the findings of Fleck, Bidarte and Mello (2018) by identifying the factors that lead mothers to leave the labor market after the birth of their first child. The following chapter (3) describes the methodological procedures that were adopted in order to address the proposed objective.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was carried out in the field of Applied Social Sciences and used mixed methods. Primary data collected through structured interviews and questionnaires applied to the target audience and secondary data were obtained from theoretical and empirical papers published in scientific journals. Statistical data released by nationally accredited entities were also used to meet the proposed objectives.

The primary data collection procedures were divided into two steps. In the first step, by exploratory research applied to the target group, mothers who left the labor market after their first child's birth. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted in order to characterize the group

to be surveyed. The in-depth interviews were conducted during April 2017 and allowed mapping the interviewees' main characteristics, such as age, professional occupation, and the reasons for leaving the labor market when they had their first child (see Appendix A). The main outcomes were “personal accomplishment being mother”, “difficulty in conciliating roles (mother, wife and work)”, “caring for child’s health in first years” and “have reached financial stability”. These information contributed to the preparation of the survey. Qualitative exploratory studies provide a rich description of complex situations that have been little explored before (MARSHALL; ROSSMAN, 1999).

In the second step of the research, a structured questionnaire was prepared in the survey format with 24 questions and applied to the target audience in person and through a shared link via social networks (see Appendix B). The survey was conducted from August to November 2017, and 120 valid questionnaires were obtained.

After the data collection, it was analyzed and served as a basis for the describing the characteristics of the sample and comparison with the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2, identifying the factors that influenced the decisions of mothers who left the labor market.

Descriptive statistics were used in the data analysis in order to summarize and qualify the presentation of results. In this sense, tables were used in the presentation of results, in addition to the calculation of frequency distribution (BUSSAB; MORETIN, 2017; HAIR *et al.*, 2009).

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter is subdivided into the presentation of the survey results and discussion of findings. Thus, firstly the answers obtained for each question are presented, considering the frequency distribution in each question. We then discuss the data obtained in blocks: a) Relationship between Motherhood and Work; b) Exit from the Labor Market; and c) Return to the Labor Market.

4.1 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The questions from numbers 1 to 4 aimed to analyze the profile of those surveyed in relation to the current age range, level of education, the age range when the child was born, and family income. Table 1 below shows the age ranges of the sample.

Table 1 – Age ranges

Age range distribution		
Between 20 and 26 years old	11	10%
Between 27 and 33 years old	51	42.5%
Between 34 and 40 years old	39	32.5%
Between 41 and 47 years old	3	2.5%
Between 48 and 55 years old	12	10%
Above 55 years old	3	2.5%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors.

We note the predominance of respondents in the second age range, between 27 and 33 years old.

Table 2 shows the characteristics of the sample researched in terms of educational level. Most respondents have completed higher education (42.5%).

Table 2 – Educational level

Educational level distribution		
Elementary school	6	5%
High school	24	20%
Technical/professional course	12	10%
Higher education incomplete/ongoing	27	22.5%
Higher education	51	42.5%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

Table 3 shows the age range of the women interviewed about the birth of their first child.

Table 3 – Age range of women when the first child was born

Age range distribution of the women when first child was born		
Between 20 and 26 years old	27	22.5%
Between 27 and 33 years old	36	30%
Between 34 and 40 years old	57	47.5%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

Table 4 shows the size of the survey sample about the monthly family income range of the respondents.

Table 4 – Monthly family income

Monthly family income distribution		
Up to 2 minimum wages	27	21.1%
From 2 to 4 minimum wages	53	44.7%
More than 4 minimum wages	40	34.2%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

Questions 5 to 24 were directed to identifying and qualifying the factors and circumstances that influenced the respondents' decisions before, during, and after their first child's birth. The results of questions 5 to 11 from Block I, on motherhood and work are presented below.

The table 5 summarizes the results of question 5: At what point in your life did you decide to become a mother?

Table 5 – Decision about being a mother

Influencing factors on the decision to be a mother (multiple choice question)		
After completing higher education degree	62	51.7%
After building a professional career	54	45%
After achieving financial stability	58	48.3%
Decision made in agreement with partner	56	46.7%
Decision based on age (biological factor)	36	30%
I didn't plan my pregnancy	32	26.7%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

This question allowed multiple choice. The options that concentrated the most responses are related to the Completion of higher education (graduation), Achievement of financial stability, and Decision-making in agreement with a partner. Only 32 respondents said they did not plan their pregnancy.

