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in Couples

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Working hours and Work-Life Balance Satisfaction in Couples

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Over the past several years, many studies have highlighted the strategic nature of working hours, the way they are determined, their regularity and their predictability to judge the qualities of a job and how family life and work life are reconciled. Our results confirm those obtained by previous studies and clarify them, while also showing that both the working hours of the persons questioned and those of their spouse constitute a central variable. We will first review the results from the available French studies and then demonstrate how couples' working hours influence their work-life balance satisfaction.

Working hours and work-life balance satisfaction

Results from recent studies

There are relatively few French studies allowing us to measure and explain the work-life balance satisfaction or dissatisfaction or the conflicts between work and family life, and all of these studies are recent.

Nevertheless, this concerns a main issue: we know that having too many difficulties in work-life balance can be a reason to temporarily or definitively stop working, as shown by a study carried out in 2003 on 1,000 women who had ceased working after the birth of their children [Méda and al., 2003]. When asked for the reasons why they interrupted their professional activity, almost three fourths of the women indicated that work conditions had been a key factor in their choices, half of the women also indicated that it was "too complicated" to continue working, 40% mentioned that their working hours were incompatible with having a child, almost a third said it was impossible to rearrange their working hours, and one out of five complained that work conditions were too difficult. Above all, an analysis of the characteristics of the representative women having stopped their professional activity showed that half of these people regularly worked with staggered hours (working before 7 am or after 6 pm), more than one third regularly worked on Saturdays or Sundays and less than half never worked on weekends. Moreover, half of them considered their working hours to be inconvenient.

The decisive role of working hours

A study carried out by the INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) in 2003 entitled *Histoire de vie-Construction des identités* confirmed the decisive role of working hours played in the existence of difficulties in work-life balance. When asked "Do you think that your job (hours, location, and organization) makes it difficult to organize your family life?" almost 40% of the working people questioned responded affirmatively [Garner and al., 2004 and 2005]. This study found that the main determinants for difficulties were working in the private sector and being an independent worker, the presence of young children in the household, being under 35 and, above all, the role of working hours: "The fact that independent workers and executives are among the most numerous to declare having problems with their work-life balance, as a certain number of people working in very specific professions such as direct personal service and retail employees, can be explained in a large part by these peoples "atypical" hours (and by the combination of several types of atypical hours: long working days, work on Saturdays and Sundays, working nights and business trips)."

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The more atypical the hours were the more they expressed job dissatisfaction and found it difficult to articulate family life and work. It was those with the most fluctuating hours, mainly executives, who indicated work-life balance difficulties. The same study also showed that although voluntary working part-time reduced the problems with work-life balance (thus confirming certain international studies that highlighted the fact that British women satisfaction at work increased when they worked part-time [Booth and van Ours, 2007]) but involuntary part-time increased these problems.

Finally, this study enabled to move forward in the explanatory role of couple working hours: it appears that men having a working wife found it harder to articulate work and family life than men with a stay-at-home wife and that are the same for men having a wife who worked full time rather than part-time.

Work time reduction: what effect?

We have long known that work time reduction (WTR) does not mechanically improve work-life balance or time spent with children or spouses, and that the "freed" time is not automatically transformed into quality time. The quality of the transformation actually depends not only on the quantity of time freed, but also on the quality of this time (are these moments particularly useful? Do they occur when the children are in school, when stores are opened...?). The method for determining these moments must also be questioned (was the employee able to make his point of view count? How was the WTR determined? Is the time off regular, predictable...?) And, more generally, what are the modalities of work time organization [Silvera and al., 1998].

Two studies specifically dedicated to WTR and its effects on different dimensions of work life and outside work life gave important results. The oldest one, entitled *RTT et modes de vie*, which was carried out in 2001 with full time employees who experienced WTR implemented under the regime of the Aubry I law, showed that reconciling work life and family life had improved since WTR was implemented for one third of those questioned : 32% of the men and 38% of the women declared that work-life balance had become easier since WTR was implemented, half of the fathers and over 60% of the mothers with children under twelve spent more time with their children [Méda and Orain, 2002; Cette and al., 2004 and 2005]. More generally, this study showed that 60% of employees questioned considered that their daily lives improved, 13% of them considered that it worsened. Women with children under twelve who, given the sample construction, worked full time, turned out to be the most satisfied with this new work organization, and it was demonstrated that the traditional allocation of chores between men and women was most modified when the men obtained WTR and not the women, the men in these situations doubtlessly found themselves obliged to do their share of domestic and family chores. We were also able to demonstrate, through an analysis of the employees' WTR satisfaction (controlling other variables), that this increased particularly when the working hours were predictable, the evolution of the hours being predictable since the implementation of WTR, the employees' autonomy in the determination of their working hours and that it decreased with atypical hours.

Another study, which was carried out in 2000 on a sample having at least one child under 6 confirmed this information [Fagnani and Letablier, 2003]. 60% of the parents concerned by the 35-hour week law responded affirmatively to the question: "Do you think that the law on the 35-hour week enabled you to better articulate your family life with your work life?" The study confirmed that the way work was organized was more important than the personal characteristics of the employee in making his judgment on the effect of WTR. It demonstrated that parents' appreciation varied greatly depending on whether or not they had atypical hours: 65% of parents having fixed and regular hours thought that WTR improved their daily lives as compared to half of those who had atypical hours. This is also the case when the employer respected the notice period in effect, more than six out of ten employees expressed satisfaction as compared to only 37% when this was not the case. The study thus validated three hypotheses:

- 1) The level of WTR satisfaction is higher when the organization of work is regular and the hours are controllable and predictable.
- 2) The way job flexibility was negotiated between the employee and the employer plays a larger role in determining the employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction than the job flexibility in and of itself.
- 3) The law reveals inequalities in the domain of work organization between, on one hand, employees working in "protected" sectors, that are highly regulated and have a strong tradition of social dialogue as well as a favorable environment for families and, on the other hand, other employees subjected to more restrictive forms of work organization.

Other studies that are based on less numerous samples, that are qualitative in nature and that do not specifically address the question of work-life balance had shown that the organization of work time, a central concern for employees' appreciation, led many of them to give a mixed judgment on WTR when it degraded the regularity of their working hours or made their daily organization more complex [see Charpentier and al., 2005].

To sum up, the main message of these studies is that the appreciation of WTR as regards work-life balance or daily life certainly depends on the employee's personal characteristics, especially the socio-professional category to which they belong to and their family organization, but it is very dependent upon the way their work was organized after WTR was implemented.

These are the results that the INED (French National Institute of Demographic Studies) *Familles et employeurs* study clarified and completed, by characterizing the dimensions of satisfaction towards work-life balance, and by taking into consideration, beyond individual opinions, the opinions of both members of the couple: what role do working hours play in the satisfaction individuals get from their work and more particularly as regards to work-life balance? Do the variations of the latter depend on having experienced WTR or not, or is the organization of working hours more important than their actual duration? Does the working time organization in the spouse's workplace modify individual appreciation?

