


Work–Life Integration and Workplace Rights for Domestic Workers in Support to Elderly Persons: A Real Challenge in a Complex Working Environment!

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Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay¹ and Ilda Ilse Ilama²

Abstract

Our article shows that there is a real challenge in balancing work and family for employees working in support services in domestic work for elderly persons; their workplace rights on this issue are quite limited, and they depend largely on managers' understanding and support. Given their difficult working conditions, these workers actually find quite a challenge in trying to reconcile work and family. Our article is based on a qualitative research mobilizing 33 semi-structured interviews with employees of the home care sector in the field of the social economy mainly but also in the private sector. We first present the concept of work–family and personal life, then the area of home care and domestic work for the elderly. Then, we present the particular challenges observed in reconciling work and family life, where possible by comparing men and women. The results highlight two major sources of differentiation: age and single parenthood. Those who are older highlight the fact that children have grown up, and they have (finally) some time for themselves, even if their working conditions are difficult (broken schedules, etc.). In contrast, single women live a much more difficult situation concerning work–family, partly because of the lack of workplace rights on this issue and because of the poor working conditions for many (broken hours of work, low wages, difficult working conditions). We conclude with some recommendations, including the Right to request, which appears to be the best option, although it would need some further analysis.

Keywords

work-life integration, domestic workers, elderly, workplace rights, working conditions

Introduction

Over the last decades, studies have highlighted the increasing conflict between work and family for many workers (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1993, 1994; Galinsky, Stacy, & James, 2001; Nelson & Quick, 1985; Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), but much work has centered on professionals and managers (cf. Tremblay & Genin, 2010; Tremblay & Mascova, 2013), and little has been done on lower level workers or workers with difficult working conditions. This is what brought us to look into a group of workers that has less favorable working conditions to see to what extent they suffer from work–family conflict.

The work–family or work–life conflict is generally analyzed in reference to the lack of time faced by parents, which is the result of a conflict between the time allowed to working and the time that they manage to have for their family (work–family conflict) and for other activities—political, social, cultural, leisure (work–life conflict more generally). These various activities (social, cultural, leisure, political, etc.) are often put aside; parents sometimes procrastinate and end up completely

excluding them from their lives (Tremblay, 2012a, 2012c). In addition, some research indicates that a large proportion of parents who are in employment feel stressed because they are not always able to balance their work and family responsibilities and tasks (Duxbury et al., 1993, 1994; Galinsky et al., 2001; Nelson & Quick, 1985). Also, many forms of employment (temporary, independent, on-call, casual) and schedules (part-time, split, or broken schedules, etc.) increase the difficulties people have in trying to articulate work and family, as well as a career that meets their wishes (Tremblay, 2004, 2005).

In Canada, as in all industrialized societies, the transformation of the labor market and the family, as well as demographic changes, in particular, an aging society, causes difficulties in

¹Teluq, University of Québec, Canada

²Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon, France

Corresponding Author:

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, Teluq, University of Québec, 5800 St-Denis Street, Montréal, Québec, Canada.
Email: diane-gabrielle.tremblay@teluq.ca



balancing work and family, and a good number of employees sometimes consider leaving their job or leaving the labor market earlier because of important difficulties in this area (Lazzari, 2012; Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b; Dykeman & Williams, 2013). This is particularly important for carers (of elderly or ill parents or partners) who are in employment (Lero, Spinks, Fast, Hilbrecht, & Tremblay, 2012) but can also touch other groups of the population. Concerning the challenges and difficulties of work–family balance in general, studies show that job characteristics are essential to explain the importance of the work–family conflict (Gu erin, St-Onge, Chenevier, Denault, & Deschamps, 1994; Gu erin, St-Onge, Trottier, Haines, & Simard, 1997).