Question 6 sought to identify if the respondents faced any difficulties conciliating the mother, wife, and professional roles. The result indicated that 69.1% of respondents faced some difficulty in conciliating these roles. Complementing the previous question to identify and quantify the possible difficulties encountered by respondents, question 7 had multiple choices, and table 6 below presents the results.

Table 6 – Conciliate mother, wife, and professional roles

**What are the difficulties in conciliating the roles of mother, wife and professional?
(multiple choice question)**

Having no support from partner	11	13.3%
Not having enough income to stop working and caring exclusively for her child	17	20.4%
Personal or child diseases	11	13.3%
Feeling the responsibility of raising children as the only and exclusive responsibility of the mother	39	46.9%
Overwhelming work overload	50	60.2%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

This outcome highlights that work overload is the main influencing factor among women's difficulties in coping with the roles played by the mother, wife, and working individual, followed by the exclusive responsibility in raising the children.

In question 8, the respondents were asked about their temporary leaving of the labor market, an essential condition for answering the questionnaire (see research method). Table 7 clarifies whether the choice was voluntary or involuntary (i.e., it came from the interviewee herself and her living conditions at that moment or the company imposed it).

Table 7 – Decision to leave the labor market

What led you to leave the labor market? (multiple choice question)		
Difficulty in conciliating roles (mother, wife and work)	43	35.8%
Personal accomplishment (being a mother)	58	48.3%
Previous decisions (Career, formal education, financial independence)	21	17.5%
Child Health	18	15%
Caring for your child's early years	62	51.6%
Family support (financial and psychological)	31	25.8%
Financial stability	25	20.8%
Dismissed by the company	13	10.8%
Rejection of the labor market	3	2.5%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

From the data collected in the applied survey, we identified that the main reasons those mothers left the labor market after their first child's birth are related to child care in the early years and personal sense of achievement as a mother. Both responses are focused on child welfare and the personal fulfillment of women as mothers. Findings indicate the importance of becoming a mother at the beginning of the 21st century for women.

The women who marked the alternative "Previous decisions..." in question 9 were asked to answer question 10, which attempted to identify which decisions were these. Thus, in a complementary way, 17.5% of the respondents, or 21 of the 120 questionnaires, chose the following listed affirmatives in table 8.

Table 8 – Previous decisions

Previous decisions (multiple choice question)		
Building professional career	18	85.7%
Having an academic background	12	57.1%
Seeking financial independence/stability	12	57.1%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

According to the respondents, “building a professional career” was the most important alternative, suggesting that women have sought professional fulfillment and then decided to dedicate themselves to their children, as already verified in the results of question 8.

Question 11 dealt with the influence of personal income, i.e., how much the interviewees' personal income influenced their family income when they decided to leave the labor market. Table 9 below presents the result, which demonstrates that their income only complemented or did not influence their family income when the decision was taken.

Table 9 - Influence of personal income on family incomes

How much did your income influence family income?		
My income was a fundamental part of family's income	18	15.1%
My income only complemented the family's income	68	56.6%
My income had no influence the family's income	34	28.3%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – prepared by the authors

In block II, questions 12-18 aimed to identify the possible dilemmas experienced by the women respondents and the advantages and disadvantages after leaving the labor market and how this impacted their lives.

Question 12 addressed aspects related to personal accomplishment and satisfaction with the respondents' work, with the statement: “Were you really well accomplished and satisfied in your work?” The result identified that 60% of the respondents were satisfied and realized with their work when they decided to leave the labor market to dedicate more time to their child. We found that personal accomplishment did not have a negative impact on the decision to leave the labor market, and most respondents may have become mothers after a period of work that allowed them to reach personal accomplishment through their work.

Question 13 attempted to understand if the respondents faced dilemmas regarding their decision to leave the labor market.

Table 10 – Dilemmas faced regarding to your withdrawal the labor market

Did you face dilemmas regarding your decision to leave the labor market?		
Yes	55	45.8%
No	65	54.2%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – prepared by the authors

The results of question 13 indicated that almost half of the respondents faced dilemmas in making decisions regarding leaving the labor market after the birth of their first child. In order to identify the dilemmas faced by 55 respondents, pointed in question 13, a multiple-choice question was elaborated (question 14). The alternatives presented in question 14 emerged from exploratory research step.

The following table (11) shows the dilemmas experienced concerning the decision to leave the labor market.

