

# Egalitarian Ideals and Traditional Plans: Analysis of First-time Parents in Spain

*Ideales igualitarios y planes tradicionales: análisis de parejas primerizas en España*

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## Key words

- Child Care
- Gender Equality
- Income
- Motherhood
- Couple
- Paternity
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## Palabras clave

- Cuidado de los hijos
- Igualdad de género
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## Abstract

This study analyses childcare plans among first-time parents, examining how gender attitudes, parenthood ideals and institutional limitations influence childcare plans. It is based on a sample of 68 dual-earner couples who were expecting their first child in 2011. The analysis reveals that most couples aim to maintain a dual-earner model after the transition to parenthood. However, when difficulties balancing work and family are anticipated, women continue to reveal a greater predisposition to develop "adaptive preferences" to meet childcare needs. Men, in contrast, exhibit much greater resistance to making important employment-related adjustments, due to their fear of being penalised in the workplace or to their particularly strong work orientation.

## Resumen

Esta investigación analiza los planes de cuidado del primer hijo en parejas, indagando en cómo influyen los ideales de maternidad/paternidad, las actitudes de género y las limitaciones institucionales en el proyecto de cuidado del bebé. El estudio se basa en una muestra de 68 parejas de doble ingreso que esperaban su primer hijo en el año 2011. El análisis revela que gran parte de las parejas aspira a que ambos cónyuges continúen trabajando después del parto. Sin embargo, en el caso de prever dificultades de conciliación, siguen siendo las mujeres quienes manifiestan una mayor predisposición a adaptar su vida laboral a las necesidades del menor, desarrollando en gran medida "preferencias adaptativas", mientras que los hombres muestran mayor resistencia a asumir ajustes importantes en su vida laboral por temor a ser penalizados en el trabajo o por su fuerte orientación laboral.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The starting point for this research is a current paradox in Spain today. Representative surveys show that young heterosexual couples that are in the process of forming families hold very egalitarian attitudes regarding the sexual division of labour (Naldini and Jurado, 2013), but the actual division of unpaid labour is still largely gender-based (Domínguez, 2010) and is a source of conflict and dissatisfaction among couples (Meil, 2005). The responsibility for childcare also continues to fall more on women, as demonstrated by the unequal use of parental leaves (Lapuerta *et al.*, 2011). How can we explain this discrepancy between egalitarian ideals and the persistence of a highly gender-based division of labour in families? As recent European and American studies have shown, the transition to first-time parenthood is a period during which gender inequalities are exacerbated in couples (Fox, 2009; Kühhirt, 2011; Schober, 2011; Grunow *et al.*, 2012) and is, therefore, key for understanding this discrepancy between ideals and reality. In Spain there have been few studies on how the arrival of the first child changes gender relations in heterosexual couples (Botía-Morillas, 2011). This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap in the Spanish context.

This qualitative study aims to analyse the ideals and childcare plans of dual-earner couples when they are expecting their first child and in the first months after birth. The study specifically analyses the discourses of future mothers and fathers related to the use and division of parental leaves (maternity, paternity, parental and reduced-hours leaves), and how these discourses are related to the economic and employment situation of the couple, as well as to constructions of mother-

hood and fatherhood. We have excluded the use of family networks (grandparents) and daycare to limit the scope of the study, as in the first six months it is in principle easier for couples to organise childcare without having to turn to outside assistance.

The Spanish context is particularly suitable for this analysis because the period which is being analysed has been marked by very important changes in families, policies and the labour market. There are an increasing number of unmarried couples and births outside of marriage, which reflects profound changes in attitudes and obligations toward family. Furthermore, the incorporation of women into the labour market has reached unprecedented levels; the rate of employment for women between 25 and 49 years of age rose from 31% in 1986 to 62% in 2012 (Eurostat, 2014). At the same time, the current economic crisis, which began in 2008, initially affected men more than women. The high level of uncertainty in the labour market for many men may make it difficult to maintain traditional arrangements in families, with the father as breadwinner and the mother as caregiver, and perhaps could be encouraging the construction of more balanced gender relations. Finally, in 2007 there was a qualitative change in policies regarding parental leaves, as for the first time a specific leave exclusively for fathers was established, which has been very well received by new fathers (Romero-Balsas, 2012).

This paper is organised into three sections: the first section provides the theoretical framework, the second explains the research design for this study and lastly, a final section provides the findings regarding parents' plans for the use of the different leaves available.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CHILD CARE STRATEGIES OF WORKING PARENTS

To understand the childcare strategies of parents in dual-earner couples it is neces-

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sary to first examine how they plan to organise childcare before the birth of their first child. In this regard, it is essential to consider the effect of ideals on their dedication to their jobs and to childcare, how these ideals articulate with their plans regarding which member of the couple will dedicate more time to childcare and how they see each member of the couple's job affected. At this stage of the life cycle, for the first time the ideas and decisions regarding the role of the man and the woman in the couple interact with conceptions and expectations of how to correctly carry out the role of mother and father. Therefore, it is at this intersection between, on the one hand, the relationship of the man and woman in the couple, and, on the other, the relationship of father to child and mother to child, where attention must be focused when analysing couple's childcare strategies.

The fact that both partners work does not mean that their employment is necessarily comparable. There may be significant differences in the occupations that men and women have, as indicated by the salary gap and the occupational strata that statistically place men in better positions than women (INE 2010). As a result, the division of labour between a man and woman in a couple may be understood to be the result of negotiations based on the different relative resources each one has (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). From this perspective, economic resources, in particular the income that each partner earns, become "resources of power" within the family: the partner with the most power becomes the family's main breadwinner and the one who makes the important decisions, while the other partner, generally the woman, remains in a position of economic dependence. Based on these differences in resources, couples negotiate agreements about how to balance work and care. The issue of the influence of relative resources is very important today, as an individual sacrificing her/his economic independence for the good of

the family may lead to serious problems in the long-term, for example, in cases of divorce, the primary breadwinner becoming unemployed, or widowhood.