Over the years and with the development of the service economy, many precarious and atypical types of jobs have been created. This increase in jobs and demand for services is due not only to the increased presence of women in the labor but also to an aging population, which needs services during long hours, sometimes outside of the regular 9 to 5 working hours (nursery, day care, health services 24 hr a day, 7 days per week; Lero et al., 2012; Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b, 2007; Tremblay & Larivi ere, 2013).

As mentioned above, the majority of research on work–family issues has focused on relatively advantaged professional categories (cf. Tremblay, 2012a, 2013), so we wanted this time to turn to the less advantaged workers, with difficult working conditions. We therefore decided to study the home help services, which are all the more important in the context of an increasing demand for these services due to the aging population.

Faced with an aging population, one of the aims of the Quebec (a Canadian province) government is to help people wishing to age in their home to achieve this. With the project called “Aging and live together at home, in the community,” (our translation from French), one of the objectives is to “allow seniors who wish to stay at home as long as possible to do so and to ensure that their safety is not compromised” (Minist ere de la Famille et des A in es [MFA], 2012). Although for many years, women took charge of the private sphere and men the public sphere, the current situation is certainly different with women’s access to employment (Cloutier, Bernard, & Tremblay, 2011).

In the area of home care in general, but especially in services for seniors, jobs are sometimes criticized as being of poor quality (Devetter, Janice-Catrice, & Ribault, 2009), and we did observe this also in our research. Indeed, these jobs are characterized by elements such as low pay, low qualification, and little recognition of these qualifications (CERC, 2008). The concept of “quality of employment” usually includes various dimensions such as training, compensation, and working conditions, which can be seen as partly dependent on human resource management practices, as they determine workplace rights and working conditions.

Our article shows how the employees in this sector reconcile their work and family and personal life, given the low

level of workplace rights—they are usually non-unionized and subject only to the minimum labor standards—as well as the low quality of their employment and difficulty of their working conditions. This led us to the following questions: Given their working conditions and low workplace rights, how do male and female employees manage to reconcile work and family life and in the area of home care, and particularly in domestic work for the elderly?

To answer this question, a study was conducted with 33 employees and 23 employers in this sector. First, we present a short literature review on the issue of home care, then on the issue of work–family/life balance, focusing on the area of home care. Then, we present the respondents, the data collection technique, and finally our results.

Home Care, Work–Family, and Work–Life

Home Care Workers

We reviewed literature on home care aides or home care workers as they are often called, but we call them domestic workers, as in our case, these workers do not do anything related to health or physical care but only domestic work to help the elderly stay at home. There has not been much research on this theme; most research is on the health home care, and this is precisely what brought us to look into working conditions of home domestic workers.

The existing literature mainly highlights the increasing need for personal assistance services in industrialized economies, and some research shows that it is mainly women, some indicating mainly older women who do these jobs, which are usually low-status and low-wage work (Butler, Wardamasky, & Brennan-Ing, 2012).

A certain number of articles are centered on factors that lead workers to leave or to stay in these jobs (Butler et al., 2012; Faul et al., 2010). Some articles look into the factors that can improve these jobs (Kemper et al., 2008). One article (Butler et al., 2012) has studied home care aides and has shown that low and variable compensation often forced workers to leave these jobs, particularly the younger workers; however, they indicate that these workers surprisingly find more rewarding than challenging aspects to the job.

In the context where many economies are looking for new cost-effective models for elderly home care, another article indicates that the new market model of home care can lead to less job satisfaction and a higher propensity to leave the job (Denton, Zeytinoglu, Kusch, & Davies, 2007). This research deals with health home care, and we have not found similar work on the group of workers who do domestic work. However, some elements found in this research were integrated for analysis in our own work (job characteristics, workload, work intensification, number of visits per day and time spent for this, organizational and peer support, job insecurity, relations with clients, etc.). Geiger-Brown, Muntaner,

McPhaul, Lipscomb, and Trinkoff (2007) have looked into the issues of abuse and violence in home care, and found this could lead to depression. In our own work, we also looked into this question but actually found few elements to confirm any form of abuse or violence; on the contrary, most workers indicate that the elderly for whom they work are eager and happy to have them at home.

