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Article

Women's Perceptions of Discrimination at Work: Gender Stereotypes and Overtime—An Exploratory Study in Portugal

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to identify women's perceptions of the main reasons for discrimination at work. Furthermore, the aim is to analyse the effects of public working time policies on gender equality and their impact on discrimination at work and on women's career paths. This article presents a framework for the topic through an analysis of documents and literature, as well as an exploratory study carried out in Portugal. Working time policies since 2011 in Portugal are examined and through an empirical study, the impact of overtime on women's work and careers is analysed. The documentary analysis carried out in Portugal shows the difficulties women face in reconciling work with family and personal life. While most studies focus on job satisfaction and women's willingness to work long hours for better career progression, this paper examines gender discrimination at work associated with working time policies. Gender equality and women's empowerment are among the goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This study, based on a survey completed by female employees, concludes that women feel discriminated against in their careers due not only to the persistence of gender stereotypes but also to long working hours. Studying women's perceptions of the reasons for discrimination at work, as well as the relationship between working time and equality at work, can be important for understanding the under-representation of women in leadership positions and can help enrich public policies in this area.

Keywords: gender equality at work; working time; perceptions of discrimination; gender stereotypes; overtime



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1. Introduction

In an 'always-on' society, based on the ubiquitous use of communication and information technologies (ICT), individuals are able to keep in constant contact. With the expansion of ICT, new forms of work and the use of teleworking or hybrid working, more and more workers recognise that they remain electronically connected to their work even when they have finished their working hours (Golden 2012; Haines et al. 2012; OECD 2016; European Commission 2020). Consequently, some individuals have developed the habit of being permanently connected with others. This situation will particularly affect workers who have family responsibilities, especially women (Burchell and Fagan 2004; Crompton et al. 2007; Artazcoz and Gutiérrez Vera 2012; Fagan et al. 2012; Andringa et al. 2015; Artazcoz et al. 2016; Artazcoz 2021). Some recent studies report, long hours of paid work are associated with a worse work-life balance (Eurofound 2018; Eurofound 2021a). Burchell and Fagan

(2004) show that work intensity has a negative effect on work-life balance, with this effect being stronger in women than in men.

Women's massive access to the labour market has been widespread in European countries. Two out of every three net new jobs in the EU over the last two decades have been filled by women, and although the result has been a reduction in the gender employment gap, it still persists in almost all EU Member States (Eurofound 2021a). This happens, especially, as gender stereotypes persist (Mahon 1998; European Commission 2009; Bain and Masselot 2012). In studying the origins of the EU's gender equality policy, Bain and Masselot (2012) emphasise that there has been a political consensus among Member States to elevate gender equality to a fundamental principle but that the issue of work-life balance is still a concern for many Europeans and that measures must be taken to strengthen women's employment. A gender stereotype is a generalised (and broad) view of a set of characteristics (or roles) attributed to a certain person. With regard to women in particular, gender stereotyping is harmful when it limits their ability to develop their professional careers. In many cases, these stereotypes associate women with family responsibilities and, as such, with less time available for work (especially working overtime). Stereotypes are ubiquitous and continue to influence behaviour. It is, therefore, very difficult to determine to what extent they represent genuine preferences, to what extent they express a social preference, and to what extent they are a way of expressing an opinion (European Commission 2009). As the EIGE report (EIGE 2018) states, gender segregation reduces life and employment options, leads to inequalities, and further reinforces gender stereotypes while perpetuating unequal power relations between men and women. To fulfil the gender and employment targets set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, women's employment conditions must remain a priority (European Commission 2015).

Some studies reveal a double effect: developed welfare states facilitate women's access to the labour force but not too powerful and desirable positions (Mandel and Semyonov 2006). How it is recognised, gender equality is a multifaceted issue, particularly with regard to gender stereotypes. The main question when analysing gender stereotypes is the extent to which men and women differ in terms of job quality when all dimensions and sub-dimensions (including working time) are considered simultaneously (Eurofound 2020). For example, the question of gender stereotyping arises above all in relation to motherhood. Some authors have examined the link between motherhood and occupational segregation, concluding that mothers are more likely than women without children to be over- and under-represented in certain professions (Hook and Pettit 2016).