Job and Work life-balance satisfaction

In the *Familles et employeurs* study, two questions relate directly to the individual and subjective perception to their work and the conditions of work-life balance (see boxed text 1). The answers supplied by the individuals, who express their level of satisfaction in relation to different items characterizing both their jobs and their work-life balance perception, make a global level of satisfaction emerge and create a link between the characteristics of work and work-life balance satisfaction. The use of this subjective data certainly poses the problem of "interpretation of the declared satisfaction, variable in essence, unobservable and subject to strong individual variations" [Sénik, 2002], but the coherence of the results obtained below along with those of other studies carried out on comparable subjects, allows us to consider them to be valid and interpretable results.

Boxed Text 1: questions used to analyze satisfaction

In order to analyze the determinants of satisfaction towards work and family life balance, we mobilized the answers to two questions that enable to determine the subjective judgment of the individuals.

Question F106: "Are you very satisfied, satisfied, slightly or not at all satisfied with your current job in terms of income, work interest, hours and reconciliation of family life and work life?"

We aggregated the 'slightly satisfied' and 'not at all satisfied' answers together for the dissatisfied category.

Question M1: "Do you completely agree, agree, do not really agree or do not agree at all with the following affirmations: My work and my family or personal life are often in conflict? My professional life helps me to have a satisfying family life? My family or private life helps me to have a successful, well balanced professional life?" For the first question, we aggregated the answers 'completely agree' and 'agree' and for the next two questions we aggregated the answers 'do not really agree' and 'completely disagree'. Indeed, the interpretation of the answer to the first question must be the opposite of the following answers interpretations, 'agreeing' with the notion of conflict meaning that the individual expresses dissatisfaction. All of the results presented below are weighted using a standardized weighting variable representative of the sample.

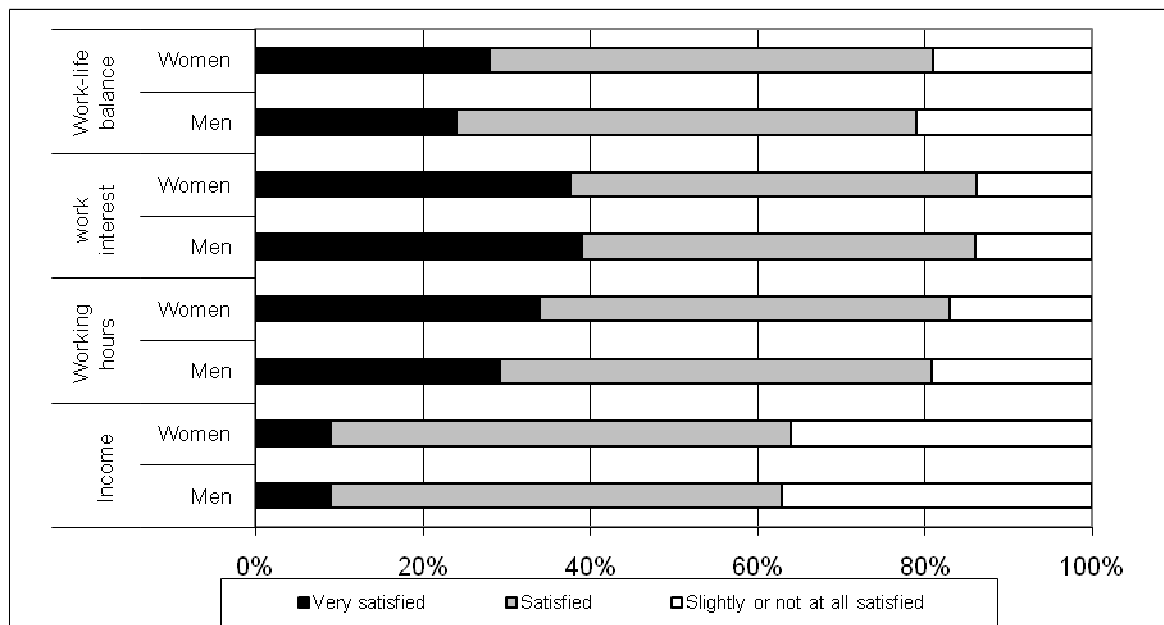
Factors influencing individual job satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Job satisfaction (question F106) is analyzed in terms of income, hours, interest and work-life balance. According to these dimensions, 65% to 85% of those questioned declared to be satisfied or very satisfied with their current jobs with rather small differences between men and women. Nevertheless, women appear to be more satisfied on average with their current job and their hours and their work-life balance (figure 1) - results frequently highlighted in studies analyzing job satisfaction [Clark, 1997] and confirmed by comparable tests of proportions. They also acknowledge the influence of their professional lives on their family lives more than men (figure 2).

As in most studies where individuals are questioned about their subjective perception, the level of satisfaction is globally high. This can notably be explained by a “social desirability bias”, the unsatisfied people tending to self censure themselves [Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2001], because satisfaction can hide a form of resignation, especially for women [Davoine, 2007].

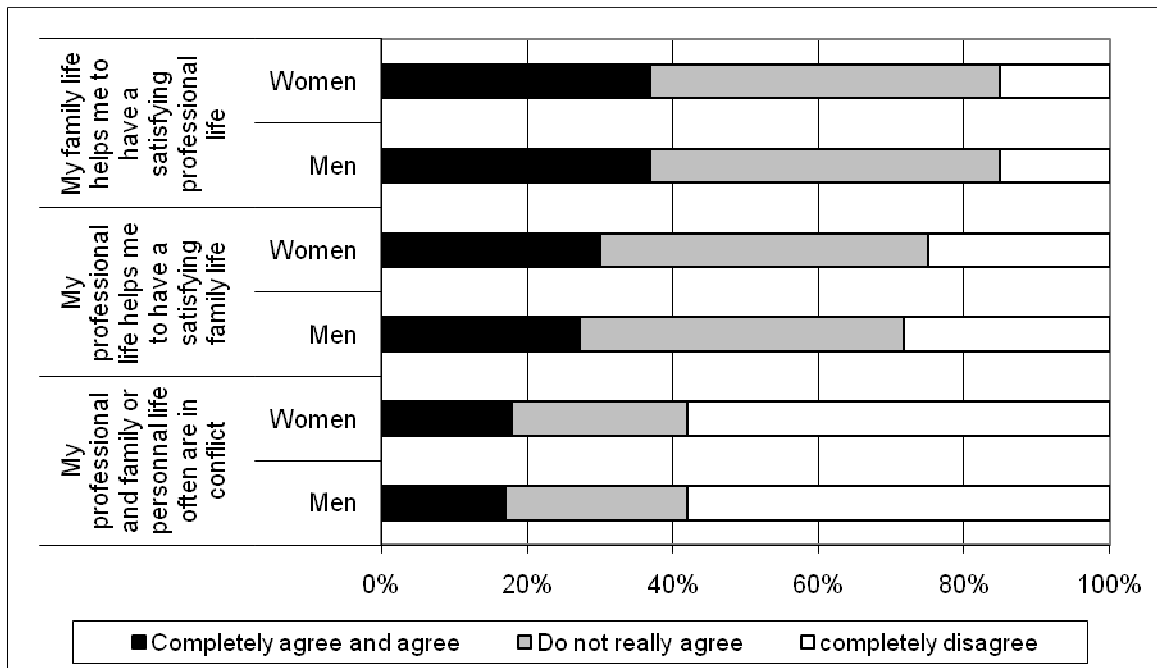
We thus observe that the items 'satisfied' receive the majority of responses, an uncertain opinion that is difficult to interpret. This is why we will essentially concentrate on the 'very satisfied' and 'dissatisfied'. Concerning the perception of conflict between professional life and family life, the responses show that it is present in 17% to 18% of the cases (figure 2).

