

Career vs. Motherhood - Regulating the inequality in the work market

Carreira *versus* Maternidade - Regulando a desigualdade no mercado de trabalho

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, motherhood status comes with professional penalization that deepens the disparities of opportunities between men and women. Being a mother permanently hampers the search for employment and career progression; it also affects women's earnings negatively. This tension is fueled by brands that simultaneously exalt motherhood and professional achievement without recognizing the contrast between them. Much has been debated recently about the fact that Brazilian females, especially the wealthier and more highly educated, tend to postpone or avoid motherhood to prioritize their careers. Yet there has been little analysis of when motherhood takes place during professional careers, that is, the extent to which women are penalized in their professional trajectories when they become mothers. Companies that seek to mitigate these inequalities and value motherhood, creating brand identity around this purpose, are the exception. This paper aims to assess these issues thus broadening the debate on business policies that help reduce and overcome the contradiction between career and maternity.

KEYWORDS: Maternity; Career; Gender equality.

RESUMO

No Brasil, a maternidade é acompanhada de uma penalização profissional que aprofunda as disparidades de oportunidades entre homens e mulheres. Ser mãe dificulta de forma persistente a procura por emprego e a progressão na carreira, além de impactar negativamente os salários da mulher. Essa tensão é alimentada por marcas que simultaneamente exaltam a maternidade e a realização profissional sem reconhecer a contraposição existente entre elas. Muito tem se debatido recentemente sobre o fato de que brasileiras, sobretudo de classes mais altas e com maior escolaridade, adiam ou evitam a maternidade para priorizar suas carreiras. Pouco se tem analisado, entretanto, a outra face desta mesma moeda: o quanto são penalizadas em suas trajetórias profissionais as mulheres que se tornam mães. Empresas que procuram mitigar essas desigualdades e valorizar a maternidade, criando identidade de marca ao redor desse propósito, são exceção. Esse artigo visa dimensionar essa problemática no Brasil e ampliar o debate sobre políticas empresariais que ajudem a reduzir e superar a contradição entre carreira e maternidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Maternidade; Carreira; Igualdade de gênero.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the face of the global downward trend in birth and fertility rates, especially in the developed world and among the better-paid strata of the population in emerging countries, family reproduction may become scarce. In Brazil, for example, the number of children per woman fell from 5.8 in the 1970s to 1.77 in 2018, below the replacement rate, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). There is also a reduction in motherhood rates among younger women and an increase in the number of women who become pregnant after the age of 30 in recent years. In addition, contemporary societies are in an accelerated process of population aging, which generates imperatives of social and fiscal equation and generation of skilled, socially and culturally integrated labor.

Our society is grounded on the concept of reproduction and continuity of the human species, just as it should be based on the realization and fulfillment of potential of the greatest number of its members. In the present scenario, however, maternity represents a cost to the majority of the population. It deepens gender inequalities, rather than moderates them, and creates obstacles to factors that could reverse inequalities, such as education and professional development.

Without the active, complete and satisfactory inclusion of women, the majority of the population, in the professional and educational market, there is no way for society to reach its full potential.

The Brazilian woman finds herself at a crossroads: on the one hand, the achievements of feminism and gender equality set the goal of professional achievement. On the other, traditional values, the aging of the population and descent of fecundity rates hierarchize the role of mother. Today, maternity and professional achievement are not presented as complements, but as antagonistic forces, a strain of demands for women that ends up frustrating both their progress and personal-professional accomplishments as well as a healthy motherhood. Furthermore, this tension is fueled by brands that simultaneously exalt motherhood and professional achievement without recognizing the contrast between them nowadays.

This modern dilemma raises a number of questions that relate to the way women are experiencing this impasse. What do they prioritize in the face of these tensions? How does motherhood impact the search for professional positions and future plans of women? And how does the pursuit of professional roles impact women's family plans? What nuances characterize this dilemma and what are the possibilities for reconciliation and convergence?

Based on these tensions and the fact that the research industry is also mostly female, Market Analysis Brazil has developed a study that seeks to answer a series of specific questions:

- In Brazil, does the maternity status come with a professional penalty?
- What are the differences of opportunity experienced by mothers and non-mothers in Brazil and in the world?
- In what ways can these disparities further increase gender differences?
- Are there companies trying to mitigate these inequalities?