Another research indicates that home care workers have “a conflicted, often contradictory, relationship to their labour” (Stacey, 2005, p. 831). Stacey (2005) indicates that workers can find in this work some constraints that can reduce their capacity to do a good job or to see the work as meaningful and rewarding. However, this research highlights the fact that workers can however find meaning in such a job. Our results are close to what Stacey (2005) reports; it appears that workers actually find dignity in the cleaning work (or dirty work, as Stacey puts it).

Domestic home work for the elderly is clearly a particular sector of activity as it is situated paradoxically at the frontiers of public and private spheres (Martin-Matthews, 2007); in Québec, the public sector contributes to the financing of domestic workers for the elderly, and these workers partly financed by the public sector enter the private sphere of elderly people.

Our literature review shows that research has mainly centered on health care workers and less on domestic work, and this led us to look into the work–family balance issue for this group. We wanted to complete the picture presented by existing research and try to determine whether these workers do manage to deal with the constraints of the work. We also observed that if working conditions were treated in some research, no work had been done on the impact of these conditions on work–family and work–life challenges.

Definition of Work–Family and Work–Life Challenges

Having decided to address the issue of work–family and work–life for this group, we pursued our literature review on this theme. The expression of “work–family balance” is fairly recent, and it is with the feminization of employment that the term appeared in the literature during the 1990s (Tremblay, 2005). However, the term *work–life or work–family balance* does not always lead to consensus among researchers. Some choose to speak of “articulating work–family,” others of “harmonization between work and personal life” or of “balancing work and family” (Tremblay, 2012b). The first expression refers to both employment and family, but the inclusion of “personal life” is also used to extend beyond responsibilities of working parents, to include those who have older handicapped children or elderly/ill parents. Indeed, over time, researchers have gone beyond parental responsibilities to include the responsibilities of anyone who has gainful employment and who wishes to have time for his or her personal life, thus adopting a perspective centered

more on a *life course* view. It must be recognized that family responsibilities are increasing the difficulties related to working time for many workers, and although the work–family issue has not translated into workplace rights in most countries (see the debate on “Right to request” working time arrangements, cf. Tremblay & Nogues, 2014), we consider that this should warrant special attention from the employers (Tremblay, 2012b).

The expression of work–family reconciliation or integration refers to the objective of reducing a real or potential conflict between work and family. The work or employment dimension refers to the workplace, workplace rights, and the specifics of the job, especially the degree of autonomy in work, workload, workplace rights, or other job specifications, which can influence the level of work–life conflict (Guérin et al., 1994; Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). The job specifications and workplace rights are essential to determine the importance of the work–family conflict by socio-professional class, as the difficulties clearly vary depending on the professional category, various groups having different levels of autonomy, a different type of workload, and workplace rights (Tremblay, 2012a, 2014; Tremblay & Mascova, 2013). Constraints at work may be more important while workplace rights may be lower, as in the group studied here, and these may then constitute an important obstacle to work–family balance (Guérin et al., 1997; Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

Work–Family Conflict in Québec

Not only are work–family challenges different from one sector to the other, but the link between work and family changes over time (Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b). It should first be noted that the number of mothers in the labor market has increased considerably, a change that has occurred particularly since the 1960s (St-Amour, Laverdure, Devault, & Manseau, 2005; Tremblay, 2004, 2012a, 2012b); women’s presence in the labor market has an impact not only on child care but also on elder care (Lero et al., 2012; Tremblay & Larivière, 2013). In the 1980s, not only has Quebec seen an increase in women’s participation in the labor market, but also, the participation of young mothers has increased (Tremblay, 2004, 2012a, 2012b).