Table 11 - Experienced dilemmas

Which were the dilemmas you experienced regarding your decision to leave the labor market? (multiple choice question)		
Do I have another income alternative?	8	15%
Can I keep working and taking care of my child?	25	45%
Am I doing the right thing by working so hard?	19	35%
How can I restart my work after this period has passed?	28	50%

Source: Research data – prepared by the authors

The most significant dilemmas identified by the respondents are related to the double journey, sharing their time and efforts between work and child-caring, and the concern with returning to professional activities, returning to the labor market, or acting as an autonomous professional after a period devoted to their child. As almost 85% of the respondents did not identify that their income had an important influence on family income (table 9), that result is related to the least chosen affirmative, concerning "another income option".

In question 14, the respondents answered about the advantages of their decision to leave the labor market. Table 12 shows the results.

Table 12 - Advantages of leaving the labor market

Which were the advantages of leaving the labor market? (multiple choice question)		
Gain in quality of life (better living standards)	44	36.8%
More time to do the things I like	22	18.4%
No sense of guilt by leaving my child in the care of others	73	60.0%
Accompaniment of each stage experienced by my child	98	81.6%
Greater complicity between me and my child	82	68.4%
There was no advantage	-	-

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

We identified that 81.6% of the interviewees classified as an advantage leaving the labor market the fact to be able to follow each phase, especially in early childhood. A response option was provided so that respondents could identify if there were no advantage after leaving the labor market to dedicate more time to their child. No respondent checked this option, which means that all respondents found it advantageous.

It can also be noted that the "more time to do the things I like" option was the least considered, demonstrating that respondents ranked the child(ren) as a priority in their decision.

Question 16 sought to identify the possible disadvantages of leaving the labor market. Table 13 below presents the results and their respective percentages.

Table 13 - Disadvantages of leaving the labor market

Which were the disadvantages of leaving the labor market? (multiple choice question)		
Feeling of inferiority towards your partner	18	15.4%
Financial limitation	58	48.7%
No time for myself	31	25.6%
Fear of becoming financially dependent	43	35.9%
There were no disadvantages	31	25.6%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

These findings pointed to "financial limitation" as one of the most sensitive disadvantages. As this question allowed for multiple-choice, unlike the previous question (15), 31 of 120 respondents identified no disadvantages in leaving the labor market. However, almost 50% of respondents considered the "financial constraint" option as the main disadvantage.

Question 17 aimed at identifying the impact on living standards after leaving the labor market. The results are as follows.

Table 14 - Impact on living standards after leaving the labor market

Has the decision to leave the labor market altered your living standards?		
Yes	65	54.2%
No	55	45.8%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by authors

The result presented in Table 14 indicates that almost half of the respondents did not notice any change in their standard of living after leaving the labor market to dedicate themselves to motherhood.

In an attempt to understand the respondents who indicated that they had been a change in their standard of living, question 18 sought to identify these changes after leaving the labor market and presented options on the possible changes that might have occurred due to the decision taken.

According to table 15 below, 88.9% of respondents considered that they had to “give up” superfluous spending. This condition caused the most impact on their living standard, now spending only necessary during the period out of work.

Table 15 - Changes in living standards after leaving the labor market

Which were the changes in your standard of living after leaving the labor market? (multiple choice question)		
I had to give up superfluous expenses, spending only the necessary	58	88.9%
I had to quit extra rides, parties and trips	11	16.7%
I had to use public transport everyday	4	5.6%

Source: Research data – Prepared by authors

In Block III, the questions were meant for the period of returning to work after maternity leave.

We attempted to identify the reasons that influenced women to return to the labor market, the possible difficulties they faced, and their current attitude as professionals. Question 19 asked: Do you intend to return to the labor market, or have you already returned? Based on the data from the exploratory survey, three options were presented for answering this question.

Table 16 - Returning to the labor market

Do you intend to return to the labor market, or have you already returned?		
I intend to return	32	26.7%
I'm already at work	70	58.3%
I don't intend to return	18	15%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

According to the table above, 85% of the respondents already returned or intend to return to the labor market after the period dedicated to their child. This result allows us to infer that these interviewees have a strong relationship with professional work outside their homes. Although the mother's role had full attention in the first years of motherhood in the next moment, they started or will start to share the tasks of mother and professional performing, either as autonomous or under a contract to some company or organization.

Respondents who indicated that they had returned to the labor market or intended to return, in the previous question (19), were directed to the next question (20) to identify, through a multiple-choice question, the reasons for their return. In question 20, the respondents indicated the reasons for returning to the labor market. The following table shows the totals of the answers obtained.