In a changing society, such dilemmas challenge businesses and institutions and defy their construction of a consistent identity. However, this tension remains marginal to the research agenda. Much has been debated recently about the fact that Brazilian women, especially of higher social classes and higher education, postpone or avoid motherhood to prioritize their careers (Fiorin, Oliveira, & Dias, 2014, p.6). However, little has the other side of the same coin been analyzed: how much are penalized in their professional trajectories the women who become mothers. Companies that seek to mitigate these inequalities and value motherhood, creating brand identity around this purpose, are still the exception.

2 METHODOLOGY

The present paper aims to measure the discrepancies of opportunities between mothers and women without children, based on an online quantitative research conducted by Market Analysis Brasil among 1019 people in 128 cities in the 5 regions of the country; the survey was applied at the end of 2017. The interviews were conducted using an online questionnaire and, therefore, all respondents had access to the internet.

To analyze the results, descriptive-exploratory analysis (cross tabulations, tests of significance and correlation) of this study were employed and also data on occupation and income of mothers and non-mothers of the Continued National Survey by Household Sample (PNAD-C) conducted by IBGE in the last quarter 2017.

The sample was weighted by variables of social class, sex and age to represent the adult urban population of Brazil. Among the female representatives, we had a sample of 61% of mothers and 39% of non-mothers. This information was cross-referenced with PNAD-C's data and literature.

3 DIMENSIONING THE PROFESSIONAL PENALTY OF MOTHERS

In Brazil, maternity status has been accompanied by a professional penalty. It has become increasingly clear how companies and society are unprepared for the insertion of mothers into the labor market. What is seen today is a marked inequality, a disadvantageous scenario for women who choose to become mothers. Traditionally imposed gender roles are such a common cultural ground that women believe that moving away from the labor market and education after they become mothers is a choice and a responsibility that concerns them alone. But how prepared is the market to absorb the diversity of needs these women have? To what extent does this choice of professional withdrawal for motherhood reflect rather the inability of companies to integrate both dimensions of women's lives rather than an illusory individual choice of new mothers?

Part of the explanation for this is in the culture, in the dichotomist form as motherhood and career are seen and portrayed. This historically formed position has crystallized gender roles and has served as support for exclusionary and alienating social structures. Some of these beliefs are easily accessed by any individual in today's society, for example, the idea that children are a woman's responsibility, confirmed in the difference of parental leave offered by organizations (maternity leave of 4 months, compared to the 5-day paternity license). Even when four out of ten Brazilian households are headed by women (PNAD-C, 2017), cultural frameworks that place men and women in different roles and responsibilities prevail. Indeed, the survey conducted by Market Analysis Brasil reveals, for example, the persistence of the belief that men should provide for their families and that women should take care of the household, using their income only for "supplementing" the household income (OIT, 2010). There is also a strong belief that, after having children, women are more focused on the home and offspring, while men become more concentrated and worried about work; a belief that is fed by the idea that men are the providers and having one more mouth to feed will make them even more dedicated to work (OIT, 2010).

The study clearly shows the adverse impacts of maternity on women's professional journey since the birth of the first child. Being a mother permanently hampers the search for employment and career progression, as well as negatively impacts women's wages. In addition, motherhood reduces the likelihood that women will achieve managerial and leading positions, and increase the likelihood that they will be left unoccupied, out of the labor market, or work in the public sector. By all accounts, most companies are still unprepared to provide opportunities and equal growth for men and women.

3.1 Income, occupation and educational inequalities

The persistence of professional inequalities between men and women illustrates a previous inequity that exists among women themselves; in fact, households with mothers have an average family income lower than that of households with women without children (Figure 1).