The new labor market includes more dual-income families, more and more single women workers who must provide care for children, and many men and women who need to provide care for elderly parents or disabled persons (Lero et al., 2012; Tremblay & Larivière, 2013). Also noteworthy is the aging of the population, which clearly represents an increased challenge in balancing work and family, as women are often also caring for elderly relatives (St-Amour et al., 2005; Tremblay & Larivière, 2013). This has also contributed in an important increase in the number of home care and domestic care jobs, so that domestic workers are at the forefront of today’s challenges in an aging society with more and

more women active in the labor market and thus less available to offer care and support to elderly members of the family.

Finally, several changes have occurred in the labor market and in employment relationships (Tremblay, 2004). We are witnessing a gradual and steady decline in the normal working hours (the traditional “9 to 5”) and an increase in atypical schedules or “non-standard,” split schedules; evening, night, irregular schedules; and so on. Women working in the service sector are quite concerned by these changes as they are the majority in the areas of retail, health, restaurants, and hotels, where these working schedules and working times are most frequently observed (Tremblay, 2012a).

Domestic Care in Quebec

We now present the situation of domestic work for elderly care in Québec. Although there are some private companies active in this field, home care often falls within the scope of the social economy in Québec. Indeed, since 2006, the Québec government has favored the development of various social economy sectors and companies, and these social economy firms are characterized by social objectives. As indicated on their website, the social economy firms were created to promote the satisfaction of individuals and local communities, and the social economy is very much centered on human values (Tremblay, 2012c). Among the 10 sectors that are part of the social economy, personal services attracted our attention when we decided to look at work–life issues in the less advantaged sectors of the economy (from the point of view of wages, working conditions, and rights). This category of personal services brings together all services contributing to the well-being of people wherever they live, whether it be their home, place of work or leisure. The personal services sector is however very diversified (Pétillon, 2009). We chose to look into home care services to seniors, and particularly domestic services (not health or nursing services), which help maintain the elderly in their homes by doing the cleaning for them. This sector occupies a special place in personal services because of the nature of jobs and the type of clients or beneficiaries involved (the elderly and frail benefit from special support programs).

In Quebec, in the context of the provision of public services, home help services are integrated into the broader category of “home support” services to the elderly or frail people, people with disabilities, and sick or convalescing, which also include professional home care (doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, etc.). Home help services refers to the following: personal assistance services: health care, food aid, assistance to the mobilization and transfer, domestic help services (housekeeping home, meal preparation, laundry, shopping, etc.), and community activities related to civic support (help in administering a budget, completing administrative forms, etc.; Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux [MSSS], 2004).

Faced with an aging population, the need for domestic help has increased over recent years (Ratel, 2012). Depending on requirements, these home care services can be offered by the local authority, community organizations, volunteer groups, staff hired directly by the local health services, personnel hired directly by individuals, or social economy firms, and the latter have become important providers over the years (MSSS, 2004).

The history of the development of these services helps us understand the increase in the share of the social economy firms over the years. During the period of 1984–1990, the community services supported by the government (CLSC–Local Center for Community Services) started to use private companies rather than their own personnel to give services, which contributed to a privatization movement over time. The public sector became less important in the delivery of services, while the private sector increased its presence. Indeed, with the support of the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) as well as regional health centers and social services (CRSSS), a large share of public funds was used to outsource to private sector companies the home care services, rather than use public sector staff (Vaillancourt & Jetté, 1997). By 1996, the CLSC (public services) had started to use mainly the social economy enterprises in domestic help (ESSAD– Entreprises d’économie sociale en services d’aide domestique) for the delivery of home help services. Over time, the state officially recognized these social economy firms (ESSAD) by giving them direct funding for these services. The ESSAD now provide most of the housekeeping for the elderly, and these services are practically no longer offered by public structures (Boivin, 2013).