Table 17 - Reasons to return to the labor market

Reasons to return to labor market (multiple choice question)		
Financial needs	47	46.1%
Professional achievement	67	65.7%
Pregnancy was not planned	9	8.8%
Only to add to family income	15	14.7%
Fear of being rejected after remaining away from the labor market for a long time	15	14.7%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

Table 17 shows that among the 102 respondents to question 19 who indicated that they had already returned or intended to return to the labor market, over 65% considered the search for “professional achievement” as the main reason for the return, and 46.1% considered “financial needs” as one of the main reasons.

Nine respondents considered “unplanned pregnancy” to be one reason for their return to the labor market. These respondents are among the 32 who stated they had not planned their pregnancy, according to the results in Table 5.

Question 21 aimed to identify the possible difficulties faced by respondents in returning to professional activities. Based on the exploratory research data, three options were presented for answers regarding the respondents’ possible difficulties. Table 18 below presents the quantitative results.

Table 18 - Difficulties faced in returning to the labor market

Difficulties after returning to the labor market (multiple choice question)		
Discrimination for being a mother (having a new born child)	6	8.6%
Rejection for remaining away from the labor market after a long period	6	8.6%
Conciliate working times and personal affairs	32	45.7%
I haven't experienced any difficulties	26	37.1%

Source: Research data – Prepared by authors

From those respondents who have already returned to the labor market, 44 considered facing difficulties, in which "organizing working schedules and personal affairs" stands out as the main difficulty presented.

Question 22 sought to identify the respondents who had already returned to the labor market, whether they had resumed their previous function or returned to new positions in the company.

Table 19 - Return to the labor market and professional attributions

On returning to the labor market, you...		
Continued in the same function/area	31	44.3%
Became an entrepreneur	8	11.4%
Conciliated the new job/enterprise with motherhood	31	44.3%
Total	70	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by the authors

According to the data presented in Table 19, two options obtained the same number of responses, both with 44.3%: "continued in the same function" and "conciliated the new job/undertaking with motherhood". This last group of respondents (44.3%) returned to part-time jobs, dividing their daily time.

In question 23, on how respondents feel or felt about after returning to work, the predominant opinion was that they consider themselves more focused, better, and more committed to their work. Table 20 below presents these results.

Table 20 - Personal perception on returning to the labor market

When you returned to the labor market, you consider yourself...		
A better, more focused and more committed professional	34	48.6%
A professional in process of adaptation, because my attention is still focused on the child	23	32.9%
I don't feel any difference in my professional performance	13	18.6%
Total	70	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by authors

Finally, question 24 asked the respondents' understanding of their personal and professional accomplishment after becoming mothers and choosing to remain a period out of work for later return to the labor market, or have not returned until they answered this survey. Table 21 below presents the results obtained.

Table 21 - Personal and professional accomplishment, at present

Today you consider yourself a fulfilled person:		
Professionally	3	2.5%
Personally	66	55%
Both alternatives	51	42.5%
Total	120	100%

Source: Research data – Prepared by authors

Most respondents identified that they feel personally fulfilled, and 42.5% currently feel personal and professionally fulfilled. Only three respondents do not feel personally fulfilled, i.e., they are still seeking personal accomplishment after becoming mothers.

4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss the data collected and presented in the previous sections. Firstly, the interviewees' profile is described, and then the analysis will be presented in three consecutive blocks by themes addressed in the applied survey.

The profile of 120 survey respondents is characterized by a more representative sample in the 27-40 age range, representing 75% of the respondents, and 62.4% of the respondents who belong to this age range are studying or already have a university degree. This characteristic of the respondents' profile is related to the increase of women in Brazilian universities, because according to IBGE (2010), the number of Brazilian women in universities increased in the first decade of the year 2000, reaching the proportion of 57.1% of women between 18 and 35 years of age. Therefore, the educational level of women is higher than that of men in the same age range.

Regarding the age analysis, when the first child was born, the sample identified that 77.5% of respondents were between 27 and 40 years of age. Therefore it is possible to state that the women who responded to the survey were attending or had already completed higher education when they became mothers. For Hewlett (2008), women have been delaying motherhood because they consider that children can make them less competitive, and having children requires careful planning nowadays. Having to prioritize other objectives, the modern woman postpones more and more the decision to be a mother or has decided to have children after some personal and professional accomplishments.

4.2.1 Discussion of Block I findings: Relationship between Motherhood and Labor.

Questions in Block I were directed to the relation between the decision to be a mother and the impacts on the respondents' personal and professional lives.