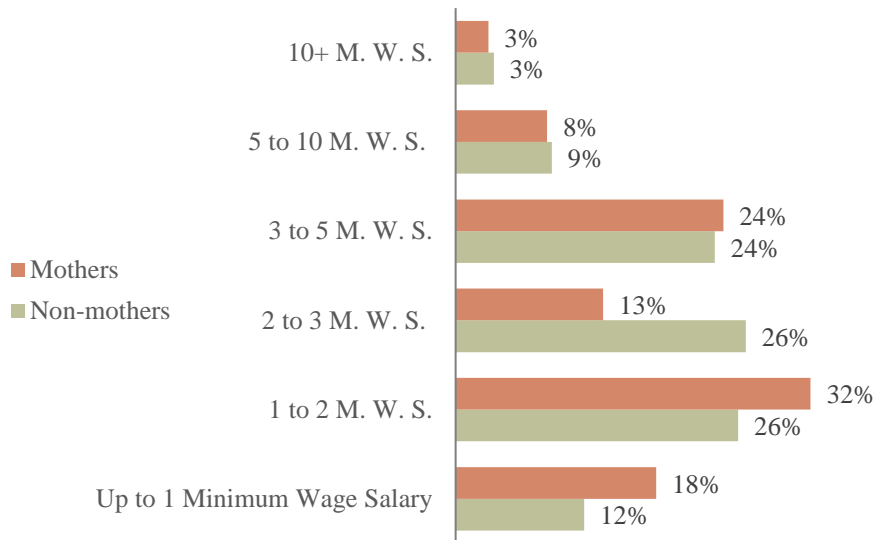


Figure 1 – Income of mothers and non-mothers
Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

The proportion of mothers whose occupation is to take care of the house is four times higher than women without children; furthermore, mothers rarely claim to be students (Figure 2). The modern economy requires time in the office and a fixed and long shift in most occupations, so it is more common for mothers to relinquish working or studying to devote themselves to raising their children and to the routines of the house. According to recent research on free time, even when both parents work full time, women tend to spend a lot more time on domestic shores and care of offspring than man.

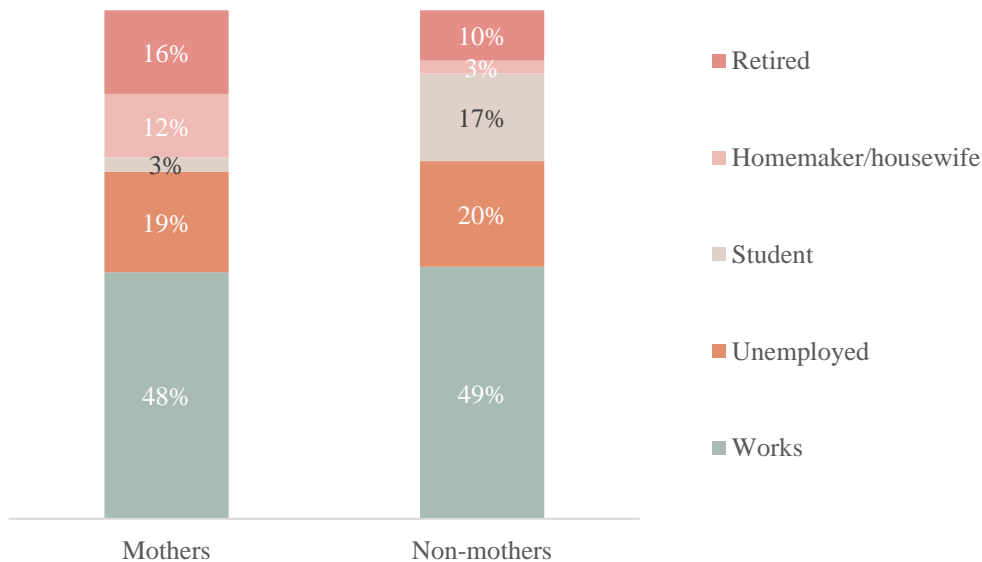


Figure 2 – Occupation of mothers and non-mothers
Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

Mothers have lower education, appearing in less expressive numbers at higher levels of education. This educational disadvantage conditions personal progress, crystallizing a lack of opportunities and flexibility on the part of educational institutions towards women who decide to dedicate themselves to motherhood (Figure 3).