However, economic theory cannot completely explain the strategies adopted by couples, since the family is an area governed not only by economic considerations and strategies but also by altruistic attitudes and exchanges and by relationships based on giving and love (Godbout, 1998). Couples are also immersed in institutional and cultural contexts that establish and designate certain forms of behaviour as desirable and normal (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). The latter factor does not mean that the different socialization of men and women will necessarily be the decisive factor in understanding the traditionalization of couples when their first child is born. The division of labour is a social practice that is created and reconstructed continuously in accord with the gender and stereotypes that dominate in the contexts in which subjects act. This perspective on the construction of gender (see, for example, West and Zimmerman, 1987) stresses the active and reflexive component of differentiation in patterns of behaviour based on gender.

Barbara Risman (1999) proposed a multi-level theoretical approach which connects the institutional context and the individual characteristics of the partners. The institutional context influences the couples' childcare plans in at least three ways: offering incentives or disincentives for certain behaviours, creating more or fewer opportunities, and establishing cultural references. For example, social policies aimed at families and the family models that are publicly supported shape the structure of opportunities for women. Social policies also have a symbolic character because they are based on specific family and gender models. If public policies are based on care being ascribed primarily to one member of the couple (the woman), this will reinforce and legitimise a traditional and asymmetrical division of labour. In fact,

institutional designs often harbour implicit ideas about the division of childcare based on gender (Sainsbury 1996). For example, the simple fact that there are longer paid leaves for mothers than for fathers already establishes and reinforces an asymmetric division of care for newborns.

From the theoretical framework laid out, two different hypotheses emerge regarding the factors which circumscribe the immediate decisions couples have to make; that is, how to take care of the newborn in the first months of life. The first is that childcare plans will largely depend on the resources (economic, social and cultural) of each partner, as well as their gender attitudes (for example, the explicit preference for shared responsibility in care). Therefore, it can be assumed that couples in which both express egalitarian values and have similar resources (economic and educational) will come up with more egalitarian care plans and share responsibilities. The second is that the employment and institutional contexts (in this case, parental leaves) largely determine couples' decisions about childcare, because couples simply adapt to the possibilities marked by the Spanish parental leave system. In contrast to Catherine Hakim's theory of preferences (2006), according to which women have the real possibility of following their preferences and choosing between family and the labour market, this latter hypothesis is based on James Doughney and Mary Leahy's concept of "adaptive preferences" (2006). These authors demonstrate how culture, the labour market and social policies push women and men in different directions and they end up aligning or adapting their preferences to these contexts.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is based on 68 couples from urban areas interviewed between March of 2011 and January of 2012. They were conducted following a thematic script and a spe-

cific protocol. The latter consisted of the following steps: first, one of the partners was interviewed to gather information and opinions about his or her career and employment situation, as well as his/her ideals regarding childcare. Afterwards, the same procedure was followed with the other partner using the same script, and lastly, another interview was conducted with the two partners together asking them about their history as a couple, their division of domestic tasks and their plans for taking care of their baby. The interviews – the two individual ones and the one together – lasting approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes each, were carried out by the same interviewer and only if both partners were in agreement with participating in the project. This design made it possible to triangulate the discourses of "her", "him" and "both".

To study the ideals held by both partners we analysed their discourses in response to questions about what would be the ideal situation regarding dedication to their jobs in the future, to the care of the baby and how they would like their partner to be involved (all of this was gathered in the individual interviews). Plans regarding taking advantage of parental leaves or not (maternity, paternity, for breastfeeding, leave of absence and reduced hours) were described by both partners when they were interviewed together, although at times some of these issues came up in the individual interviews.

The process of recruiting couples was carried out primarily in medical centres and clinics and in particular, in childbirth courses taught by midwives. Some participants were recruited through social networks. The sample is composed of dual-income couples (both members of the couple employed full-time), with the exception of 18 unemployed persons receiving unemployment benefits. All the women were pregnant with their first child when they were first interviewed and their average age was 35. As can be seen in the table in Appendix 1, the sample includes

individuals with different education levels (although the majority have university education), couples with different income levels and with varying relative resources<sup>2</sup>.

## FINDINGS: IDEALS, CARE AND EMPLOYMENT PLANS AFTER THE BIRTH OF THE CHILD

At the time of the interviews not all of the couples had made a final decision regarding their childcare plans, although they had thought about different alternatives. Two ideas in particular were common among the couples in the sample. First, the majority took for granted the model of a two-income couple, and as a result, the majority of mothers planned to return to work as soon as their paid maternity leave ended, between four and six months after the birth of the baby. Secondly, in many cases it was difficult for the couples to separate their ideal plans about childcare from more realistic plans. In the following section we discuss constraints, both explicit (gathered in criticisms made of family policies) and implicit (reflected in expressions of concern about the consequences of certain choices), that justify, in part, couples' future strategies for taking care of their children.

### Maternity and paternity leave

Spain provides well-paid short-term leaves and then the possibility of choosing between unpaid leave or reduced work hours (Escobedo and Wall, 2011). Almost all of the couples in our study had the right to take maternity and paternity leave<sup>3</sup>. The majority of

women planned to take all of the paid leave available – from 4 to 6 months – and only 6 future mothers planned to transfer part of the maternity leave to their partners. The women interviewed who worked in more feminised labour sectors or in the public sector had greater opportunities for taking the most time off possible than did women employed in the private sector or in more masculinised sectors. This involves combining the 16 weeks of maternity leave, the 20 days leave for breastfeeding and the approximate one month of annual vacation. In this way, the mother is able to have almost half a year to devote to taking care of her baby, if this period is not extended within the framework of collective agreements covering a specific workplace or sector<sup>4</sup>. Since 2007, fathers who are self-employed have had the right to 13 days of paid paternity leave, while those who are wage-earners also have the right to a total of 15 days paid leave. The majority of men in the study intended to take the leave days available and many also planned to extend this period by taking annual vacation days, which meant having a month or a month and a half to devote to taking care of the baby. Only one man planned to use the transferable part of the maternity leave. Some were in job situations that were so precarious that they did not have the right to any paternity leave or to reduced working hours: the primary concern of these individuals was

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also have the right to an *unpaid childcare leave* (with the exception of those who are self-employed) for up to a maximum of 3 years after the birth of the child. In some Autonomous Communities these leaves are paid (Lapuerta, 2012), but this was not the case with any of the couples interviewed. Lastly, parents have a right to a *reduced work day* to care for their children, with the corresponding reduction in their salaries.