The literature shows that segregation in the labour market is particularly intense in the case of traditionally male-dominated professions (Eurofound 2010), and the differences between men and women are still evident, particularly in employment patterns and working conditions, which reflect persistent segregation between men and women (Eurofound 2013a). Through Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council the application of the principle of equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation has been strengthened (European Parliament & the Council of the European Union 2006). In this line, the European Gender Equality Strategy 2016–2019 concluded, among other things, that there is a need to implement a coherent framework for gender equality policies in Member States (European Commission 2015).

Since the end of the last century and the beginning of this century, working time has become one of the main elements of European employment policies since time can be a structuring element in the organisation of work (Adnett and Hardy 2001; Bosch and Lehdorff 2001; Askenazy 2004, 2013). In the last three decades, companies have implemented increasing flexibility in terms of work management—regarding working time—in order to guarantee the pursuit of their business objectives (ILO 2005; Eurofound 2006). However, working time management directly impacts personal interests (work-life balance and the right to rest and leisure) and workers' health rights (Gershuny 2000; Dembe et al. 2005; Hein 2005; Fagan et al. 2012; Ganster et al. 2018).

In the 1970s, debates on working time developed, linking this issue to the massive entry of women into the labour market (Garnsey 1978; Rothwell 1981; Rubery et al. 1998, 1999). Studying the cases of Britain, France, the USA and Scandinavia, Garnsey (1978) questioned why so much time is spent researching “new work patterns” when a number of these already exist in women’s working lives. In addition, since the 1990s, with the development of ICT, new working methods have emerged, especially after the negotiation of the Working Time Directive. Since then, the process of making working time more flexible has increased, with a view to organising work in socially dignified conditions and making it possible to combine work, family, and personal life.

Companies have been more concerned with ensuring a work-family balance (particularly in view of issues such as maternity, childcare, and care of the elderly) and, to this extent, working time management policies should be geared towards mitigating work-family conflicts (Calmfors 1985; Freeman 1998; Trzcinski and Holst 2011). Hence, working time flexibilisation policies have expanded to meet both workers’ and employers’ interests. In addition, over the last three decades, we have experienced a social process of increasing flexibility. This flexibilisation can lead to either a reduction or an increase in working hours (Askenazy 2004; Adăscăliței et al. 2022). The increasing deregulation of the labour market—and the flexibilisation of working time leading to work overload—related to the combination of employment and domestic work may explain the relationship between poor health status and poor psychological well-being in both sexes, but mainly among women in continental and southern European countries (Artazcoz et al. 2016).

As has been recognised, understanding how the organisation of working time affects the balance between work and private life is of fundamental importance (Eurofound 2013b). In 2013, on the basis of data from Eurofound’s fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), based on interviews with more than 38,000 respondents in 34 countries, Eurofound analysed the relationship between work and life balance and preferences regarding the organisation of working time.

Other studies consider that due to flexible working practices, there has been an intensification of work, with significant social consequences such as income inequality and longer working hours (Hewlett and Luce 2006; Russell et al. 2009; Kelliher and Anderson 2010; OECD 2015; Adăscăliței et al. 2022). Kelliher and Anderson (2010) examine employees’ experiences of working from home for part of the week and working reduced hours, show how work intensification impacts employees, and seek to explain the responses of flexible workers. These authors identify that increased effort may be imposed, allowed, or may be a reciprocal act by employees in exchange for discretion over work arrangements.

However, this flexibilisation has, in many cases, led to an increase in working hours, leading to overtime (Golden 2012). As pointed out by several international organisations, the increase in working time directly impacts workers’ working conditions, consequently affecting their work performance (Eurofound and ILO 2017). Furthermore, an increase in normal working hours does not translate into better working conditions (Eurofound 2009, 2016).

There is, however, literature on the benefits of long working hours that suggests that people who work longer hours—as well as benefit from higher wage income—may benefit from better career prospects. Using the British Household Panel Survey, Booth et al. (2002) found evidence that employees who worked more hours per week of overtime significantly increased their chances of promotion. Scase et al. (1999) concluded that long-hour workers have access to better jobs with higher wages. On the other hand, the study of Steptoe et al. (1998) suggests that reducing paid working hours could cause stress for employees, as it could lead to a reduction in income. On the other hand, studies have been developed that analyse, namely, the relationship between gender differences, long working hours and the type of contract, assessing psychosocial and health risks (Dembe 2009; Berniell and Bientenbeck 2017). According to the study by Artazcoz and Gutiérrez Vera (2012), working up to 60 h a week was associated with job dissatisfaction in both sexes and in women with nervous disorders/depression. The author argues that long working hours

are associated with precarious contracts and more psychosocial risks, especially among women. In a recent study, the author concludes that, although in recent years, interest in health problems related to long working hours has increased, there are persistent gaps in the literature investigating this relationship and the factors involved (Artazcoz 2021).