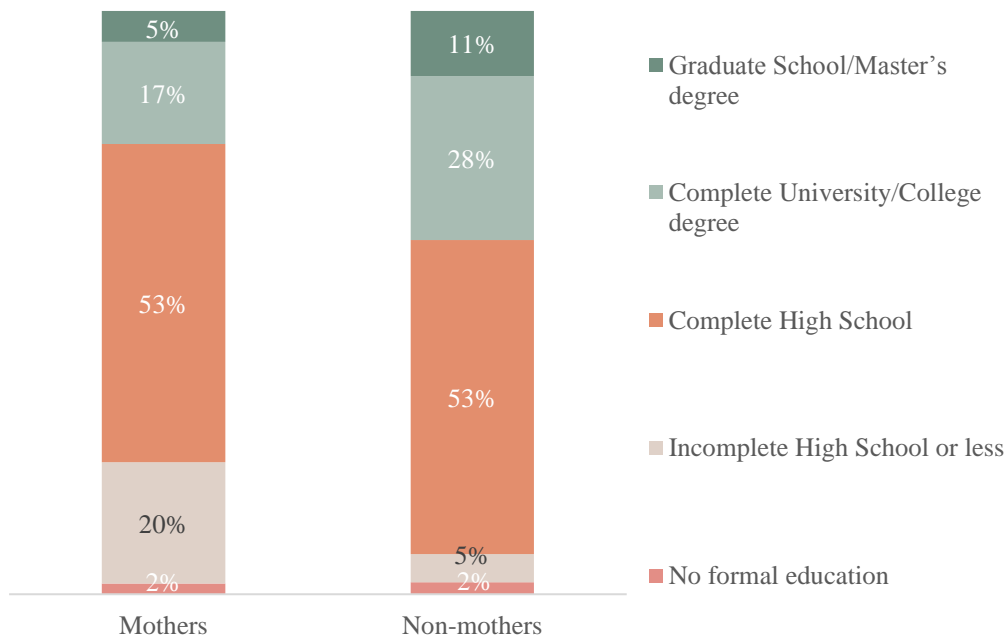


Figure 3 – Education of mothers and non-mothers
Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

The adversities that the educational institutions impose and the little reward that the private sector proposes work as a discouragement to the training and formative progress of the mothers' universe. The interest of starting or resuming studies is lower among mothers, regardless of their current level of education. When questioned about their plans for the next two years, 38% of women without children with full secondary education or less and 28% of those with higher education show an interest in completing studies or initiating training. Among mothers, this proportion drops to 21% and 14%, respectively (Figure 4).

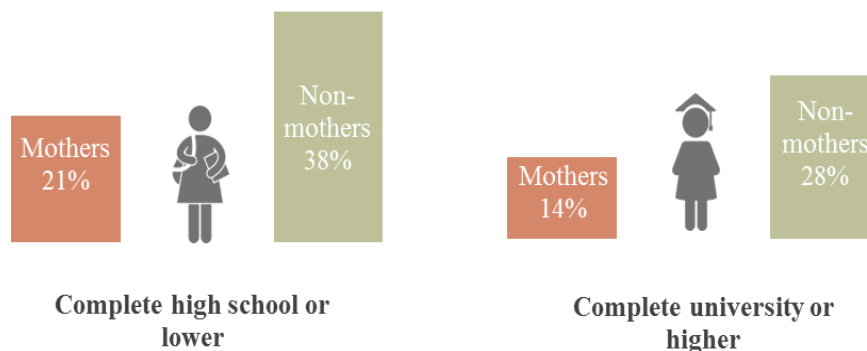


Figure 4 - Intention to complete studies, initiate training or study in the next two years, between mothers and non-mothers
Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

Women without children consider it more important to complete studies than mothers. Regarding the importance of the studies, 84% of the women without children agree that it is very important to complete the studies, while 72% of the mothers agree with the same statement, which indicates a difference in priorities (Figure 5).

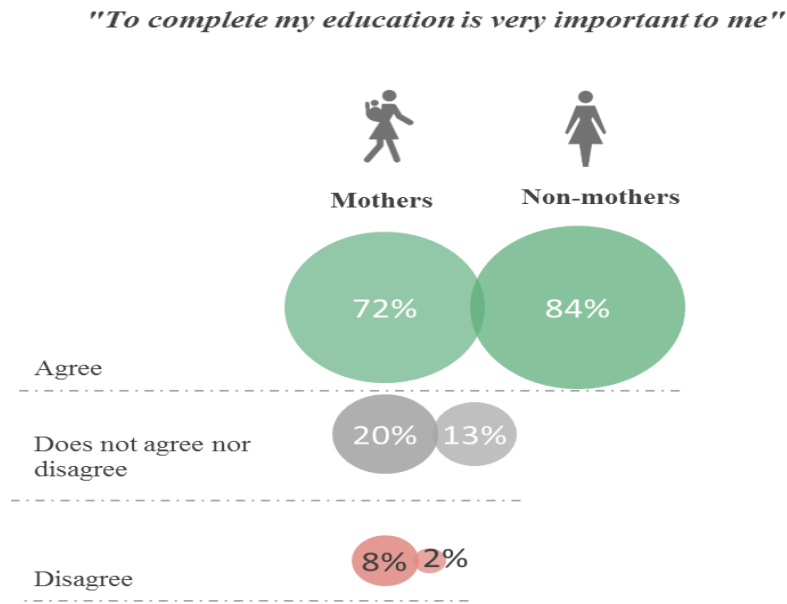


Figure 5 - Agreement with the statement "Completing studies is very important to me" between mothers and non-mothers
 Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