Figure 1. – Satisfaction in relation to the current job



Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

Figure 2 – Perception of conflict between family life and professional life



Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

Among the items retained by the study to analyze satisfaction, that which concerns work-life balance has proven to be central in determining the individuals' global satisfaction (boxed text 2 and figure 3). For this particular dimension, 24% of men declare to be very satisfied as compared to 28% of women, while the dissatisfaction rate is 21% for men and 19% for women. Figure 3 enables to observe gaps in these averages, related to variables in gender, age, status, socio-professional category and the presence of children.

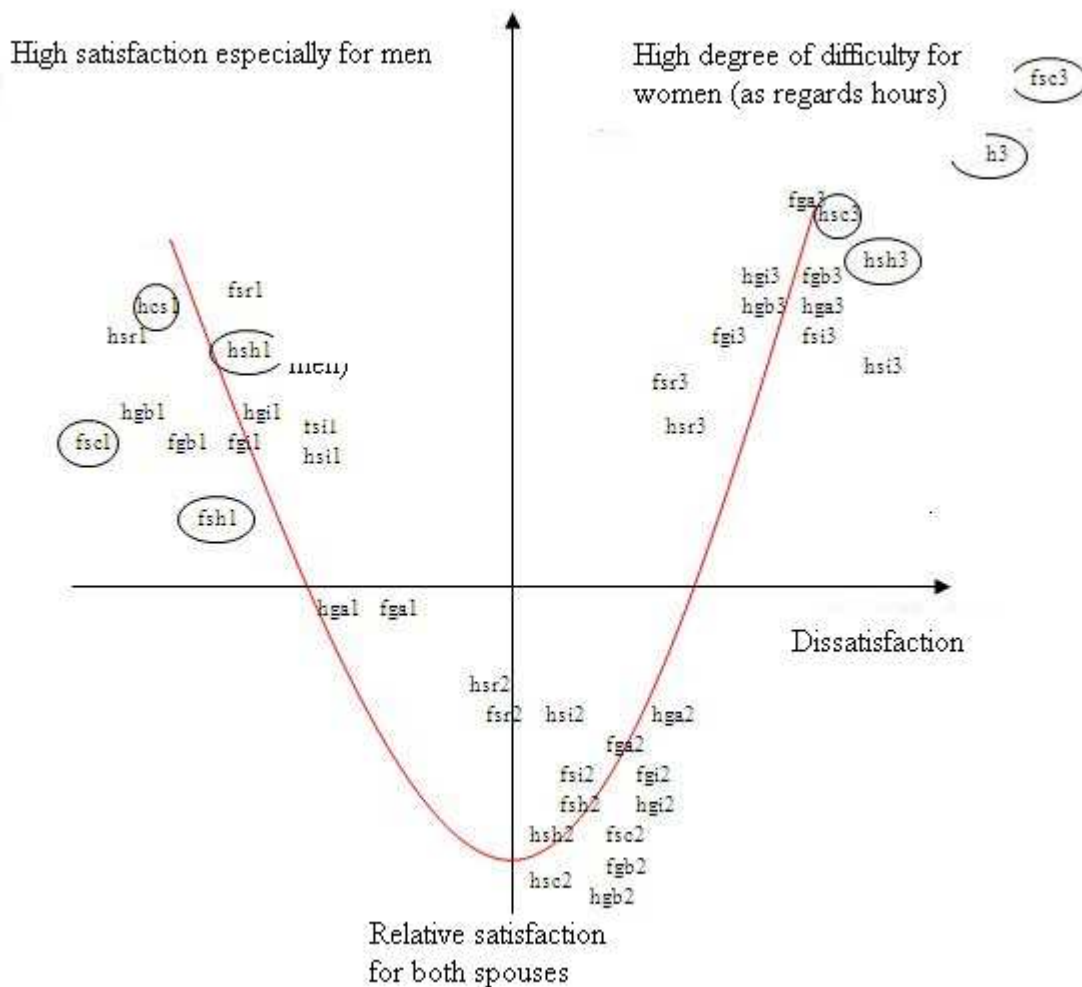
Working in the public sector appears to have a positive influence on work-life balance (figure 4a). We can observe this for both men and women. On average 34% of them declare to be very satisfied (+9 points in relation to the average for men, +6 points for women). Conversely, those who work in the private sector are the least likely to be satisfied, the effect being more pronounced for men. Finally, having an independent worker status has a strong effect on men dissatisfaction (27%, +6 points).

Moreover, young employees (between 25 and 30) build the category in which are found the most dissatisfaction concerning work-life balance (dissatisfaction rate over 26%, +6 points), which can be explained by the difficult conditions of insertion into the labor market, as well as by the presence of young children. Work-life balance then improves with age, as these obligations lessen, (figure 4b).

We do nonetheless observe a certain erosion of satisfaction after the age of 40, which allows us to assume that there exists a U curve between age and satisfaction, especially for men.

The influence of the presence of young children (figure 4b) is expressed through a rise in dissatisfaction for women having a child under three (24%, +5 points) and by the fact that parents of children over 12 are globally less dissatisfied (16.5%, -3.5 points). This can be linked to the low autonomy of children under three and the lack of childcare options before this age, which could lead the mothers to stop working.

Figure 3. – Gender satisfaction
(Dimension 1 x dimension 2)



Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.

Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

Key:

h: designates men's satisfaction variables f: women's satisfaction variables.