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<sup>2</sup> The script for the interviews and details on methodology are available online (see: <http://transparent.upf.edu/>)

<sup>3</sup> According to the Spanish system of parental leaves, mothers have the right to a *maternity leave* of 16 weeks, 10 of which can be transferred to the father. Fathers have the right to 15 days of *paternity leave* if they are employed or 13 days if they are self-employed. Both parents

<sup>4</sup> The Catalan Generalitat (regional government), for example, implemented specific measures that permit its public workers to enjoy paid parental leave during almost the whole first year. These types of complementary measures exist in other public administrations, such as, for example the Junta of Andalusia, whose workers enjoy four additional weeks of leave.

to maintain their income and ensure a livelihood for their families.

Among employed men, we found one group (14 individuals) who were unwilling to take paternity leave despite having the right to do so, or who rejected using the 15 days of paternity leave available because of their perceived work obligations. This group included a majority of self-employed individuals (8 of the 14 men), who legally have the right to paternity leave but may often not consider it a viable option, as their paid leave will not reach 100% of their earned income. The other men within this group were wage earners and had different reasons for justifying their expected low participation in childcare. Some mentioned unfavourable working conditions, such as long working hours or temporary contracts. Three men with high incomes and in management positions did not believe they could miss 15 days of work, which went along with a strong work orientation. One future father who had a job with a lot of flexibility, allowing him to work from home, also did not feel it was necessary to do the paperwork to ask for paternity leave. Finally there were two men with very precarious employment who did not think it was a good idea to take this leave.

Regarding the theoretical framework of this study, it is particularly interesting to note that some men opt for traditional gender behaviours despite having resources, in terms of time, or an economic or employment situation favourable to taking paternity leave. As we have pointed out, this is above all the case of future fathers with high occupational status and a strong orientation toward work, who explicitly reject taking advantage of a social right available to them.

### **Leaves of absence for childcare and reduced working hours**

The use of prolonged parental leaves – and in particular, leaves of absence for childcare available until the child is three years old –

was not very frequent in our sample, given that such leaves are unpaid. However, in many cases the women did consider the option of reducing their working hours for legal guardianship with the resulting reduction in salary. This alternative was seen as the only way to have time for childcare within job situations that were not very favourable toward balancing work and family life, often characterised by long hours and complicated schedules. For most of the couples, in view of the institutional constraints and the need to dedicate time to their children, it was necessary for at least one of the parents to work less, whether through reducing working hours, working a part-time job, a change in shifts or an adaptation of working hours.

In the sample analysed, it was more common for women to consider asking for a reduction in hours, although the decision to do so was not always explicitly connected to gender. Some couples turned to purely monetary arguments, reflecting certain economic theories, which, based on the logic of “relative resources”, consider it more rational for women to reduce their involvement in the labour market, at least for a period of time, when they have jobs with lower salaries. For example, one participant, Marta, who had a strong orientation toward work, had a job with “few prospects for career advancement”, but that would allow her to work part-time if she wanted. Her husband, Ricardo, was in a management position and had a much higher salary, so she felt it was natural for her to take on more of the responsibility for childcare. In her own words:

MARTA: “From the beginning we have agreed that [...] if you decide to have children, you have to have time. And then it is a question of logistics and finances. If he [...] if his salary is higher, well it is clear who has to reduce work hours, and it has nothing to do with feminism, sexism or anything like that.”

[Marta has a university education, couple no. 63 in appendix]

Except for those employed in the public sector, it was normal for respondents to assume that reducing their participation in the labour market would have negative consequences for them professionally. Interestingly, in those couples in which both had the same employment restrictions, the men were less likely than the women to make changes in their jobs, thus avoiding being penalised. This suggests that the employment context is not enough in itself to explain the greater propensity of women to reduce their working hours. It also reveals that mothers who plan to solicit a reduction in their working hours do not always take into account the logic of relative economic resources.

Among the men, our findings show that a combination of individual and contextual factors explain why the majority do not consider it opportune to ask for leave or to reduce their work hours. On the individual level, a strong work orientation, possible penalisation at work and the desire to show a commitment to their job, above all in times of uncertainty, are factors that reinforce the traditional role of the man as primary breadwinner for the family. Many of the women in the sample expressed this same concern but they planned, nevertheless, to maximise their time available outside the workplace. When mothers work in particularly feminised sectors, couples believe that it is more legitimate for women to make use of parental leaves, assuming that the penalty faced will be less. Women who have more demanding jobs or who work in typically masculine sectors anticipate that the costs of taking advantage of this right will be greater. Couples anticipate what their colleagues and superiors might think about them taking time off and both men and women think that reducing work time will be interpreted as a lack of professional commitment. However, there is general consensus that the society is more accustomed to women, rather than men, being the ones to reduce the time dedicated to their

jobs. This line of reasoning ends up being circular: as the majority of women reduce their work hours after having a child, employers expect them to do so. As a result, women face negative employment consequences, which leads them to act exactly as is expected of them: reducing the amount of time dedicated to their jobs or resigning themselves to being penalised. Rosa's case, a woman with a strong career orientation working in a very masculinised sector, clearly illustrates this. Rosa is married to José, who is employed in a similar job but with a lower salary. She had to take a short-term disability leave during her pregnancy and believed she would be penalised in her job for this reason. Both José and Rosa believed that her career had already been harmed so they decided that she would be the one to reduce her work hours. This decision would allow at least one of them, José, to protect his professional career, which remains intact.

ROSA: "Well, might as well go all in, you know? We talked about it [...], it already happened to me, to a certain extent, if you have a problem during your pregnancy, like I did, and you have to take a leave beforehand, or later, especially, you know [...] the weeks you are obligated to take maternity leave, well in a job like mine, in the end there are consequences, you know? [...] So you might at as well go all in, right?"