In addition, women are very clear about wage and opportunity differences, and mothers perceive these differences more often than women without children. When compared to men in their work areas, mothers more often claim lower wages than non-mothers. Seven out of 10 non-mothers perceive that there is currently greater pay equity; for mothers this proportion falls to 6 out of 10 (Figure 6).

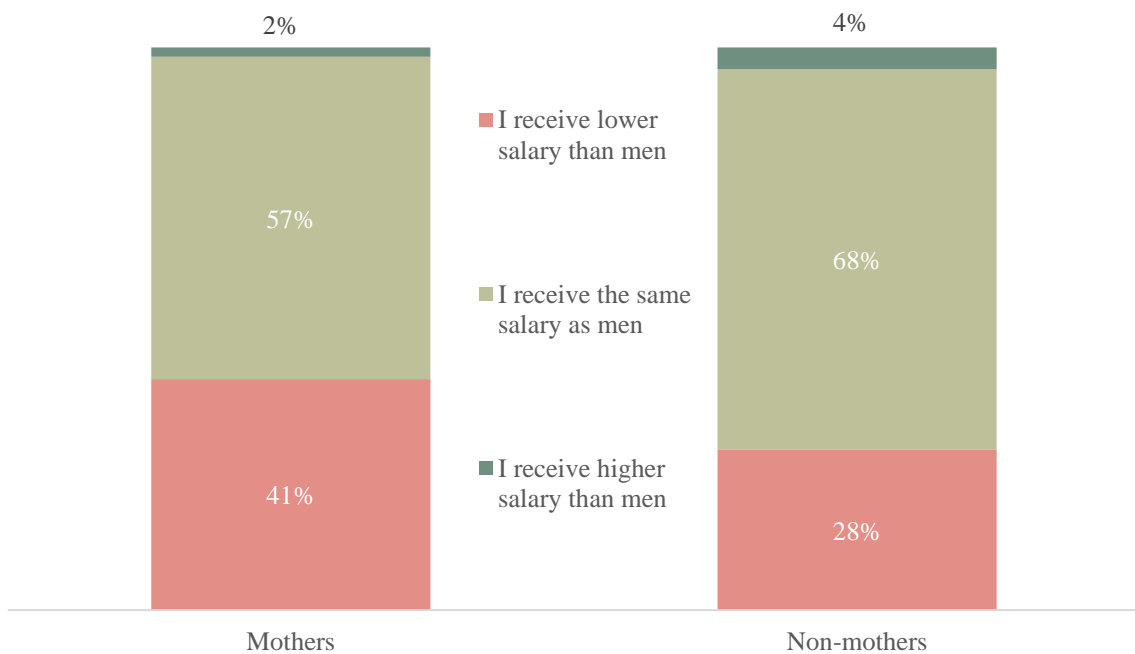


Figure 6 - Perception of wage differences by gender between mothers and non-mothers
 Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

Women who have children report more often perceiving less growth opportunities within their areas compared to men. Women without children also perceive the differences in growth, however, with a lower frequency (Figure 7).