The difficulties faced by mothers who work and leave the labor market after the birth of their first child are mainly related to reconciling the roles of woman, mother, wife, and professional and also related to the feeling of exclusive responsibility, as a mother, to raise the child. A

personal realization of being a mother, as well as the concern of mothers with the first years of their child's life, are the significant influences in the decision to leave the labor market.

Most respondents focused on a professional career as a form of personal accomplishment before deciding to have their first child. In addition to this condition, most women's incomes only complemented the family income or did not influence the family income when they decided to have their first child.

In addition, most respondents stated that they felt accomplished and satisfied with their work performance when deciding to have a child and leave the labor market. Although 40% of the women identified that they were not satisfied and fulfilled in their work at that time, we believe that this "dissatisfaction" was not the main influence in the decision to leave the labor market after the birth of their first child.

4.2.2 Discussion of Block II findings: Leaving the labor market

Regarding possible dilemmas faced by the respondents due to their decision to leave the labor market, less than half of the respondents considered having faced dilemmas, and those who did experienced dilemmas related to the twofold role of mother and working individual, as well as doubts about how to return to work after the period dedicated to their child. This shows the importance of dedication and the mother's effective role as a major influencing factor in these decisions. The feelings of anguish and ambivalence experienced by women when facing the choice of being or not a mother have repercussions on different reactions related to each woman's personality and personal circumstances (MANSUR, 2003).

When asked about the advantages of leaving the labor market, it became evident that the personal care and upbringing of the newly born as well as increasing the bond between mother and child, diminished the feeling of guilt of mothers for leaving their offspring in the care of other people. This condition, highlighted through research, is related to human feeling, maternal love, which for Badinter (1985) is a human feeling like any other, fragile and uncertain. As maternal attitudes and the mother's role have constantly been changing throughout history, the author says that motherhood is a social behavior that fits the historical context.

4.2.3 Discussion of Block III findings: Returning to the labor market

In block III, questions were addressed to mothers' return to the labor market, their perspectives, and experiences. Of 120 respondents, 70 respondents already returned to work, and 32 intended to return at the time of responding to the survey.

The most frequent reasons for returning to the labor market pointed out by the respondents were the "financial needs" and "personal & professional accomplishment", in addition to seeking "complementation of the family income" and "fear of being rejected" after being away for an extended period.

The reasons identified by respondents for returning to the labor market are related to what Metz (2014) describes as: “the effort that women undertake to seek equal wages and hierarchical equivalence with men in their professional activities” due to society’s concept in which the resource provider is the man, even in the contemporary context.

The same feelings of anguish and anxiety experienced by women for not having temporarily interrupted their career and spending less time with their children can also be experienced by mothers who left their paid work (their career) to dedicate themselves to their children, especially about acceptance returning to the workplace, and professional accomplishment (BELTRAME; DONELLI, 2012).

The woman who works, studies, and seeks space in organizations, frequently giving up other personal accomplishments, goes through what Mansur (2003) quoted in his research as “a kaleidoscope of senses”.

Among the difficulties found by the respondents who returned to the labor market, it is worth mentioning the readaptation to daily routines and arrange working hours with personal appointments. The results corroborate Tanure, Carvalho Neto and Andrade (2006), who investigated executive women working in large companies and the challenges they faced in their careers and identified that childcare and very long working hours are some of the most frequent difficulties.

About 50% of the respondents who returned to work reported feeling better, more focused, and more committed to their activities and personally and professionally accomplished.

Therefore, the results found from the data collected confirm the characteristics pointed out by the authors of the theoretical-conceptual references of this study.

5. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research attempted to describe and understand the relationship between women-mothers and the labor market, focusing on those professionals who had left the labor market by becoming mothers of their first child. Although the sample consists of 120 valid questionnaires, there is no intention to extrapolate the results of the analysis, but rather to describe the characteristics and conditions of this group of women and the factors that influenced their decisions.

Although the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, where the sample was obtained, concentrates a large part of the economically active population of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, it has a different population and economic traits from other state regions. It is important to observe this as one of the limitations of the survey.

For future studies, we suggest increasing the sample size and the geographical scope within the state of Rio Grande do Sul to reach a broader sample with diverse characteristics. The broader sample can reveal other information about the reality of mothers who work and perform double or multiple journeys in the roles of a woman, mother, wife, and working individual.

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APPENDIX A

EXPLORATORY DATA COLLECTION

Open Questions:

- Your age today, your educational level and your age when your first child was born.
- Are you working nowadays?
- Tell us about your decision to leave the labor market to be with your child.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Profile

1) How old are you?