[Rosa has a university education, No. 48]

In other cases, the decision made by women to reduce their work hours is related to the feeling that they have reached the "glass ceiling" in their jobs and do not have the possibility of advancing further or finding a better job. This makes them perceive their work is merely instrumental, and legitimises not investing so much time in the labour market. This decision is at times reinforced by their partner's greater level of dedication to work, or by the idea that the husband's job offers greater potential, as revealed in the quote above regarding the case of Rosa and José.

Most of the men in the sample demonstrated a greater orientation to work than the women and considered their jobs to be very important, so much so that some were not even considering taking the two week's paternity leave they had a right to. The discourse and motivation of these men is not explicitly related to gender: the majority agreed with the idea that men should reduce their work hours in order to spend more time with their children, but they felt that the labour market is not adapted for them to do so and that they, in particular, could not consider such a possibility. In addition, they more often mentioned specific circumstances that made it impossible for them to be away from their jobs, such as the fact that several people needed to take parental leaves at the same time. Many also felt that they could not easily be replaced in their jobs. Again, this points toward a construction of gender that is not always linked to employment context or differences in resources (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

In fact, the idea of not being able to disconnect easily from work or that work cannot go on adequately without their presence is common among men, and not only among those who hold skilled or managerial positions, yet this attitude is practically non-existent among women. This is perhaps due to the fact that compulsory maternity leave leads women to think that companies can continue with their activity even with women on leave. For example, Helia, who has a university education, was working in a company in which all the employees were women, and she could easily ask for reduced hours. She earned less than her husband, Héctor, a company manager, and both believed that such a decision made sense from an economic standpoint. Héctor could have taken his vacation days immediately after the two weeks of paternity leave. He could even have reduced his work hours. However, both of these options were discarded.

HÉCTOR: "No, not possible; I don't think so, because me, the only thing that I could reduce is, no [...] eventually I would end up being at work and earning less, which is not possible. In the job I have now, I couldn't do it; I could, but I wasn't going to do it, so..."

[Héctor has a secondary education, No. 13]

The plans regarding parental leaves described here could be a sign of the role of women becoming more traditional with the arrival of the first child. This could be interpreted, in line with Doughney and Leahy (2006), as a process of mutual reinforcement among various factors. On the one hand, public authorities assign care to men and women unequally (different amounts of leave time for fathers and mothers), and certain work situations are perceived to be hostile toward balancing childcare and work. On the other hand, decisions about the use of leaves largely depend on the characteristics of the couple, such as their unequal position in the labour market, unequal potential for job promotion or different attitudes about gender. In the sample, there were women who said they had already reached the glass ceiling in their profession and others who felt this for the first time during their pregnancy. However, we also found couples who were trying to forge new paths that would avoid roles becoming more traditional after the birth of the child.

Most fathers talked about the ideal of working less overtime and getting home from work earlier after the birth of the baby, but only one-third of the sample planned to really do this. Some did intend to significantly reduce the number of work hours, change their shifts or in some way, modify their work conditions to take care of the baby, to complement the changes that the mother was also making or as an alternative so that the mother could continue in her job. For many of these men, their relationships with their partner and with their baby were very important and meaningful for them, demanding greater time

and devotion than that given to their jobs. Often, for fathers who intended to be more involved with their children, work was more instrumental. It is also interesting to note that their partners usually had more resources in terms of education, career and income than they did. This was the case of Carlos and Conchi. Work was very important and a vocation for Conchi; she had had a career since she started working. Her husband, Carlos, had recently finished university and had always been precariously employed. At the time of this study, he was unemployed and was considering taking care of the baby, adapting his work to childcare so that Conchi could continue developing her career:

CARLOS: "Everyone has to have his own time; I mean, you have to have your time to work, for leisure, time with your partner, with your child; sometimes it can all go together, except for work – it can be free-time, time with your partner and child at the same time [...]. I don't have any problem, I can find some kind of job or some situation from home and I can do both easily [...] my manhood is not diminished because my wife is supporting me."

[Carlos, university education, No. 39]

This attitude is not only found among men who have a university education, like Carlos. The perception of work as being instrumental is found even more so among men with lower education levels, who began to work at a very early age and who have always had precarious jobs. These men are dissatisfied with the labour market, and having had irregular work throughout the years with periods of unemployment, they find it difficult to connect their personal identity to work. Some want to participate more in domestic and care tasks. For them, this option is a way of continuing to contribute to the household despite their being unemployed. This was the case of Jorge and Natalia, both with secondary education. Natalia had a stable job, but Jorge was unemployed. Natalia had some health problems during her

pregnancy and during this period Jorge stopped looking for work to take care of her and the home.

INTERVIEWER: "And if you were unemployed? Would you go to work or what?"

NATALIA: "Well [...], if he was still unemployed, I mean..."

INTERVIEWER: "Yes, once your leave is over..."

NATALIA: "He would stay home, initially, and I would go to work."

INTERVIEWER: "And would this be a problem?"

JORGE: "No, no problem...I hope that doesn't happen; I would like to be working, but if I am not, well obviously I will have to do something useful, right? And taking care of my child a bit, obviously. But yes, of course, if this is the case, clearly I would do it and there would be no problem"

[Natalia and Jorge have secondary education, No. 15]

### **Maternity, naturalisation and breastfeeding**

When future mothers and fathers have to decide how they will take care of their new family, different ideas about gender emerge. These ideas are reflected in the way they interpret motherhood and fatherhood, although rarely are ideas about gender stated or made explicit in their discourses. The couples studied were very diverse in this regard, and they did not always reveal a coherent identity regarding gender; rather the contrary, they mixed egalitarian elements with more traditional ones.

In the majority of couples, the mother was *naturally* considered to be more responsible for the children or, more loosely, closer and more connected to them. This idea of care and childrearing as a woman's responsibility is related to a process of naturalisation and involves relating care to the biological changes women experience during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. The physical experience of the mother is linked with a special knowledge

and capacity to respond to the baby's needs, an ability that is often thought of in terms of instinct, as stated by Nadia:

NADIA: "I think that the mother is the one who contributes more, right? From the moment you are pregnant, this is your greatest concern; of course, the father's role is very important, right? ... But I don't think it is the same as the mother's role..."