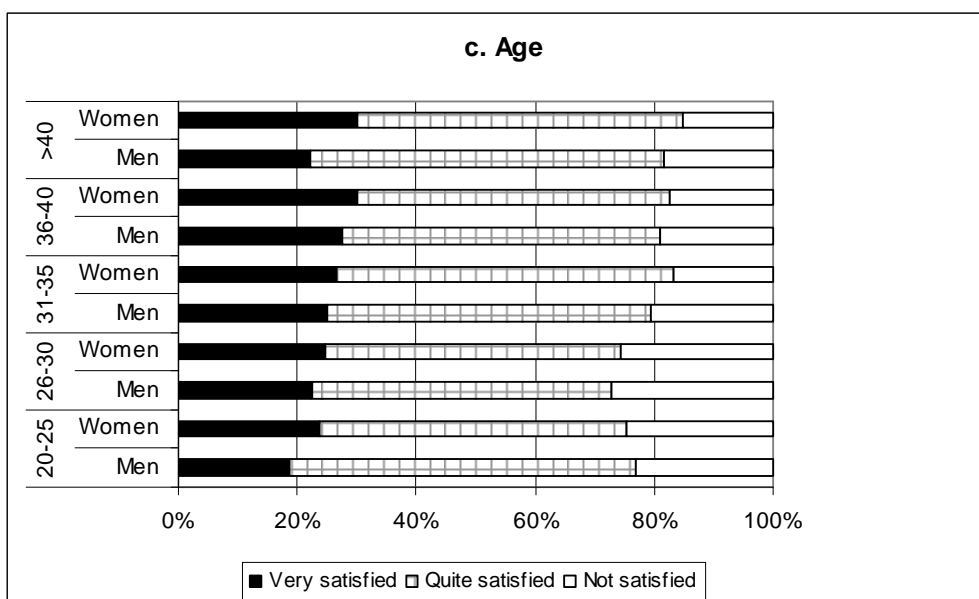
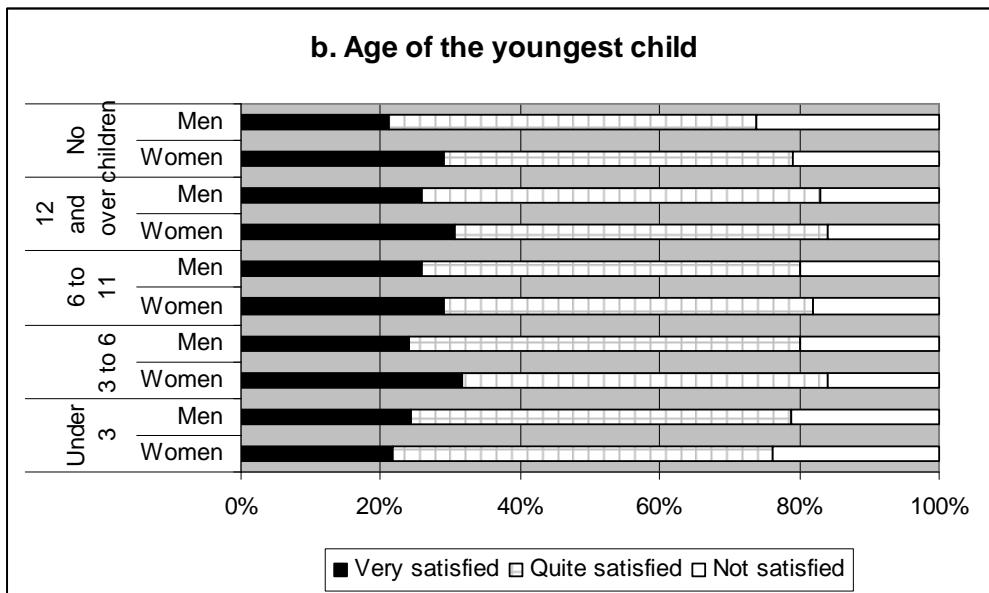
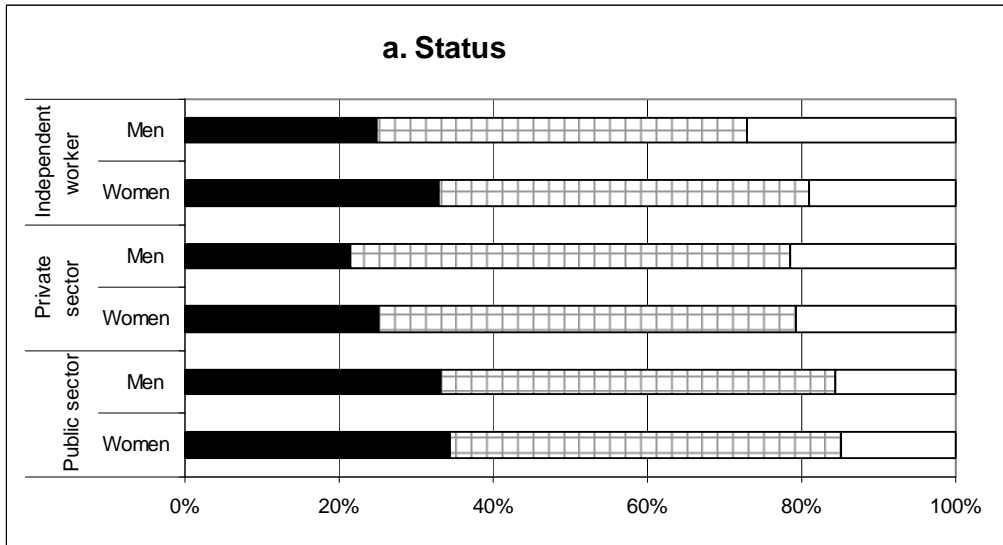
sr: satisfaction income; sh: satisfaction hours; si: satisfaction work interest; sc: satisfaction reconciliation

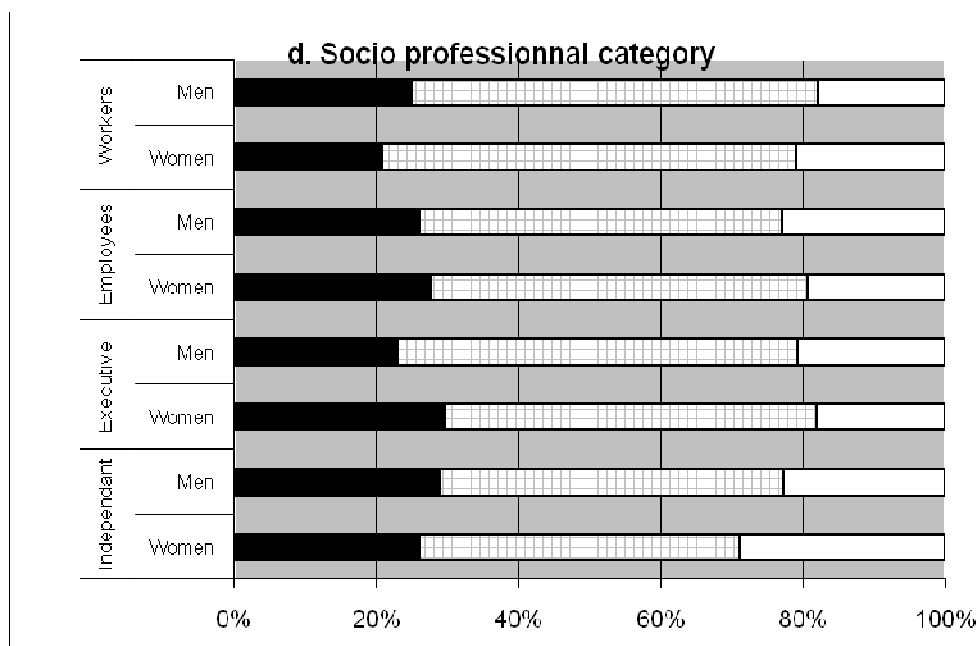
ga: family life and work life conflict; gb: effect of work life on family life; gi: effect of family life on work life

The variables fcs1, fcs3, fsh1 and fsh3 all belong to the group of the 10 most distinguishable variables, out of a total of 52 active variables.