The quality of employment, as well as working conditions and rights, is a major issue in the field of home care. Indeed, the quality of employment for carers, including domestic helpers, is often considered to be of lesser quality. (Boivin, 2013) The difficulty of this work refers in particular to difficult schedules, split schedules, travel between places of work, and generally the difficulty of the work itself. Working conditions combine industrial discomforts and some challenges of the service sector in dealing with individuals (Boivin, 2013; Volkoff & Gollac, 2007), and this clearly supports the idea of difficult working conditions and low-level employment in this sector (Devetter et al., 2009), as well as a general absence of workplace rights (Boivin, 2013). In Québec, as mentioned above, workers mainly rely on the minimal workplace rights offered by the minimal standards law (2 weeks vacation, overtime pay over 40 hr, and the like, but no right to working time arrangements whatsoever). Also, among the various work-related discomforts, Juhel (1998) mentions the physical and mental exhaustion, contacts with beneficiaries who may be difficult, monotony of tasks, and often the lack of time to perform all tasks. These are all elements that we found in the work done by the domestic help workers; although the working conditions may be a little easier in the social economy sector, the work

itself remains difficult, and the schedules are also often split schedules as is the case in the private sector.

In our research, we thus wanted to address the issue of how these employees reconcile their work and family responsibilities as well personal life in the context of working conditions and workplace rights that are rather minimal.

Our Research on Work–Family Challenges in the Home Help Sector

Portrait of Respondents and Research Method

Portrait of respondents. We conducted a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews lasting on average 1.5 hr with 33 domestic workers in Quebec, namely, 10 employees in the private sector and 23 in the social economy firms (ESSAD). We also interviewed 23 employers with 3 private companies and 20 ESSAD managers. In this article, we concentrate on the views of employees, although the employers' views gave us a better understanding of the specifics of the context and confirmed some elements from the employee interviews. We need to mention that to access the employees, we had to go through the managers, and interviews were carried out under a voluntary basis, after managers put out a call for volunteers to contact us directly. The domestic help workers that we met were all working with elderly people who wanted to stay at home but needed regular support to do so.

Method of analysis. We used content analysis as it is proposed by a group of colleagues (Bardin, 1993; Savall & Zardet, 2000) who designed a method of thematic treatment based on excerpts from the interviews, which they call “witness sentences.” This method brings us to encode the text, and analyze it to gain an understanding of the representations and interpretations of the respondents' discourse. It is based on the division of the text into sections, reading section by section to determine the important elements of content, and then encoding the various categories or themes (Fallery & Rodhain, 2007). The transcripts were cut into sections and analyzed with the ideas or words contained in these sections. In other words, we identified key sentences expressed by the respondents, which some colleagues call “witnesses sentences” (Savall & Zardet, 2000). This method allowed us to find “patterns” and to collect and understand the research results.

Research Results

Important difficulties with workplace conditions and rights. According to our interviews, the home help staff faces difficult situations regarding working conditions and workplace rights. In terms of schedules and hours of work, employees indicate that the number of hours of work varies quite often, and schedules are often split. People who work on-call do not always visit the same customers, and therefore, the hours can

vary considerably in some cases. Many mention the complex issue of working hours, and their fragmentation, which causes instability in private life. Moreover, hours and schedules are strongly related to the working environment; as many mention, this type of work is done essentially in the homes of the beneficiaries of domestic help, and it mainly has to do with cleaning the house or apartment.

Workers are often confronted with unpredictable events, and this can have an impact on their working hours. For example, an elderly person can cancel a service at the last minute, for various reasons (hospitalization, not feeling well, or whatever). The worker is then not paid, without any right to some form of compensation for the lost hours and wage. It apparently happens relatively frequently that the client/beneficiary falls ill or he or she returns to the hospital, so this can have an important impact on the worker's and the family's budget.