[Nadia has a university education, No. 33]

This idea was explicitly questioned by only a small group of women in the sample, who had more elaborate ideas about gender and therefore, who identified the suppositions mentioned as social norms and questioned their validity and consequences. This was the case of Fabiola and Federico, a couple who wanted to share care as much as possible, although Fabiola's co-workers were casting doubt on these plans:

FABIOLA: "...my co-workers always tell me 'yeah, but this is now, because the baby is the mother's' and clearly, I'm used to, like Federico, it is like I, I don't see it this way, but there are times that on top of everything, it seems like I'm not normal because being normal is to be that, well sure, I, as he is like that, and for me this doesn't seem so normal, uh, to me, my co-workers are like 'you are going to have a baby, how can you talk like that'"

[Fabiola has a university education, No. 45]

Naturalised ideas about childcare, as expressed by Nadia, also appear closely tied to breastfeeding. In general, breastfeeding, recommended by official health care organisations, is considered to be better for the child. The couples in the sample usually mentioned the virtues of breastfeeding that they had learned about in childbirth preparation courses and through reading. A repeated argument is that breastfeeding is the best way to raise a healthy baby and to protect the baby from infection. This is one of the most firmly

rooted ideas about what is best for the baby, along with the idea that a baby should not be in daycare, at least not until he or she is one year old.

All of the couples interviewed (with the exception of one in which the mother had a medical problem) planned on breastfeeding if possible and for at least four months, although the ideal length of time was generally considered to be six months. This period coincides with the time allowed for maternity leave. This illustrates the tension between practice – limited by institutional parameters – and social norms about "good motherhood" (Miller, 2007).

The need to breastfeed also appears as a recurring argument to justify mothers taking advantage of all of their leave. This is also the argument most cited by fathers to explain why they do not plan to share the part of the maternity leave that may be transferred to the father (10 weeks). By extension, breastfeeding legitimises less initial involvement of the father. Chodorow (1974) showed that there is a continuum between breastfeeding and care-giving: the former is conceived of as an activity that involves a greater commitment and responsibility to the baby, fostering a bond between the baby and the mother, as well as an attitude of permanent attention on the part of the mother and a greater emotional connection that sometimes excludes the father. Most couples anticipate greater involvement by the mother in the first months of the baby's life due to this continuum. This explains for example why some fathers, such as Hugo, express the feeling that they will have a secondary role in the beginning:

HUGO: "Well, [...] everybody says that the first month is really hard [...] Delia has to deal with the worst part, right? As this is the hardest part, right? Because she feeds the baby and later, well,...complete dedication. I have decided to be in charge of

logistics [...] because in the end, she is the one who is going to be with the baby all day long.”

[Hugo has a university education, No. 32]

Several fathers planning to be more involved developed strategies that would enable them to contribute to the baby's care and participate in household tasks while the mother was breastfeeding. Some mothers were conscious of the fact that breastfeeding initially leaves fathers with a merely supporting role; this consideration was more explicit among women with more sophisticated ideas about gender. There are mothers who want to involve the fathers in feeding the baby, but who do not have a clear strategy – they talk about the father as an occasional helper, suggesting that they can pump and store breast milk so that the father can feed the baby when they are not there. The couple in which the mother could not breastfeed for medical reasons, also thought about this issue and saw the possibility of sharing in the feeding of the baby as something positive.

As a result, breastfeeding, as well as the naturalisation of care-giving as primarily the mother's responsibility, legitimise, in the discourses of many of the respondents, an asymmetrical social construction of gender in care-giving. This factor is in part a result of the recommendations of health authorities, but it is also, to a great extent, rooted in individuals' perceptions of what it means to be a “good mother” and what it means to provide the best care for a child. That said, it is interesting to observe how the restrictions in the context just mentioned, which lead to mothers returning to work six months after the birth, also lead to the development of “adaptive preferences” regarding the appropriate length of time for exclusively breastfeeding. This indicates that the naturalisation of maternal care-giving is socially constructed and could be re-constructed in a different way, as some of the couples interviewed pointed out. However, this process

of naturalisation creates a care-giving dynamic exclusive to the mother for the first six months after birth, which at the same time, favours an asymmetrical construction of gender in care-giving that may last over time.

### **Construction of fatherhood**

Regarding the involvement of fathers, all of the future fathers in the sample were very excited about having a baby and wanted to be very involved in the life of their children. Often they mentioned the “absent father” critically, since many of them had experienced an absent father in their childhood. Most of them mentioned the need to dedicate “quality time” to their children, although few defined “quality”.

At least two different ideas about fatherhood and its implications emerged in the discourse of the fathers interviewed, based on the specific plans they had and how they expected their new life to be. On the one hand, most of them planned to adopt the role of secondary care-giver: even those who were working long hours did not plan to reduce their hours, and assumed that the mother would be more dedicated to the baby. In general, the fathers believed that they could dedicate time to their child when they got home from work. Many said that they would be in charge of giving the baby a bath, a care-giving task identified as more masculine and enjoyable and that could foster the father-child relationship. Other activities they planned to do with their children were those related to play and sports. It is interesting to see that the fathers in the sample rarely realistically imagined all of the attention required by the baby. They knew that most days they would get home from work with just enough time to see their children at bath time, for dinner and for putting them to bed, but they expected to spend more time with their families on weekends. The greater involvement of fathers in taking care of their

children on weekends is a recurring finding in studies on time use (Sayer 2004).

On the other hand, we found one group of men – approximately one-third of the sample – closer to the model of “dual care-giver”, who held ideas more in agreement with new parenting roles. As has already been mentioned, factors such as the desire of greater involvement with the baby or an unfavourable employment situation – for example, unemployment – may contribute to a questioning of the role of father as the main economic provider. Many of the fathers in this group also made explicit their desire to be as involved as the mother in caring for their children, and they said that the type of relationship they wanted to have involved assuming equal responsibility for parenting. Oscar, a future father, with an egalitarian attitude and whose partner participated actively in the feminist movement, expressed this idea clearly:

OSCAR: “I want to have a relationship of equal intensity with my son or daughter and that comes from responsibility and from participating in his or her care and, and upbringing [...] both of us equally.”