It is surprising to observe that men without children are the most dissatisfied with their conditions of work-life balance, with a 26% dissatisfaction rate (+5 points). This highlights an inherent limit to subjective questions on work-life balance, which seems to have different significations for different individuals, especially concerning the time dedicated to children for certain households and free time for others; and confirms the results of the *Histoire de vie — Construction des identités* study in which over 30% of the individuals without children declared having difficulty articulating family life and work life.

Figure 4 – Work-life balance satisfaction: Individuals’ subjective perception according to status, socio-professional category, age and the presence of young children in the household.





Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
 Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

The effect of the socio-professional category (figure 4d) is the hardest to discern, since it is probable that differences exist within a single category, notably in terms of working hours and especially the choice of hours, some enjoying relative freedom in the organization of their work schedules while others are subjected to atypical or long working hours that strongly restrain the available time they have for family life.

Role of working time organization

As mentioned, previous studies on matters of satisfaction indicate that the organization of working time has a very pronounced effect on work-life balance satisfaction (which is also suggested by our own analyses, see boxed text 2). It is clear that life outside work is restrained by the time taken up by professional obligations, which are more and more atypical and determined in an exogenous manner, often without taking the employees' family responsibilities into consideration [Tremblay, 2004]. It is the reason why it is interesting to study the manner in which organizing hours influences individuals' satisfaction as regards to work-life balance.

Working hours, whether or not these hours are regular, the method with which they are determined and their typicality are this study main variables, that enable to characterize the organization of working hours (see annex 1). Laurent Lesnard [2006] showed, using the results from the INSEE *Emploi du temps* study, that the duration of work and its distribution throughout the day could be defined as four types of hours: standard working hours (almost 55% of hours worked) and atypical hours, meaning staggered hours (17%), extensive hours (12%) and irregular hours (17%). As regards to atypical hours, they have been developing for twenty years with clearly identified social characteristics: flexible hours are reserved for workers and employees and extensive (long) but relatively regular hours for executives and independent workers.

In the *Familles et employeurs* study, these different types of hours are correlated with the satisfaction towards reconciliation (annex 1). The most dissatisfied women are those who work alternating hours (2x8, 3x8...) (33%, +14 points in relation to women on average), and those who have extensive hours (40 hours or more; 28%, +9 points). The most satisfied women, on the other hand, are those working part-time (36%, +8 points) and those having flexi-time hours (39%, +11 points). As for the men, the most dissatisfied are those working atypical hours (extensive, alternating, working nights, etc.; 30%, +9 points).

These results confirm those of the *Histoire de vie — Construction des identités* study, in which the difficulties were strongly tied to working atypical hours. Benefiting from WTR does not appear to significantly modify the satisfaction rate of the persons questioned; women benefiting from WTR do, however have a slightly higher rate of satisfaction towards work-life balance (+4 points). These results, which minimize the impact of WTR on employee's work-life balance satisfaction, must be put into context. Firstly, they are not directly comparable to those who were questioned in previous studies because, as opposed to those ones, the people were not questioned about their satisfaction towards WTR, but rather more generally about their general job satisfaction. We must also consider the fact that WTR, in most cases, was implemented several years ago and therefore those questioned may well have forgotten the changes it brought about in their lifestyles at that time. Nevertheless, its result is important: it reinforces the idea mentioned above, according to which it is indeed the organization of work time that determines employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and that WTR is, as it were absorbed by this dimension. The minimal effect of WTR can be explained either by the fact that it is not accompanied by a significant improvement in work time organization or by the fact that the benefits of WTR, if they ever existed, have been absorbed or forgotten.

Working hours cross effects

One of the most interesting things about the *Familles et employeurs* study on work-life balance satisfaction is considering the answers from both members of the couple. We can thus analyze whether or not the satisfaction of one spouse is linked to that of the other and whether these conjugal configurations in terms of organizing working hours reinforce or reduce options within the household.

An analysis of the variables characterizing the cross spouses statuses and the similarity – or, contrarily, the dissimilarity – of their working hours thus suggests that the organization of a spouse's work time plays an important role in determining individual satisfaction (annex 1 and figure 5), notably when the spouses' hours are not similar: the spouse with the least restrictive hours then declares a high level of satisfaction. The lowest level of satisfaction is found in couples that cumulate atypical, irregular and non-adaptable hours.