Also, Parry et al. (2021) study the experience of working from home in the UK at an individual and organisational level, and, in another study, Rubery and Tavora (2021) identify factors to ensure equality between men and women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These authors argue that the COVID-19 experience can be used to strengthen the gender dimension at work.

Other studies highlight the gender issue, focusing especially on women with young children at home. The study of Andringa et al. (2015)—developed in 23 European countries—shows that there is a stronger negative association with women who have young children at home and have traditional gender attitudes compared to women with egalitarian attitudes. On the other hand, Kay (2020) discusses the evolution of working time in the UK and the fact that full-time workers in the UK work the most hours in any EU country, seeking to study the evolution of the length of the working week in the UK (Kay 2020). On the other hand, the literature indicates that gender stereotypes affect women's performance (Neschen and Hügelschäfer 2021).

It should also be noted that recently, Directive (EU) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 lays down rules applicable to bodies for equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in matters relating to employment (European Parliament & the Council of the European Union 2024). As this Directive states, in order to promote equal treatment and, in particular, to prevent discrimination, it is important that equality bodies pay special attention to intersectional discrimination, understood as discrimination based on a combination of sex and any other ground or grounds for discrimination.

After the conceptual framework presented in this Introduction—in which the literature related to gender equality and its effects on women's work and careers and working time was analysed—the research methods of an exploratory study carried out in Portugal are described, and the research results are presented, followed by a discussion. The article ends with conclusions and recommendations for future work.

2. Methods

2.1. A Previous Study and an Exploratory Survey Carried Out in 2021

The aim of this article was to identify women's perceptions of the main reasons for discrimination at work and in their careers and understand how working time impacts the lives of women with labour contracts. To this end, this article also analyses working time policies in Portugal in the last decade. As some studies recognise, the different generations have been socialised into believing that states ensure gender equality—not least because it stems from national regulations—but the way in which different generations of women continue to experience personal gender inequality in everyday life points to a paradox (Melby et al. 2008). For this reason, when designing the methodology for this study, it was crucial to identify women's perceptions of discrimination, their view of themselves as individuals (Fischer and Holz 2007), and their problems with career progression. Three research questions guided this study: RQ1—What do women employees perceive to be the main reasons for discrimination at work and in their careers? RQ2—Are the main reasons for discrimination at work associated with women with family responsibilities, namely children? RQ3—Is there a specific association between discrimination against women with children and their lack of time to work outside of working hours?

This study sought to emphasise the importance of studying the relationship between working time and gender equality at work, specifically considering that the literature shows that women are under more pressure to combine work and family life. As mentioned in the Introduction, the literature has particularly assessed the impact of working time on workers' health and safety, wages, and work-family balance but has not delved into the importance

of the link between working time policies and gender equality at work, especially the assessment of its impact on the careers of women with children. Thus, this article explores the potential for strengthening the link between working time and gender equality at work and highlights this association based on an empirical study conducted in Portugal. First, an assessment of public policies in Portugal was made over the last decade through a desk review of data presented by the OECD and Eurofound on working time in Portugal, as well as by the Portuguese Ministry of Labour (MTSSS). Based on a previous study—carried out in 2015 on gender equality in the Portuguese banking sector—of 30 semi-structured interviews with female workers which indirectly analysed the impact of overtime on work (Rebelo 2019), a survey (non-probability sample) on working time in 2021. The survey, answered by 155 women with an employment contract, was available online from 15 November to 16 December 2021.

2.2. A Desk Review in Portugal

A framework was created by analysing documents and literature on working time policies over the last decade in the Portuguese labour context, i.e., the policies adopted since the Economic and Financial Assistance Programme was implemented in Portugal in 2011. Therefore, this article provides a comprehensive analysis of working time and labour law reforms in Portugal since then, as well as identifying assessments made nationally (by the Portuguese Ministry of Labour) and internationally by the ILO on the increase in long working hours in Portugal. A diverse documentary analysis was carried out to understand the policies that have been implemented in the Portuguese labour market since 2011.