[Oscar has done vocational training, No. 30]

These “new fathers” face significant obstacles. Some are institutional: for example, a shortage of public daycare centres and of part-time jobs makes it almost impossible to achieve the ideal of sharing the responsibilities of care-giving for a couple who would both like to work in the morning and spend time together with their baby in the afternoon. The fathers in this group were also aware that they were going against the current regarding certain social norms; for example, it is still very unusual to see fathers in the park with their children or men who work part-time so that they can dedicate more time to parenting. At the same time, some mothers in the sample assumed that they would have ultimate responsibility for

and control over care-giving, in this way, monopolising care-giving tasks and limiting the degree of the father’s involvement (Allen and Hawkins 1999, Gaunt 2008). These attitudes reinforce processes naturalising the mother’s role and affirm the secondary role of fathers. These types of practices are apparent, for example, when mothers express understanding when their partners say they do not know how to do something, or when they do not think fathers are capable of carrying out certain tasks necessary in caring for the baby. Angel’s discourse is illustrative of this, rejecting having a secondary role, but being aware that this is the most common role adopted by fathers. Angel criticised the model of the weekend father and the way that this is often supported by women’s attitudes:

ANGEL: “To take him to the park and kick the ball around with him, or on a Saturday to watch him play football...and you don’t give me anything else, you don’t give me more responsibility than I want. And well, hey, I have it really good, because with a lot of couples, women are the same, I mean, they have grown up in sexist families and they think it’s normal.”

[Ángel has done vocational training, No. 10]

It is interesting to find that some individuals had concrete plans for the future, while others – in their majority, men – preferred to leave things open and see how things went once the baby was born. The fact that the men were less proactive than the women in making care-giving plans for the future reveals significant gender differences regarding how to proceed once the baby is born, as well as less willingness on the part of men to make adjustments in their work life (Wiessman *et al.*, 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this article has been to analyse the care-giving and employment

plans of dual-income couples after the birth of their first child. Based on various theoretical perspectives – emphasising the importance of relative resources, individual preferences, social norms and institutional context – we have sought to understand to what extent couples' ideals about taking care of their first child determine their plans. We have also explored what occurs in the intersection between ideals and the individual circumstances of couples, their gender values, and the institutional and employment framework in which public policies related to conciliation and childcare are articulated in Spain. The results from this analysis demonstrate that the effects of relative resources, individual preferences and the institutional context on couples' future plans for childcare and employment cannot be understood independently or in isolation.

Our first hypothesis was that plans related to employment and childcare would be greatly affected by the relative resources and individual preferences of each member of the couple. Regarding resources, we did indeed find that some couples justified their decision for the mother to be the one to reduce working hours and be more involved in care based on monetary arguments, for example, if the woman's salary was lower or she had a less promising career. Similarly, we found that various fathers, who expected to be more involved with their children, had partners with greater educational, employment and economic resources than they did. However, even in couples whose members faced similar restrictions in their jobs, it was usually the woman who reduced her dedication to her work and assumed the economic penalties. This suggests that in many cases preferences and individual attitudes weigh more than any type of economic rationale. The second hypothesis focused on impact of the employment and institutional context on couples' daily lives. The latter conditions parents' care-giving strategies, largely determining the resources that they have available

through leave policies, and directly influences their perceptions about what is best for the child. In this regard, we should stress how difficult it was for many of the couples interviewed to separate their ideals regarding dedication to their jobs and care-giving from real existing possibilities. The results obtained indicate that mothers and fathers end up developing "adaptive preferences" in order to deal with the imbalance between their ideals regarding care-giving and the limitations they face. At the same time, the general perception that the use of parental leaves leads to unavoidable penalties in the labour market – except for women in very feminised employment sectors or for both men and women in the public sector – makes it difficult in many cases for men to be very involved in care-giving. Although mothers also often face penalties in their jobs, it is socially and institutionally more acceptable for them to take advantage of the leaves available.

In general, we found that men tend to not take advantage of leaves of absence or a reduction in working hours to a greater extent, mentioning the need to show a commitment to their job and its importance. In addition, they often justify their attitude based on the idea that they cannot be easily replaced in their position, an argument not frequently used by women. They also tend to plan less in terms of the strategies they will follow after the child's birth for combining employment and care-giving. All of these differences in attitudes between future mothers and fathers in the sample suggest differences in the construction of gender that do not necessarily – or do not exclusively – have to do with employment conditions and economic considerations. Thus, naturalised perceptions of the mother as biologically more connected to the baby through pregnancy and breastfeeding play an important role. These ideas were found to be deeply rooted in a significant number of the couples interviewed and encouraged a planned and future asymmetric division of care-giving. In contrast, among

those couples whose plans differed from traditional models of motherhood and fatherhood, egalitarian attitudes seemed to have much more weight. In these couples we mainly found men whose identity was less connected to employment, women who explicitly reflect on gender norms, and in general, individuals who assign greater value to assuming equal responsibility and spending a lot of time with their baby. The conjunction of similar relative resources (or greater resources on the part of the mother) and egalitarian attitudes on the part of both partners was especially favourable for a shared division of labour and care-giving<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> At the time this article appears is being finalized with the publication of the results of the longitudinal analysis, comparison of the two waves (see Gonzalez and Jurado-Guerrero (Eds) Publisher: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2015).