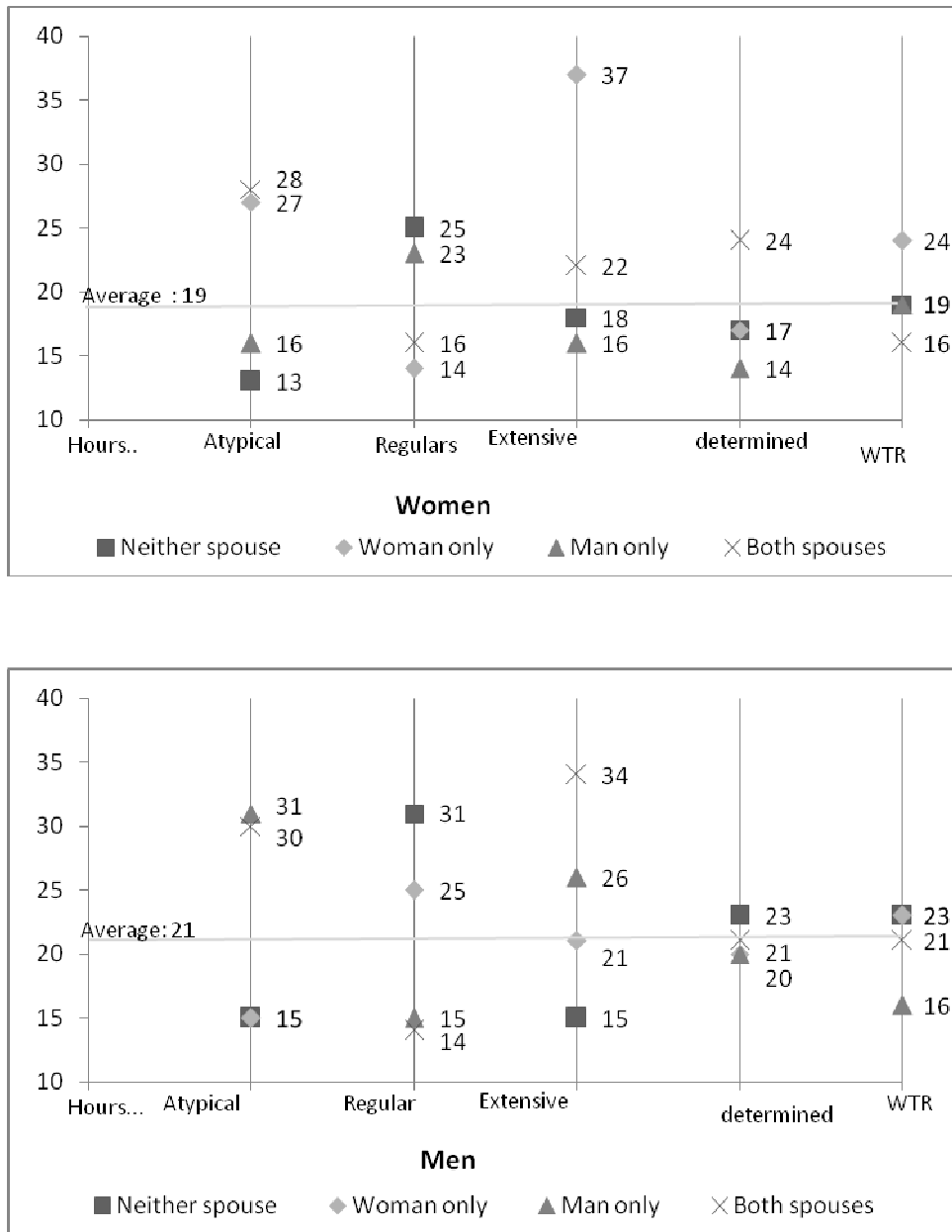
Concerning women, the highest dissatisfaction rate is reached when they, alone, have extensive hours (37%, +18 points), while for men, this occurs when both spouses work over 40 hours per week (34%, +13 points). For both spouses, accumulating obligations in terms of hours seems to accentuate dissatisfaction, the maximum being reached for men when their spouses also work irregular hours (31%, +10 points), and for women when both spouses work atypical hours (28%, +9 points). In several cases, there is also less dissatisfaction in couples in which both spouses have flexible hours as compared to those in which only one of the spouses does: thus is the case for women when neither spouse has atypical hours (13%, -6 points) and for men when both spouses have regular hours (14%, -7 points) and when neither spouse has extensive hours (15%, -6 points).

On the contrary, the most satisfied couples are those in which both spouses work in the public sector (38%, +10 points for women, +14 points for men), as well as those couples in which both spouses work under 40 hours per week and choose their own hours. The scores attained in these two cases are superior to individual scores corresponding to a situation in which only the individual benefits from hours close to "standard" organization. Couples in which both spouses have hours determined by the employer (-7 points for women, -2 points for men) and in which neither spouse has regular hours (-4 points for women, -6

points for men) generate less satisfaction.

By taking the satisfaction of both spouses into account, the effect of WTR can appear to be counter-intuitive, knowing that women who are the only beneficiaries appear to be more dissatisfied (+5 points), and that their dissatisfaction decreased when both spouses are able to take WTR (-3 points). We can also advance the hypothesis that for women, the freed time is considered to be an excess of domestic and familial work when they are the only beneficiaries [Brousse, 1999; chapters 5 and 7], and is considered to be more a factor of improvement in work-life balance when their spouse also has free time to help them or even that the freed time is less attractive when it cannot be transformed into free time to be shared with their spouse. Thus, certain conjugal configurations appear to reinforce or attenuate individual situations. These preliminary results must be consolidated by taking into consideration cross configurations controlling the others variables.

Figure 5 – Variations on the level of individual’s dissatisfaction linked to the organization of the couples’ working hours



Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

Determinants of work-life balance dissatisfaction

Using models controlling all the variables enables us to measure the singular effect of each one on work-life balance dissatisfaction. By proceeding like that, we can avoid the risk of falsifying the analysis due to interdependence between the variables studied. As we have shown, it is interesting to simultaneously study the effects of individual variables and cross conjugal configurations. The individual control variables concern the age, the number and the age of children and the highest degree passed. Employment is categorized by individuals' socio-professional category, company size, part-time work (for women), and the type of work contract (permanent contract or other). The variables of interest concerning the couple are the salary presented in three categories: the status, the working conditions and the working hours (regular hours, atypical hours, and the possibility of determining one's own hours, extensive hours - over 40 hours a week - and whether or not they benefit from WTR).

As to clarify the size of the effects and to highlight the configurations with the most difficulties in work-life balance, we used a binary probit model with the variable to explain work-life balance dissatisfaction expressed in the 'slightly satisfied' or 'dissatisfied' response modalities. Remember that close to 19% of women and 21% of men declare to be 'slightly satisfied' or 'dissatisfied'; this difference is also verified if we control the other variables. This last result concurs with one of the results from the *Histoire de vie — Construction des identités* survey. In this survey, a greater number of men found that work-life balance was difficult; this judgment was considered to be paradoxical since the majority of familial chores are done by women. The explanations advanced suggest that "either the men, less often confronted with reconciliation problems, tend to exaggerate the problems, and, although they take on less chores, they consider the one's they do to be difficult, or they group elements of their personal lives having nothing to do with childcare into the term family life" [Garner and al., 2005]. We should mention the possibility of a selection effect among the plausible explanations. The population questioned was only composed of the employees, and the women in this group who perceived or could have perceived the most difficulty in work-life balance were doubtlessly less numerous (having stopped working).

The analysis of women's difficulties (figure 6) shows that the individual variables hardly effect work-life balance dissatisfaction (with the exception of the age of the youngest child) while the working hours and the organization of work time have a strong incidence: the probability of dissatisfaction is estimated at 36% (16% on average) if the woman alone has extensive hours or 22% if both spouses do, 28% if the hours are atypical (the woman or both spouses), 22% if the couple or the woman has irregular hours and 8% if the woman alone benefits from flexi-time. Part-time work is also one of the significant modalities of less dissatisfaction (12%) – also see Booth and van Ours [2005 and 2007], who highlight, using English and Australian data, that working part-time significantly increases women's work satisfaction. The presence of children aged three to six allows better articulation between work and family life than does the presence of children under three (10% dissatisfaction as compared to an estimated value of 16%), which leads to the so-called "nursery school effect", particular to France [Périer, 2004], and the dissatisfaction is minimal when the couple has no children (8%). The effect of working in the public sector has been confirmed, with an estimated dissatisfaction probability inferior to 10% and 11% if both spouses work in the public sector or if only the woman does. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the spouse also plays a significant role (35% are dissatisfied if their spouse is dissatisfied). Finally, when only the woman WTR, it appears that reconciliation is more problematic than in cases where neither spouse has WTR (21% dissatisfaction); one would assume that domestic chores are then done only by women.