OECD points out that Portugal was one of the European countries experiencing one of the most serious declines in various indicators of well-being, mainly due to job uncertainty, as well as the increase in long working hours (OECD 2017). For its part, Eurofound (2019) highlights that in 2018, Portugal was among the EU countries with the longest working hours. In addition, in a previous report, Eurofound underlined that at the European level, women continue to spend more time in work activities than men. In 2015, women spent, on average, 58 h on paid and unpaid work (domestic work, care of children and other household members), and men only 52.5 h. At the same time, the difference between actual and preferred hours of work is greater for men, especially if they are in the parenting phase of their lives (Eurofound 2017). Thus, the data from this survey corroborate the need for an analysis that links overtime to equality between men and women at work.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2006; UN 2015). The factors that explain the disparities between men and women must be well analysed and understood in order to improve national public policies (ILO 2020). Also, as emphasised in the Global Wage Report 2018/19, the analysis must be placed in the broader context of other dimensions of inequality between women and men, including career progression (ILO 2018b). As this report emphasises, a “glass ceiling” persists in Portugal that prevents women from having equal access to top positions (ILO 2018b, p. 121), and policies that eliminate disparities between men and women must be strengthened (ILO 2018b).

As highlighted, long working hours have increased in Portugal since 2011. In 2011, changes to the Portuguese Labour Code were mainly linked to two agreements: the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Policy Conditionality, signed with the European Commission) and the Commitment to Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, a social dialogue agreement between the government, employer confederations, and the trade union center União Geral de Trabalhadores/UGT. These provisions amended various parts of the Labour Code, including legal provisions on working time, with the aim of increasing the flexibility of working time by reinforcing some of the changes in the 2009 Labour Code (ILO 2018a, p. 74). As is emphasised in this document, it is important to consider the evolution of working hours in this last decade because while in 2016, in the EU, an average of 40.3 h was worked during a normal working week, in Portugal, this

average increased to 41 h per week in that same year (ILO 2018a, p. 76). As this report notes, based on Eurostat data, from 2009 to 2016, Portugal was one of the EU Member States with the highest average number of weekly working hours. This report stresses that the rise in working hours happened in the “time period after the legal changes introduced in 2011” (*ibidem*). According to Eurofound data in 2018, in the EU28, the usual working week was 40.2 h, the same as in 2017 and 0.1 h shorter than in 2016. In the EU15, the working week was 40.1 h, 2.7 h longer than the average agreed hours in the same group of countries (Eurofound 2019, p. 14). Denmark (37.8 h), Norway (38.5 h), Italy and the Netherlands (both with 39 h) were the countries with the shortest weekly working hours. On the other hand, Portugal (40.8 h) was one of the countries with the longest weekly working hours (*ibidem*).

In Portugal, according to official data from the Ministry of Labour, the activity rate for women is around 73%, above the European average of approximately 68%, and close to the male activity rate of 78% (MTSSS 2021, p. 95). At the same time, women represent 50% of employment in Portugal, while the European average rate of feminisation of employment is still 46%, and only 11% of women work part-time (*ibidem*). As this report shows, although women and men value paid work equally, it is still women who have the most difficulty in reconciling work with family and personal life (MTSSS 2021, p. 96). On the other hand, almost 40% of women say that they have already interrupted their careers to care for their children, compared to just over 8% of men. Furthermore, the majority of informal carers, i.e., people who provide assistance to family members in situations of fragility or dependency, are women (*ibidem*). In Portugal, the under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions persists (MTSSS 2021, p. 106). As considered in this document, the balanced management of time appears as a decisive variable in the conditions of conciliation between work and family life, and it is, therefore, a critical element from the point of view of improving the demographic prospects of the country. Given the overload to which women are still subjected, the issue of working time emerges transversally as a critical element of measures to encourage birth rates in Portugal.

According to the 2018 ad hoc module of the Portuguese Employment Survey, dedicated to the reconciliation of work and family life, 22.4% of caregivers report having obstacles in their work that condition reconciliation, the most relevant being the unpredictability of the schedule or atypical schedule (6.8%) (MTSSS 2021, pp. 96–97). Furthermore, in Portugal, employers were less inclined to the reduction of working time and more in favour of combined forms of extension of working hours (Eurofound 2021b).