Travel times are sometimes long as distances between two clients can be important. Again, there is no right to any form of compensation here, although some social economy firms pay for the public transportation ticket. However, as some workers mentioned, it is sometimes preferable to go by car, to lose less time in transportation and thus reduce the total length of the workday. This is particularly important for lone mothers, who cannot pay for someone to take care of their kids until they come home. Although there is public day care in Québec, if a parent takes more time to return home, there is no pay for the extra time at the end of the day. The variability of distances is important due to the fact that the employee does not work in the same place every day, nor even every half day; not having the same client means workers are required to travel all the time. Interviewees who work outside of the main cities mentioned that they cover a very large territory, and therefore, transportation time can be quite long, and all the more so when they are on call, and the places visited can vary on short notice. A few excerpts from the interviews confirm this:

Interview 3: I have no contract, I am always on call. The CLSC contacts me and if there are calls I take them as I prefer to work full time than part-time, so as long as there are calls, I take them, even if at a distance.

Interview 1: Work schedules, it's complicated, sometimes I start at midnight at Mrs. K's, sometimes it's early morning. It may be just the afternoon, one hour, two hours. That's more difficult . . . this is the most difficult part of the job, I'll say, it's worse in the private sector here, there is nothing stable here. There are stable contracts yes, but there are not many.

Interview 14: The number of hours, it depends, sometimes we have cancelations, there is no other client to replace, and we lose our hours. I normally do 32 hours. I would like to work more hours

yet . . . I'd like to do a little more over my 30 hours, yes.

Interview 19: The hours are very variable, because in my area, I am in a rural area, so the houses are far apart, the area I cover is large, the country is big so I can have important distances to cover. Also I live in St-Gabriel, I have to go one place two or three times a week and that is a 40-45 minutes drive, and I often have to drive 20 minutes to the clients' places.

These quotes from the interviews highlight some of the difficulties facing these employees. Schedules and hours of work are not stable, there are problems due to the large territories covered by the workers, and the work schedules are sometimes changed because of cancellations. These workers have no rights to compensation for these last-minute changes, nor for the long driving distances, even if their wages are quite low, usually minimum wage and sometimes a little higher, but not much. Faced with these difficulties, we wanted to see how these employees manage to reconcile their work and family and personal life.

An important work–family challenge. Most employees do not expect to have any form of workplace rights regarding work–family reconciliation. They do not seem to expect support from their employer, and this is probably one of the most surprising results, especially as work–family issues have been high on the agenda in public discussions in Québec for some years now, and other professional groups will put forward requests to their employers (Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). However, these low expectations are probably due precisely to the low quality of employment and workplace rights.

Most workers, men as well as women, say they just “manage personally” to get things done and to balance work, family, and personal activities. They do not seem to expect much from their employer in terms of support, although they do put forward their preferences in terms of schedules and hours, but just hope that the employer can take them into account, which appears to be somewhat more frequent in the social economy firms than in other firms, but cannot be guaranteed, because of frequent changes in the clients' demands and situation (illness, hospitalization, etc.).

The workers manage to balance work and family in different ways, and they put forward five explanations. The first explanation refers simply to the fact that a majority of women say that they just organize themselves personally to reconcile work and family life to cope with the demands of work and family simultaneously. They have no choice to work, and they expect no special support although the social economy context can present some advantages over the private sector. Indeed, marginal social benefits are sometimes better. Also, in a few cases, there is a retirement and medical plan, which is offered by the social economy group collectively and to

which individual firms can adhere, but it is not all that do. Finally, sometimes the employer takes their needs into account in terms of working hours or schedules, or at least try to as much as possible.

According to one employee, “In life, you have to work and you need to have some personal organization to manage to balance work and family”; this woman is therefore not expecting any help or support from her employer but considers that she has to organize things by herself. A worker indicates that she organizes the family chores to reconcile everything, and she manages to do her work and spend time with her husband. She tries to keep the whole weekend for her husband and his family. Another employee arranges to have some “good time,” organizing her schedule accordingly and communicating the hours she is available to her employer, who seems to respect her requests (in a social economy firm). If there are things to be done, they are done when she is on leave or has some time off. According to another employee, this strategy of personal organization also requires sacrifices, for being on call, the employee may be contacted by the company at any time. However, some consider that schedule flexibility is an advantage for work–family reconciliation.