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**REVIEW:** July 29, 2014

**ACCEPTANCE:** September 25, 2014

## APPENDIX 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUPLES INTERVIEWED IN THE FIRST WAVE, 2011-12

|    | Name     | Education                        | Current or last job       | Relative income | Couple's income |
|----|----------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1  | Nuria    | Did not finish primary school    | Housekeeper               | hypergamy       | 500-999         |
|    | Nicolás  | Primary school graduate          | Worker                    |                 |                 |
| 2  | Elena    | Secondary school graduate        | Assistant                 | homogamy        | 500-1,009       |
|    | Enrique  | Did not finish secondary         | Assistant                 |                 |                 |
| 3  | Caro     | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Self-employed             | hypergamy       | 1,000-1,749     |
|    | César    | Bachelor's degree                | Administrative personnel  |                 |                 |
| 4  | Eva      | Intermediate Vocational Training | Salesperson               | hypergamy       | 1,500-1,749     |
|    | Eduardo  | Primary school graduate          | Chofer mecanico           |                 |                 |
| 5  | Celia    | Advanced Vocational Training     | Businessperson            | hypergamy       | 1,500-1,749     |
|    | Cesar    | Bachelor's degree                | Administrative personnel  |                 |                 |
| 6  | Noemi    | Intermediate Vocational Training | Administrative assistant  | hypergamy       | 1,500-2,249     |
|    | Elías    | Primary school graduate          | Worker                    |                 |                 |
| 7  | Milagros | Intermediate Vocational          | Technician                | hypergamy       | 1,500-2,249     |
|    | Mario    | Bachelor's degree                | Union coordinator         |                 |                 |
| 8  | France   | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Teacher                   | homogamy        | 1,500-2,249     |
|    | Fran     | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Salesman                  |                 |                 |
| 9  | Raquel   | Did not finish primary school    | Assistant                 | hypergamy       | 1,500-2,249     |
|    | Raúl     | Intermediate Vocational Training | Constuction               |                 |                 |
| 10 | Verónica | Bachelor's degree                | Secretary                 | hypogamy        | 1,750-2,499     |
|    | Ángel    | Advanced vocational training     | Electrical technician     |                 |                 |
| 11 | Jana     | Intermediate Vocational          | Self-employed             | hypergamy       | 1,750-2,499     |
|    | Jenaro   | Vocational                       | Technician                |                 |                 |
| 12 | Eva      | Bachelor's degree                | Children's instructor     | hypergamy       | 1,750-2,499     |
|    | Ernesto  | Secondary school graduate (COU)  | Administrative assistant  |                 |                 |
| 13 | Helia    | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Salesperson               | hypergamy       | 1,750-2,499     |
|    | Héctor   | Baccalaureate                    | Administrative technician |                 |                 |
| 14 | Karina   | Bachelor's degree                | Head of a technical team  | homogamy        | 2,000-2,499     |
|    | Karlos   | Advanced vocational training     | Specialist technician     |                 |                 |
| 15 | Natalia  | Intermediate vocational training | Assistant                 | homogamy        | 2,000-2,499     |
|    | Jorge    | Baccalaureate                    | Stock person              |                 |                 |
| 16 | Gema     | Bachelor's degree                | Teacher                   | hypogamy        | 2,000-2,499     |
|    | Gabriel  | Advanced vocational training     | Construction              |                 |                 |
| 17 | Angelina | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Technician                | hypergamy       | 2,000-2,999     |
|    | Matías   | Advanced vocational training     | Primary sector            |                 |                 |
| 18 | Feli     | Intermediate Vocational Training | Self-employed             | hypergamy       | 2,249-2,749     |
|    | Fermin   | Intermediate Vocational Training | Worker                    | hypergamy       |                 |
| 19 | Helena   | Intermediate Vocational Training | Salesperson               | hypergamy       | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Germán   | Primary school graduate          | Worker                    |                 |                 |
| 20 | Beatriz  | Bachelor's degree                | Project technician        | hypergamy       | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Benjamín | Bachelor's degree                | Sculptor                  |                 |                 |

## APPENDIX 1, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUPLES INTERVIEWED IN THE FIRST WAVE, 2011-12 (*continued*)

|    | Name     | Education                            | Current or last job       | Relative income | Couple's income |
|----|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 21 | Beatriz  | Bachelor's degree                    | Technician                | hypergamy       | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Baltasar | Bachelor's degree                    | Technician                |                 |                 |
| 22 | Juana    | Advanced vocational training         | Supermarket cashier       | hypogamy        | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Javier   | Did not finish secondary             | Construction              |                 |                 |
| 23 | Paula    | Equivalent of Advanced Voc, Training | Salesperson               | hypergamy       | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Pablo    | Secondary school graduate (COU)      | Department director       |                 |                 |
| 24 | Tania    | Bachelor's degree                    | Administrative assistant  | hypergamy       | 2,250-2,749     |
|    | Tomás    | Bachelor's degree                    | Technician                |                 |                 |
| 25 | Elena    | Bachelor's degree                    | Manager                   | homogamy        | 2,500-2,999     |
|    | Iván     | Advanced vocational training         | Worker                    |                 |                 |
| 26 | Patricia | Bachelor's degree                    | Salesperson               | homogamy        | 2,500-2,999     |
|    | Pablo    | 3 year undergraduate degree          | Worker                    |                 |                 |
| 27 | Diana    | Secondary school graduate            | Technician                | hypergamy       | 2,500-3,249     |
|    | Diego    | Did not finish primary school        | Mechanic                  |                 |                 |
| 28 | Fátima   | Bachelor's degree                    | Teacher                   | hypogamy        | 2,500-3,249     |
|    | Fernando | Primary school graduate              | Assistant                 |                 |                 |
| 29 | Iris     | Bachelor's degree                    | Teacher                   | hypogamy        | 2,500-3,249     |
|    | Alejo    | Baccalaureate                        | Construction              |                 |                 |
| 30 | Olga     | Undergraduate degree                 | Technician                | hypogamy        | 2,500-3,249     |
|    | Óscar    | Intermediate Vocational training     | Assistant                 |                 |                 |
| 31 | Lidia    | Intermediate Vocational Training     | Worker                    | hypergamy       | 2,500-3,499     |
|    | Lorenzo  | Primary school graduate              | Fork-lift operator        |                 |                 |
| 32 | Delia    | Bachelor's degree                    | Teacher                   | hypergamy       | 2,500-3,499     |
|    | Hugo     | Bachelor's degree                    | Director                  |                 |                 |
| 33 | Nadia    | Bachelor's degree                    | Assistant                 | hypergamy       | 2,500-3,499     |
|    | Norberto | Bachelor's degree                    | Engineer                  |                 |                 |
| 34 | Luisa    | Advanced vocational training         | Designer                  | hypergamy       | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Felipe   | Advanced vocational training         | Designer                  |                 |                 |
| 35 | Nerea    | Bachelor's degree                    | Accounting specialist     | hypogamy        | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Néstor   | Engineering technician               | Salesperson               |                 |                 |
| 36 | Isabel   | Bachelor's degree                    | Manager of a business     | hypogamy        | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Israel   | Advanced vocational training         | Designer                  |                 |                 |
| 37 | Raquel   | Bachelor's degree                    | Bank employee             | hypogamy        | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Roberto  | Bachelor's degree                    | Consultant                |                 |                 |
| 38 | Mara     | Bachelor's degree                    | Communications specialist | hypogamy        | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Mauro    | Bachelor's degree                    | Administrative personnel  |                 |                 |
| 39 | Conchi   | 3 year undergraduate degree          | Technician                | hypogamy        | 2,749-3,499     |
|    | Carlos   | 3 year undergraduate degree          | Factory worker            |                 |                 |
| 40 | Sara     | 3 year undergraduate degree          | Administrative officer    | hypergamy       | 2,750-3,499     |
|    | Sergio   | Engineer                             | Technician                |                 |                 |