The legislation in Portugal formally ensures the equality of men and women in the labour market. The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic—through Article 13 (under the title Principle of Equality and Non-Discrimination)—rejects the possibility of any discrimination between people based on sex, guaranteeing respect for the equal treatment of men and women. Afterwards, and following the principle laid down in paragraph (a) of no. 1 of Article 59 of the Portuguese Constitution that “for equal work, equal pay”—and emphasising that differences in remuneration do not constitute discrimination if based on objective criteria common to men and women—the Portuguese Labour Code ensures equal working conditions, particularly for male and female workers [Article 28(1)]. In the Portuguese Labour Code, the legal limit is a maximum of eight hours of work per day up to a maximum of 40 h per week [Article 203(1)], but individual agreement or collective labour agreements may set different maximum limits, admitting the practice of normal daily working periods of up to 12 h.

Despite setting maximum limits on working hours, Portuguese labour law establishes several mechanisms for making the organisation of working time more flexible. Therefore, these flexible working arrangements can lead to an increase in normal working hours to a maximum of 10 or 12 h per day and 50 or 60 h per week. There was a sharp increase of 21% in the number of employees in the “Individual Adaptability Scheme” between 2010 and 2014 (MTSSS 2016, p. 267), a form of working time management that allows normal weekly working periods of 50 h. As stated in this document from the Ministry of Labour,

the fact that in Portugal “76.3% of workers with employment contracts are covered by a flexible way of organising working time” demonstrates the impact of these working time arrangements introduced in 2009 and 2012 in Portuguese law (MTSSS 2016, p. 268). Also, according to the report Gender Equality Index 2019, in Portugal, gender inequalities are most pronounced in the domains of power (46.7 points) and time (47.5 points), and progress has stalled in the domains of time (+0.2 points) (EIGE 2019).

3. Results and Discussion

This article seeks to emphasise the importance of studying the link between working time and gender equality at work and the need to assess their impact on women’s career paths. This is a way to obtain more complete knowledge of the conditions of equality between women and men at work. Therefore, in order to gather information to diagnose and characterise this purpose, in 2021, a study carried out in Portugal by Rebelo (2019) was complemented and updated. This study was carried out through 30 interviews with female bank employees. The impact of long working hours on women’s work-life balance was assessed, particularly in terms of career promotions and access to top positions in companies. This study concluded that the increase in long working hours strongly affects women, as they are the most frequent family carers. It was possible to group themes for analysis, specifically considering the need to reconcile work and family: organisation of working time, performance evaluation and career progression. Working time stood out as a major factor in reconciling work and family life and in performance within the organisation. The main conclusion of this study was that all the women interviewed considered that the longer working hours created by the measures to make working time more flexible increased gender discrimination in performance appraisals since it is women who provide more family care.

Thus, in addition to these interviews, in November 2021, a “working time survey” was launched on the Internet, aimed at women with an employment contract throughout the country. This survey explained, in the introduction, that the aim was to find out about the conditions under which working women organise their working time in Portugal. The text also ensured the confidentiality of the answers (used solely for statistical purposes), guaranteeing anonymity. Participation was voluntary and preceded by informed consent, which consisted of reading and accepting the declaration at the start of completing the questionnaire.

More specifically, both the information gathered sought to identify the main constraints for women in work/family balance, particularly in terms of the organisation of working time. Taking into consideration the multidimensional nature of the issue and its interconnections by delimiting the objectives of the research, the purpose was to understand the effects of working time public policies, in particular, on the reconciliation of work and family life of women. A statistical analysis was applied to this survey, and categorical variables are presented as frequencies (percentages). The association between categorical variables was analysed using the Chi-squared test. Values of $p < 0.05$ were considered significant. Statistical analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows programme, version 27.0. The “2021 working time survey”, with 16 questions (closed, some of them allowing for multiple answers), was structured in two parts: the first one concerning the personal and contractual profile of the respondents—age (Q.1), marital status (Q.2), number of children (Q.3), level of education (Q.4), professional category (Q.5), employment contract (Q.6) seniority (Q.7) and residence (Q.8)—and the other part relating to working time and working conditions, namely (Q.9), perception of discrimination at work and in professional careers (Q.10), main reasons for feeling discriminated against and (Q.11) main reasons for difficulties in career progression. In this study, it was particularly interesting to analyse the results of these three questions. Q.12 to Q.16 of this survey focused on the specific articulation of working time and teleworking, an issue that will be analysed in another research. Of the 155 women surveyed, 56.1% were married or living in civil partnerships. As for the number of children, 36.1% of the respondents had

no children, 31% of the women surveyed had one child, 28.4% of the respondents had two children, and 4.5% of the women had three or more children. When asked if they had ever felt discriminated against in their professional career (Q.9), the majority of women answered yes. The answers to Q.9 were analysed by comparing the women who said they felt discriminated against (63.9%) with those who had said they did not feel discriminated against (36.1%). The comparison is made by taking into account age, number of children and education (Table 1).