The second type of explanation has to do with persons who say they do not have so much difficulty in reconciling work and family inasmuch as their children are now adults. In one case, the children are grown up, they are independent, and they also know that their mother needs to work, so they do not ask too much of her.

In the third group, the interviewees indicated that they did not have children and only have their house or spouse to take care of and seem to manage correctly in this context. In the fourth group, the employees say they have no problem in terms of work–family integration; for them, the most important aspect is to not bring work problems back home. They say they need to think of other things. They manage to get work schedules that make it possible for them to spend more time with their children. Although some admit it is difficult to find time to do their own cleaning and housework, employees in social economy firms say they can put forward their requests in terms of working hours, and schedules, and the employer usually tries to respect their requests. They have no rights per se to a given schedule or given hours, but there seems to be a mutual agreement in some organizations, and things can work out well for some of the workers.

However, the fifth group has to do with single mothers, for whom it is often difficult to reconcile everything. A single mother has three children from different fathers, and she admits she struggles to balance work, family, and personal life. She says it is difficult to hold a full-time job, which could help her support her children. She tends to work part-time, which is not always the best solution from a financial point of view. Another woman mentions that she has no time for her children, except on Saturdays. It is difficult to cook a decent meal for the kids after work, she says, and it is impossible to

work full-time: “I work a full 3 days, the other 2 days I work a half-day. When you are a single parent, you have no choice.” Another employee indicates that it is difficult to reconcile work and family because she lives with her husband and two children, and she has no one to help. This woman is an immigrant woman, and she lives only with her husband and children, the rest of the family having remained in their country of origin. A quote from the interviews supports this view where these workers tend to organize by themselves, not having specific rights to working time arrangements or support, and things just get easier when children grow up:

Interview 15: Well, that’s okay, that’s fine, I have children they are not all teen but they know that I need to work. And that’s okay, I don’t have too much problems with this.

Interview 16: It’s perfect, my son is 20, my daughter is 24 years old, my daughter does not live at home, she has her family, my son’s doing well, I prepare the meal, then if he is working he just has to warm it up, they are grown children so I’m ok now.

As for the men in our respondent group, there are only five of them, and two of the five men say that they organize themselves to balance work and family (but they do not seem particularly involved in family chores or responsibilities). According to one of them, people need to organize themselves so that they can socialize and have a life. Another indicates that he prefers to work at night, because otherwise, work would intrude with his social life. Another is separated from his wife and has one child, but he considers himself “lucky” as he does not have custody of the child and considers it would be difficult for him to balance work and family if he did have custody! Not having the child, it is possible for him to work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and also follow some evening classes at the university.

A fourth man says that work–family balance is a state of mind; he feels quite relaxed, and he does not have a large family, which also helps to reconcile work and family. The fourth says that he prioritizes family, and work comes second. Many moments are spent with his family, and many activities are done together. The fifth man indicates he prioritizes work and expects his employer to respect his requests for the given working hours and schedules.

Interview 2: I take the time to do what I have to do. We’re together all the time: it’s activities, family dinner, I see the family all the time and my work comes second.

Interview 3: Once I decided to work, I gave my availability for work, so I focus more on my work than being at home. If you have decided to go to someone’s house for the cleaning, you have to put it first.

Here, we see a significant difference with women who have young children because it is very rare that they do not have custody, and some are also single mothers.

Interview 7: It is difficult. Especially here I have no time to myself and no one to help. I’m just with my husband and my two children, and I do everything.

A woman employee mentions that she takes care of her grandson and now devotes time to him, but she says she has asked to have less clients as she must also get to the school and day care.

Also, although schedules are flexible in several organizations that use these people, mainly in the social economy firms, many mention that they are always “running for time.” Still, most do not expect support from the employer.

Interview 6: In life you have to work, work is important in life. It’s like everyone here, we manage work and family; if we have 1 hour, we try to we plan everything, our schedules and all that.