## APPENDIX 1, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUPLES INTERVIEWED IN THE FIRST WAVE, 2011-12 (*continued*)

|    | Name      | Education                        | Current or last job                 | Relative income | Couple's income |
|----|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 41 | Irene     | Bachelor's degree                | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 3,000-3,749     |
|    | Ignacio   | Engineer                         | Engineering                         |                 |                 |
| 42 | Úrsula    | Intermediate Vocational Training | Self-employed                       | homogamy        | 3,000-3,999     |
|    | Fidel     | Intermediate Vocational training | Truck driver                        |                 |                 |
| 43 | Mar       | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Designer                            | homogamy        | 3,000-3,999     |
|    | Arturo    | Secondary education              | Sales technician                    |                 |                 |
| 44 | Carmen    | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Teacher                             | homogamy        | 3,000-3,999     |
|    | Marcos    | Advanced vocational training     | Sales technician                    |                 |                 |
| 45 | Fabiola   | Bachelor's degree                | Technician                          | homogamy        | 3,000-3,999     |
|    | Federico  | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 46 | Begoña    | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 3,000-3,999     |
|    | Boris     | Advanced vocational training     | Sales director                      |                 |                 |
| 47 | Ana       | Bachelor's degree                | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 3,250-3,999     |
|    | Ángel     | Bachelor's degree                | Middle management                   |                 |                 |
| 48 | Rosa      | Engineering technician           | Project manager                     | hypogamy        | 3,250-3,999     |
|    | José      | Engineering technician           | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 49 | Susana    | Engineer                         | Technician                          | hypogamy        | 3,500-4,498     |
|    | Salvador  | Doctorate                        | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 50 | Alejandro | Doctorate                        | Researcher                          | Hypogamy        | 3,500-4,498     |
|    | Julia     | Doctorate                        | Professor                           |                 |                 |
| 51 | Daniela   | Bachelor's degree                | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 3,500-4,499     |
|    | David     | Bachelor's degree                | Curator                             |                 |                 |
| 52 | Delia     | Bachelor's degree                | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 3,500-4,499     |
|    | Daniel    | Bachelor's degree                | Account executive                   |                 |                 |
| 53 | Isabel    | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Sales director                      | hypogamy        | 3,500-4,499     |
|    | Ignacio   | Engineer                         | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 54 | Margarita | Bachelor's degree                | Congresswoman, Member of Parliament | hypogamy        | 3,750-4,499     |
|    | Miguel    | Intermediate Vocational Training | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 55 | Ainoa     | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Administrative personnel            | hypergamy       | 3,750-4,499     |
|    | Pepe      | Bachelor's degree                | Technician-executive                |                 |                 |
| 56 | Gabriela  | Advanced vocational training     | Head of administration              | hypergamy       | 3,750-4,499     |
|    | Gonzalo   | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Technician                          |                 |                 |
| 57 | Rebeca    | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Technician                          | hypergamy       | 4,000-4,999     |
|    | Rafael    | Engineering technician           | Salesperson                         |                 |                 |
| 58 | Beatriz   | FP y 3 year undergraduate degree | Sales technician                    | hypergamy       | 4,000-4,999     |
|    | Bernardo  | Bachelor's degree                | Sales technician                    |                 |                 |
| 59 | Laura     | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Middle management                   | homogamy        | 4,000-4,999     |
|    | Luis      | 3 year undergraduate degree      | Computer technician                 |                 |                 |
| 60 | Úrsula    | Bachelor's degree                | Human resources manager             | hypergamy       | 4,000-4,999     |
|    | Uberto    | Bachelor's degree                | Regional manager                    |                 |                 |

## APPENDIX 1, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUPLES INTERVIEWED IN THE FIRST WAVE, 2011-12 (*continued*)

|    | Name    | Education                   | Current or last job        | Relative income | Couple's income |
|----|---------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 61 | Ana     | Bachelor's degree           | Consultant                 | hypergamy       | 4,000-5,249     |
|    | Andrés  | Bachelor's degree           | Head of department/section |                 |                 |
| 62 | María   | Bachelor's degree           | Consultant                 | hypergamy       | 4,500-5,499     |
|    | Alberto | Bachelor's degree           | Teacher                    |                 |                 |
| 63 | Marta   | Máster                      | Head of administration     | hypergamy       | 4,500-5,999     |
|    | Ricardo | Engineer                    | Engineer                   |                 |                 |
| 64 | Tania   | Máster                      | Director                   | hypergamy       | 5,000-6,499     |
|    | Toni    | Máster                      | Marketing executive        |                 |                 |
| 65 | Teresa  | Bachelor's degree           | Director                   | hypogamy        | 5,000-6,499     |
|    | Teodoro | Baccalaureate               | Manager of a business      |                 |                 |
| 66 | Sara    | Bachelor's degree           | Analyst                    | hypergamy       | 6,000-6,499     |
|    | Samuel  | Bachelor's degree           | Director                   |                 |                 |
| 67 | Violeta | Bachelor's degree           | Senior official            | hypogamy        | 6,000-6,499     |
|    | Vicente | 3 year undergraduate degree | Computer programmer        |                 |                 |
| 68 | Alba    | Bachelor's degree           | Director                   | hypogamy        | >7,000          |
|    | Antonio | Bachelor's degree           | Lawyer                     |                 |                 |