Table 1. Perception of discrimination at work and in professional careers (Q.9).

Q.9 (<i>n</i> = 155)	Age Group	<i>n</i> (%)	N.° of Children	<i>n</i> (%)	Education Level	<i>n</i> (%)
Yes 99 (63.9%)	18–35	11 (11.1)	None	30 (30.3)	Up to the 9th grade	2 (0.02)
	36–50	52 (52.5)	One	28 (28.3)	Up to the 12th grade	19 (19.2)
	≥51	36 (36.4)	Two	37 (37.4)	Degree	31 (31.3)
			Three or more	4 (0.04)	P-grad./master's/doct. Degree	47 (47.5)
No 56 (36.1%)	18–35	21 (0.4)	None	26 (46.4)	Up to the 9th grade	0 (0)
	36–50	24 (42.9)	One	20 (35.7)	Up to the 12th grade	9 (16.1)
	≥51	11 (19.6)	Two	7 (0.1)	Degree	31 (55.4)
			Three or more	3 (0.05)	P-grad./master's/doct. Degree	16 (26.6)

In Q.9, by the number of children, for the respondents who answered who felt discriminated against, the majority of women (65.7%) had children: 37.4% of women had two children, and 28.3% had one child. As for the women who said they did not feel discriminated against, the majority of women had no children (46.4%), and 35.7% had one child (Table 1). Especially considering the answers to Q.9 and noting that 63.9% of the women say they feel discriminated against, we tried to find out whether this feeling is associated with their age, whether or not they have children and their level of education. Three analyses were carried out. It was possible to conclude that feeling discriminated against was associated with age ($\chi^2_2 = 16.044$), p -value < 0.001). Regarding the question of whether feeling discriminated against is independent of having children, we observed that 69.7% of the women interviewed considered that they felt discriminated against for having children (Figure 1).

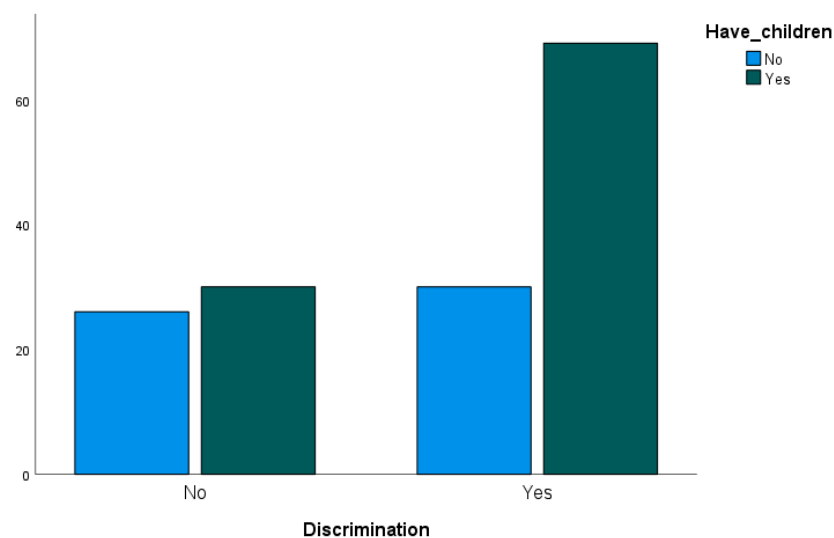


Figure 1. Perceived discrimination at work for having children.

It was possible to conclude that feeling discrimination is not independent of having children or not ($\chi^2_1 = 4.031$), p -value = 0.045. This may indicate that women with family responsibilities, who tend to avoid overtime, feel discriminated against in their performance

precisely because they reconcile work and family life. It was possible to conclude that the fact that a woman feels discriminated against is associated with her age ($\chi^2_2 = 16.044$, p -value < 0.001), with the fact of having or not having children ($\chi^2_1 = 4.031$, p -value = 0.045) and with her level of education ($\chi^2_2 = 8.802$, p -value = 0.012).