Interview 8: I manage to have time for myself, that’s for sure, it’s important, I arrange my schedule accordingly. Then if I have things to do, I manage to do them when I know I will be on leave. I manage.

In short, employees in this type of work experience many difficulties in terms of schedules and working hours, and also in terms of traveling to each of the homes. To balance their work, family, and personal life, employees organize things by themselves, giving their preferred hours and schedules and hoping the employer can give them these hours, which happens more in the social economy sector than in the private sector. However, single parenthood is a real problem because it is not always very easy to reconcile work and family in this type of situation, as many women have told us.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to understand how domestic workers in elderly care manage to balance their work, their family, and personal life, given their specific, and often difficult, working conditions. To do this, we first did a literature review on home care workers and on challenges of work–family conflict and reconciliation.

Considering the time conflict caused by the different roles and tasks that many women and men have to assume with regard to their family, and the difficulty of combining the competing demands of family and work, it is surprising to see that most employees interviewed expect very little support from their employer, although some request and do obtain specific schedules and working hours. In this type of low-wage and low-education job, workers only have minimal labor rights, and our results show that they do not expect

workplace support for their work–family challenge as is more often the case in professions such as law (Tremblay & Mascova, 2013) and other higher level jobs (Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b).

Our results allow us to say that despite a work environment that is complex and difficult, domestic workers helping with the cleaning at elderly persons' homes appear to organize by themselves. They manage to more or less balance their work, family, and personal life, inasmuch as they can given the constraints.

Although the social economy firms seem to offer a little more support, at least in arranging schedules according to preferences, people working in these firms as well as those working in the private firms consider that work–family balance is essentially a question of personal organization. Indeed, they do not seem to expect much support from the employer, and they do not expect workplace rights to be developed in relation to work–family issues in this sector, as is more often the case in unionized environments and higher level work statuses (Tremblay, 2012a, 2012b). This may be explained by the fact that most employees have a low level of education and cannot have access to many other types of jobs, so they accept these rather low workplace rights and working conditions for lack of better options. Women without children and those whose children are grown up have fewer difficulties. Single mothers clearly indicate they have difficulty, all the while still not expecting anything in terms of workplace rights.

In our view, there is clearly an issue here, and it would be interesting to consider some recommendations to make these workers' situation somewhat easier. First, we would consider developing the “right to request” working time arrangements, as this has been developed in a few countries, such as Australia, Great Britain, and New Zealand (Tremblay & Nogues, 2014). This would be an interesting extension of this research, as it may offer an alternative for low-wage and low-rights workers, who generally do not have much autonomy or support in their work environment.

We might also consider developing options to exchange schedules between workers, when some schedules enter in conflict with a worker's family or personal obligations. Firms could develop a system to permit workers to exchange working hours with another worker, although this might be more difficult to have accepted by the clients, that is, elderly persons who like to see the same person each week, even if it is not for health care but for cleaning the home. Finally, another option could be to develop teamwork, having the workers take on tasks in teams of two, which would make it easier if one needed to be absent at a given time.

However, in our view, the best option would clearly be to develop a more universal and legally enforceable “right to request” for all workers with family obligations, as this group is not particularly confident in its capacity to put forward and obtain any form of benefit or advantage. For this and other

low-level jobs, a universal right would be easier for them to request and enforce in their own work environment.

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Author Biographies

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay is professor with the Management School of Têluq, the e-learning component of University of Québec. She is Canada Research Chair on the Knowledge Economy (www.telug.ca/chaireecosavoir) and director of the CURA Center on Work-life Articulation over the Lifecourse (www.telug.ca/aruc-gats).

Ilda Ilse Ilama is lecturer with the Université de Franche Comté, in Besançon, researcher with the au CREGO, Université de Bourgogne, France. She did her thesis in Université de Montpellier, France and then a post-doc on this research, in the CURA Center on Work-life Articulation over the Lifecourse (www.telug.ca/aruc-gats).