Concerning work-life balance, men's satisfaction rates depend more on working hours than on individual variables. Their rate of dissatisfaction rises to 29% if the man alone works with atypical hours and 26% when both spouses do (as compared to an estimated value of 18%), 32% if both spouses have irregular hours, 28% when only the man does, 35% if both spouses have extensive hours and 30% when only the man does. Furthermore, when only the man works in the private sector, his rate of dissatisfaction reaches

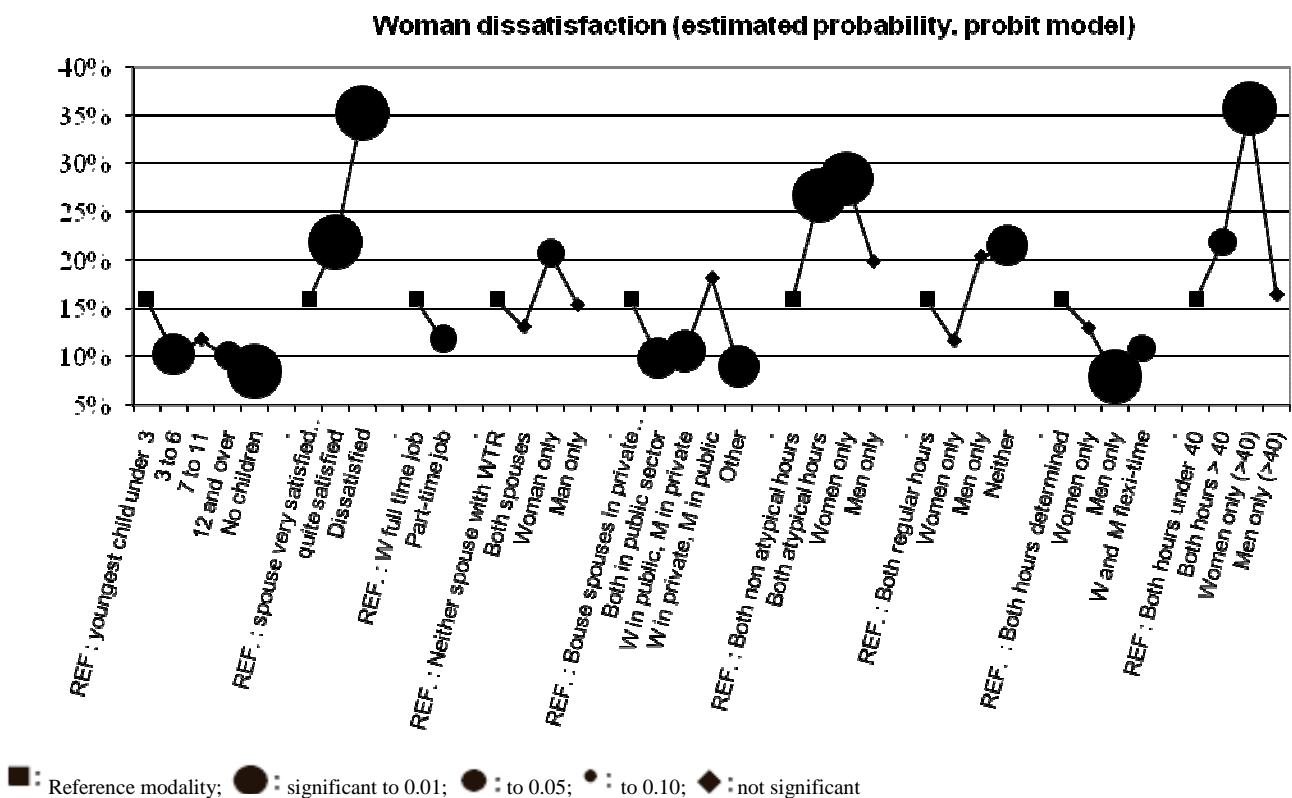
23%, and, as previously, men's rate of dissatisfaction is the highest when their spouses are also dissatisfied (35%).

Thus, for both spouses, work time organization is central in explaining work-life balance dissatisfaction, much more than socio-demographic variables. In both cases, individual configurations in which they alone are subjected to trying hours and also crisscrossed configurations in which these disadvantages (or advantages) cumulate are pertinent. Furthermore, the analysis of the extent of these effects (extent statistically validated by testing the equality of coefficients or by trends) shows that numerous effects are higher for modalities concerning both spouses as compared to those only concerning individuals: the regularity of hours, atypical hours, long hours and status for men; extensive hours and WTR for women (in the case of the latter, the individual effect is more important). It therefore appears that there is a particular effect to the couple that taking the other spouse's working hours into consideration reinforces the individual effects (it is more difficult to reconcile work and family life when the spouse also works difficult hours than when only one spouse does). The fact that the spouse dissatisfaction is a determinant variable in his own satisfaction for both men and women reinforces this result (raising dissatisfaction by 15 percentage points for men and 19 percentage points for women, it is practically the strongest effect in both cases).

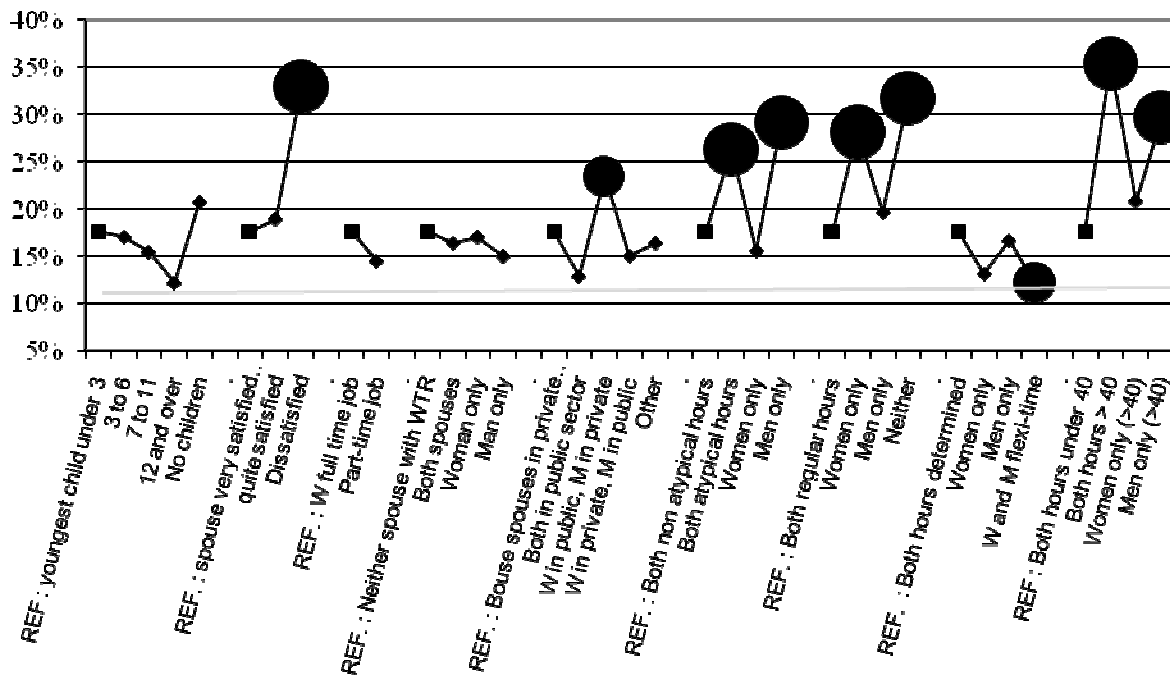
In order to confirm the existence of the effects linked to the couples' satisfaction, we can also calculate the predicted probability of dissatisfaction in certain extreme situations. Thus, the average probability for dissatisfaction obtained when the man alone works non-standard hours (no WTR, irregular hours, atypical hours, no flexi-time and excessive hours) is 34% on average while it noticeably increases if both spouses accumulate these situations (63.5%).