When analysing Q.10, of those women who answered who felt discriminated against (Q.10, with multiple answers), 69.7% considered that it was due to gender stereotypes, 18.2% answered that they had small children to assist, and 14.1% said that they did not have time available outside working hours. If we consider these last two reasons, 32.3% of female respondents recognise the lack of availability of women for overtime. The women who responded that it was due to gender stereotypes (69.7%, $n = 69$ in 99 women who answered yes) were analysed in terms of age, number of children and education (Table 2). When analysing this question by the number of children, it can be seen that the majority of respondents (66.7%) have children: 39.1% have two children, 23.2% have one child, and 4.4% have three or more children.

Table 2. Gender stereotypes as a reason to be discriminated against (Q.10, with multiple answers).

Q.10 (Yes, $n = 99$)	Age Group	n (%)	N.º of Children	n (%)	Education Level	n (%)
“gender stereotypes” 69 (69.7%)	18–35	7 (10.1)	None	23 (33.3)	Up to the 9th grade	2 (2.9)
	36–50	40 (58.0)	One	16 (23.2)	Up to the 12th grade	14 (20.3)
	≥ 51	22 (31.9)	Two	27 (39.1)	Degree	20 (29.0)
			Three or more	3 (4.4)	P-grad./master’s/doct. Degree	33 (47.8)

These results corroborate the studies by [Artazcoz and Gutiérrez Vera \(2012\)](#), [Artazcoz et al. \(2016\)](#), [Artazcoz \(2021\)](#), [Andringa et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Ganster et al. \(2018\)](#) either by showing that there is an association between overtime and long working hours and women with young children, or by demonstrating that these hours have repercussions on women’s reconciliation with their family lives.

As for the main reasons for difficulties in career progression, the results of the analysis of Q.11 (with multiple answers) show that 77.4% of women believe that the difficulties of career progression are due to gender stereotypes, and 31% say that it is due to less availability for work (Figure 2). These results lead to the question of the determination of gender stereotypes since gender stereotypes encompass a wide range of characteristics (or roles) attributed to women, which, in a cumulative effect, together with ‘being less available for work’ and the fact that women take on more family responsibilities than men, tend to accentuate discrimination at work.

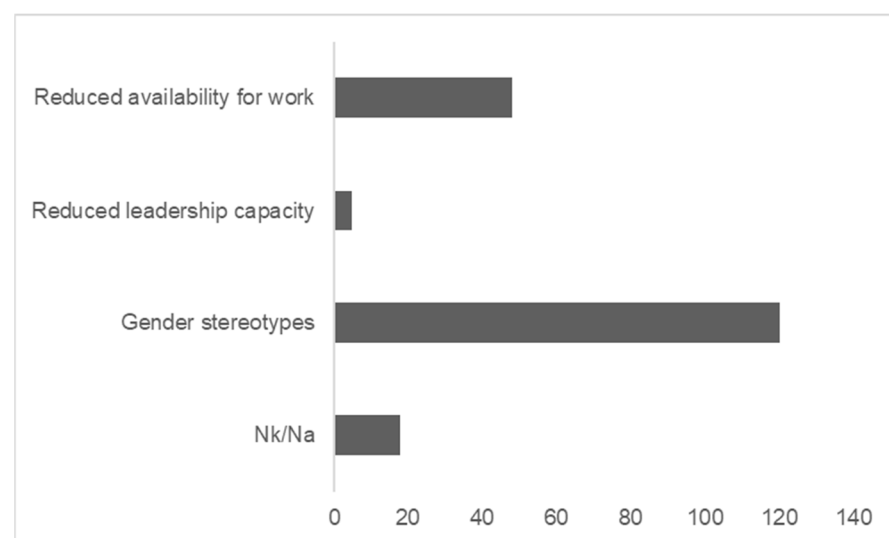


Figure 2. Main reasons for difficulties in career progression (Q.11, with multiple answers).

The main contribution of this study is the identification of women's perceptions of the main reasons for discrimination at work and in their careers. At the same time, the impact of working time on the lives of women with employment contracts was assessed since overtime penalises women as they are more likely to provide care for the family. If the theoretical discussion of the relationship between long working hours and gender equality at work has not yet been sufficiently developed, this paper aims to highlight the importance of studying this relationship. All the more so because, in addition to gender stereotypes, women's unwillingness to work beyond the agreed working hours can affect their performance and career progression.