Between 20 and 26 years old; Between 27 and 33 years old; Between 34 and 40 years old;
Between 41 and 47 years old; Between 48 and 55 years old; Above 55 years old.

2) What is your Educational level?

Elementary school; High school; Technical/professional course; Higher education incomplete/ongoing;
Higher education.

3) What was your age when your first child was born?

Between 20 and 26 years old; Between 27 and 33 years old; Between 34 and 40 years old;

4) What is your family income?

Up to 2 minimum wages; From 2 to 4 minimum wages; More than 4 minimum wages.

Block I – Motherhood and Work

At what point in your life did you decide to become a mother?

After completing higher education degree; After building a professional career; After achieving financial stability; Decision made in agreement with partner; Decision based on age (biological factor); I didn't plan my pregnancy.

6) Have you faced any difficulties in reconciling the roles of mother, wife and professional? (If YES, answer question 7. If NO, go to question 8)

Yes; No

7) What are the difficulties in conciliating the roles of mother, wife and professional (Multiple-choice question - check as many options as you find necessary)

Having no support from partner; Not having enough income to stop working and caring exclusively for her child; Personal or child diseases; Feeling the responsibility of raising children as the only and exclusive responsibility of the mother; Overwhelming work overload.

8) After the birth of your child, you have left the labor market:

On a voluntary way; In an involuntary way.

9) What led you to leave the labor market? (Multiple-choice question - check as many options as you find necessary)

Difficulty in conciliating roles (mother, wife and work); Personal accomplishment (being a mother)

Previous decisions (Career, formal education, financial independence); Child Health; Caring for your child's early years; Family support (financial and psychological); Financial stability; Dismissed by the company; Rejection of the labor Market.

10) If in the previous question you checked the option "Previous decisions", then check what was this previous decision. (Multiple-choice question - mark as many options as you think necessary)

Building professional career; Having an academic background; Seeking financial independence/stability.

11) Regarding familiar income, how much did your income influence family's income?

My income was a fundamental part of family's income; My income only complemented the family's income;

My income had no influence the family's income.

Block II - Questions on leaving the labor market

12) Were you really well accomplished and satisfied in your work?

Yes; No

13) Did you face dilemmas regarding your decision to leave the labor market? (If YES, answer question 14. If NO, go to question 15)

Yes; No

14) Which were the dilemmas you experienced regarding your decision to leave the labor market? (multiple choice question)

Do I have another income alternative?; Can I keep working and taking care of my child?; Am I doing the right thing by working so hard?; How can I restart my work after this period has passed?;

15) Which were the advantages of leaving the labor market? (multiple choice question):

Gain in quality of life (better living standards); More time to do the things I like; No sense of guilt by leaving my child in the care of others; Accompaniment of each stage experienced by my child; Greater complicity between me and my child; There was no advantage.

16) Which were the disadvantages of leaving the labor market? (multiple choice question)

Feeling of inferiority towards your partner; Financial limitation; No time for myself; Fear of becoming financially dependent; There were no disadvantages.

17) Has the decision to leave the labor market altered your living standards? (If YES, answer question 18. If NO, go to question 19)

Yes; No

Block III - Questions on returning to labor market/work

18) Which were the changes in your standard of living after leaving the labor market?

I had to give up superfluous expenses, spending only the necessary; I had to quit extra rides, parties and trips; I had to use public transport everyday.

19) Do you intend to return to the labor market, or have you already returned?

I intend to return; I'm already at work; I don't intend to return. **Only answer question 20 if you "checked" the previous one:** (I intend to return; I'm already at work)

20) Reasons to return to labor Market: (multiple choice question)

Financial needs; Professional achievement; Pregnancy was not planned; Only to add to family income; Fear of being rejected after remaining away from the labor market for a long time.

21) Difficulties after returning to the labor market? (multiple choice question) **(Only answer if you've already returned to the labor market/work)**

Discrimination for being a mother (having a new born child); Rejection for remaining away from the labor market after a long period; Conciliate working times and personal affairs; I haven't experienced any difficulties.

22) On returning to the labor market, you... **(Only answer if you've already returned to the labor market/work)**

Continued in the same function/area; Became an entrepreneur; Conciliated the new job/enterprise with motherhood.

23) When you returned to the labor market, you consider yourself...:

A better, more focused and more committed professional; A professional in process of adaptation, because my attention is still focused on the child; I don't feel any difference in my professional performance.

24) Today you consider yourself a fulfilled person:

Professionally; Personally; Both alternatives.