This is the same for women with averages of 25% in the first case and 57.5% in the second case respectively. The influence of the couples' individual situation, as previously highlighted, is thus reinforced by this result: for both men and women, the estimated probability of dissatisfaction, in the case where the individual is the only one disadvantaged as compared to both members of the couple, is lower.

Figure 6. – Determination of dissatisfaction regarding work-life balance



Man dissatisfaction (estimated probability, probit model)



Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

Example reading: the modalities of individual variables such as age, highest diploma received, socio-professional category and company size have no significant effect on women’s dissatisfaction vis-à-vis work-life balance and thus were deleted from the graph to enhance readability. We can see that, in relation to the reference situation that leads to an estimated probability of 16%, if the couple has atypical rather than non-atypical hours, the probability rises to 27%.

Conclusion

The main results presented here confirm and enrich those of previous studies, by taking into account the effects of individual variables and different conjugal configurations on work-life balance satisfaction.

They are organized into 2 main dimensions.

First, the organization of working hours has a determinant and major effect on individuals’ satisfaction, with strong amplitude for women: the fact to have atypical hours (regularly working on evenings, nights or weekend), long hours (over 40 hours per week), irregular hours or hours determined by the employer distinctly increase dissatisfaction. On the contrary, working in the public sector encourages satisfaction. Moreover, women with very young children (under three) who are confronted to complexities and obligations of childcare options have greater difficulty with their work-life balance, especially when they work full time. Being the only spouse with work time reduction (WTR) does not systematically improve women’s work-life balance satisfaction since they probably find themselves alone with the domestic chores. As for men, the absence of children is not a favorable factor for better articulation between work and family life.

Secondly, taking conjugal configurations of working hours and organization into account reinforces or diminishes individual effects of work-life balance satisfaction. In particular, it is more difficult to articulate work and family life when the spouse also works long hours (over 40 per week) than when one is alone in this situation. There exist two individual configurations that, on the contrary, reinforce dissatisfaction: cases where the woman alone has work time reduction (WTR) or when the man alone works in the private sector.

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Annex 1. – Men and women’s satisfaction and dissatisfaction vis-à-vis reconciling family and work life and the organization of working hours (in %)

| | Frequency | | Proportion of slightly satisfied or dissatisfied | | Proportion of very satisfied | |
|--|-----------|----|--|----|------------------------------|----|
| | M | W | M | W | M | W |
| Number of hours weekly | | | | | | |
| Less than 35 hours | 6 | 34 | 15 | 13 | 37 | 36 |
| 35 hours | 24 | 25 | 15 | 22 | 28 | 25 |
| 36 to 39 hours | 25 | 22 | 15 | 18 | 29 | 24 |
| 40 hours and more | 45 | 19 | 28 | 28 | 18 | 22 |
| Regularity of hours | | | | | | |
| The same every day | 52 | 58 | 14 | 15 | 29 | 31 |
| Alternating: 2x8, 3x8, teams, brigades... | | | | | | |
| Varies day to day | 29 | 27 | 29 | 23 | 22 | 27 |
| Varies week to week | 7 | 9 | 25 | 23 | 20 | 24 |
| Method for determining working hours | | | | | | |
| Determined by the employer with | | | | | | |
| no possibility for modification | 55 | 59 | 20 | 22 | 22 | 24 |
| Choice between fixed hours | 8 | 11 | 13 | 17 | 35 | 30 |
| Flexi-time | 9 | 12 | 18 | 12 | 31 | 39 |
| Determined by the person | | | | | | |
| Other cases | 2 | 3 | 24 | 25 | 20 | 26 |
| Atypical hours | | | | | | |
| Yes | 39 | 39 | 30 | 27 | 19 | 21 |
| No | 61 | 61 | 15 | 14 | 28 | 33 |
| Benefits from WTR | | | | | | |
| Yes | 47 | 40 | 19 | 19 | 25 | 32 |
| No | 53 | 60 | 23 | 19 | 23 | 23 |

Variables “couple”:

| | | | | | | |
|---|----|--|----|----|----|----|
| Couples’ employment status | | | | | | |
| Both spouses work in the public | 47 | | 14 | 13 | 38 | 38 |
| Both spouses work in the private | 10 | | 20 | 21 | 22 | 24 |
| Woman only in the public sector | 17 | | 20 | 16 | 25 | 31 |
| Man only | 10 | | 18 | 22 | 29 | 23 |
| One spouse is an independent | 15 | | 26 | 17 | 26 | 36 |
| WTR within the couple | | | | | | |
| Both spouses | | | | | | |
| Woman only | 17 | | 23 | 24 | 21 | 22 |
| Man only | 24 | | 16 | 19 | 23 | 31 |
| Neither spouse | 36 | | 23 | 19 | 27 | 32 |
| Atypical hours | | | | | | |
| Both spouses | 18 | | 30 | 28 | 20 | 21 |
| Woman only | 21 | | 15 | 27 | 29 | 20 |
| Man only | 21 | | 31 | 16 | 18 | 35 |
| Neither spouse | 40 | | 15 | 13 | 27 | 32 |
| Regular hours (the same every day) | | | | | | |
| Both spouses | 32 | | 14 | 16 | 29 | 29 |
| Woman only | 26 | | 25 | 14 | 20 | 33 |
| Man only | 19 | | 15 | 23 | 30 | 25 |
| Neither spouse | 23 | | 31 | 25 | 18 | 24 |
| Extensive hours (>=40 hours per week) | | | | | | |
| Both spouses | 12 | | 34 | 22 | 16 | 24 |
| Woman only | 7 | | 21 | 37 | 27 | 20 |
| Man only | 33 | | 26 | 16 | 19 | 33 |
| Neither spouse | 48 | | 15 | 18 | 30 | 27 |
| Hours determined by the employer | | | | | | |
| Both spouses | 37 | | 21 | 24 | 22 | 21 |
| Woman only | 21 | | 20 | 17 | 27 | 27 |
| Man only | 17 | | 20 | 14 | 23 | 31 |
| Neither spouse | 25 | | 23 | 17 | 27 | 37 |

Source: *Familles et employeurs* study, INED, 2004-2005.
Field: Dual-earner couples (close to 1,950 couples).

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