However, this study had several limitations. Firstly, due to resource constraints, the analysis was based on non-probability sampling since the survey was made available on the Internet. Aimed to reach a broad audience, the survey was disseminated through social media platforms, various professional networks, and other relevant online communities. The answers were voluntary, limiting the respondents to working women with employment contracts. Secondly, the survey is based on self-reported perceptions of discrimination, which may be subject to response bias. Although this may be seen as a limitation—since participants may overestimate or underestimate their experiences due to social desirability or recall bias—the aim of identifying women's perceptions in the research design was considered relevant since it was intended to complement the results of the previous 30 interviews carried out in 2015. Additionally, to encourage honest and accurate responses, in addition to anonymity assurance, we carefully crafted the survey questions to be neutral and non-leading, which helped reduce social desirability bias. Secondly, since the survey launched in 2021, on which the study is based, was answered by a group of highly qualified women, it is not representative and does not allow for generalisation. Thirdly, since the survey launched in 2021, on which the study is based, was answered by a group of highly qualified women, it is not representative and does not allow for generalisation. Given that the two main groups are women technicians, directors, or managers, the results of this study tend to reflect mainly the perspective of this profile of women. Finally, it will be necessary to carry out a longitudinal analysis in future research. However, this exploratory study identifies, through women's perceptions, the main discriminations at work and suggests the importance of relating the impact of working time management to the work-life balance of employees, particularly women, as well as assessing its impact on women's careers. This aspect should be explored in future research.

4. Conclusions

Working time has become one of the main elements of social welfare policies, and an important subject is its reduction, which is associated with well-being indicators and decent work. The literature has assessed the impact of long hours on workers' health and safety, wages, and work-family reconciliation but has not sought, at least in a direct way, to understand whether long working hours are a major cause of gender inequality at work.

In view of the increase in long working hours in several countries—including Portugal—in recent years, it is also important to highlight the crucial role of labour law in reducing working time, particularly by strengthening legal solutions to ensure gender equality at work and a balance between professional activity and personal and family lives. It should be noted that working time is a fundamental factor not only for the organisation of employees' personal and family lives but also for their performance. In particular, a worker's availability for a given normal work period is based mainly on how he/she organises his/her personal life (including not only time off work, but also leisure time) and family (i.e., his/her availability to fulfil his/her family responsibilities).

It will be necessary to study whether discrimination against women at work and in their careers will be accentuated as a result of this situation. This study shows that 63.9% of women say they feel discriminated against at work and that the majority of these women (65.74%) had children. Furthermore, for these women, the main reasons for discrimination were threefold: gender stereotypes, having young children, and not having time available

for overtime. Of the majority of women who answered that discrimination was due to gender stereotypes, 66.7% had children. The main reasons for discrimination at work and in their careers were identified in the perceptions of women with work contracts. It was concluded that gender stereotypes and the desire to reconcile work and family life—with women unwilling to work beyond their working hours—were the main factors behind this discrimination. Both gender stereotypes and less willingness to work overtime were more associated with women with children.

Considering that gender stereotypes—through a generalised (and broad) view of a set of characteristics (or roles) attributed to women—it is an obligation to study the relationship between working time and equality at work. Gender stereotypes are specific when they limit women's ability to develop their professional careers and how, in most cases, women are associated with taking on family responsibilities and, as such, have less time available to work.

As mentioned, this study had several limitations. However, this exploratory study identifies, through women's perceptions, the main discriminations at work and suggests the importance of relating the impact of working time to the work-life balance of employees, particularly women, as well as assessing its impact on women's careers. Debates on working time should be related to the design and implementation of public policies and the regulation (by law or collective bargaining) of working time, seeking to respond to the problem of the intensification of work. The impact of overtime on equality between women and men must be assessed, particularly when women have children and are trying to reconcile work and family life.

In companies where overtime is usually practiced, there will be greater inequality between women and men at work and greater difficulties for women in gaining access to senior positions. Furthermore, understanding the under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions implies relating it to the study of the organisation of working time—and overtime—and the possibility for workers with family responsibilities to reconcile work and family life. Future research should focus on this topic. We recommend that it is necessary to study this relationship, as it implies effective gender equality at work and improved working conditions for all. As this article demonstrates, the purpose of reducing working hours is not only associated with the benefits of job creation but also with policies promoting gender equality at work. The study of the relationship between overtime and gender equality at work should be developed in future research.

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