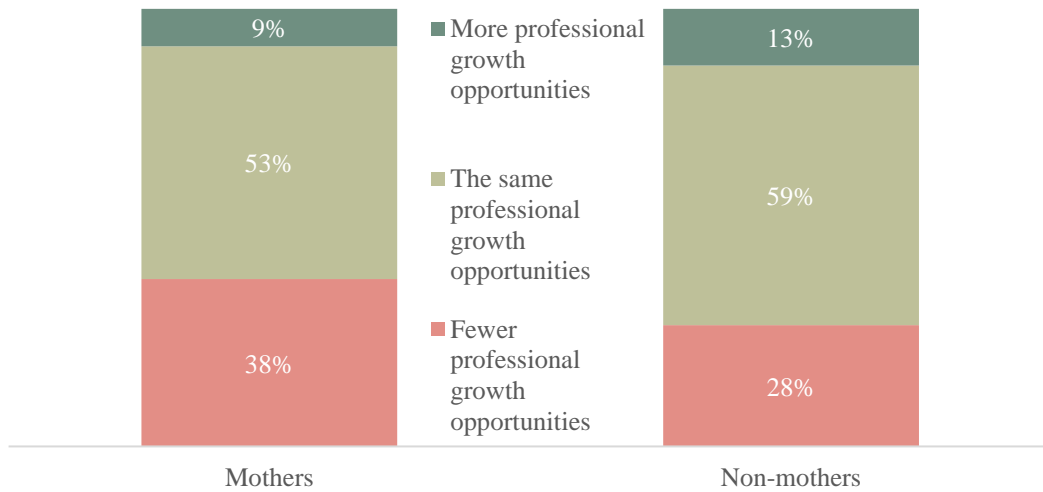


Figure 7 - Perception about differences in opportunities for professional growth by gender between mothers and non-mothers
 Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

The perception of these women is directly linked to reality. Among the more than 4.5 million companies that currently exist in Brazil, only a very small number have effective actions to retain mothers in their staff (Mercer Marsh Benefits, 2016). In addition, factual data from the PNAD-C (2017) show a chasm between men and mothers in the labor market.

According to the research, the income of women who are mothers corresponds to 78% of men's income. In addition, mothers account for only 58% of women in the workforce, while fathers are 83% (Figure 8).

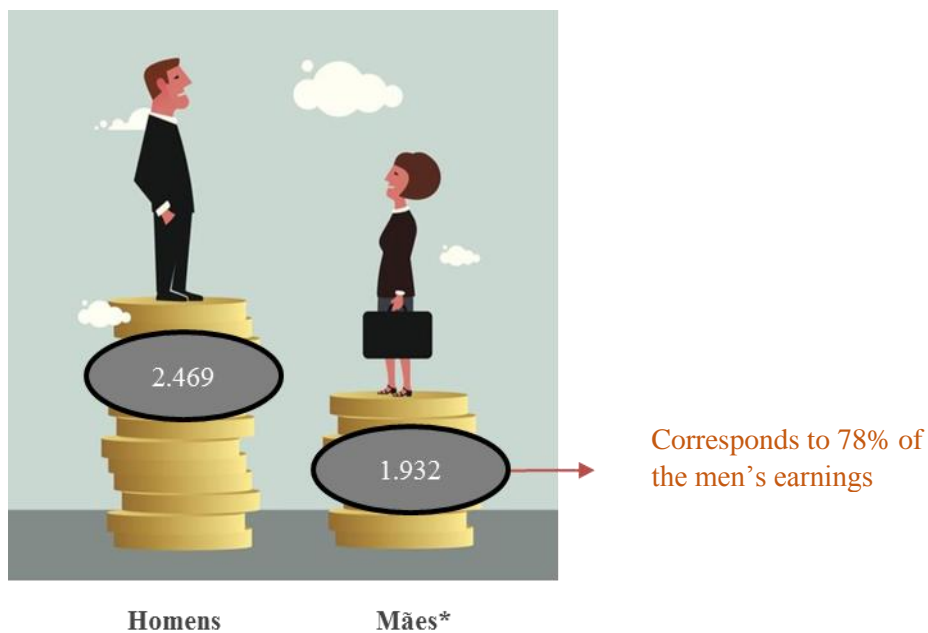


Figure 8 - Average income, by mothers (R\$), between men and mothers
 Source: PNAD-C (2017).

3.1.1 Inequalities beyond borders

This situation is not unique to Brazil. In the United States, a recent study shows that immediately after the birth of a child, the pay gap of a couple doubles due to the fall in the mother's earnings. The father's salary continues to rise, indicating that he is professionally rewarded for the family's constitution. Correl, Benard and Paik (2007) point out that motherhood, in the US, results in a penalization not only in salary: it was identified that, when stimulated to select candidates, company recruiters tend to consider mothers as less competent and committed to work.

Budig and England (2001) identify a 7% childbirth wage penalty for mothers. In Denmark, a notorious country for its equality policies, a recent study shows that, in the long run, the maternity pay penalty can reach 20% for female workers who became pregnant between 1980 and 2013. In this period, the weight of maternity as an explanation for wage differences doubled in Denmark (Figure 9).

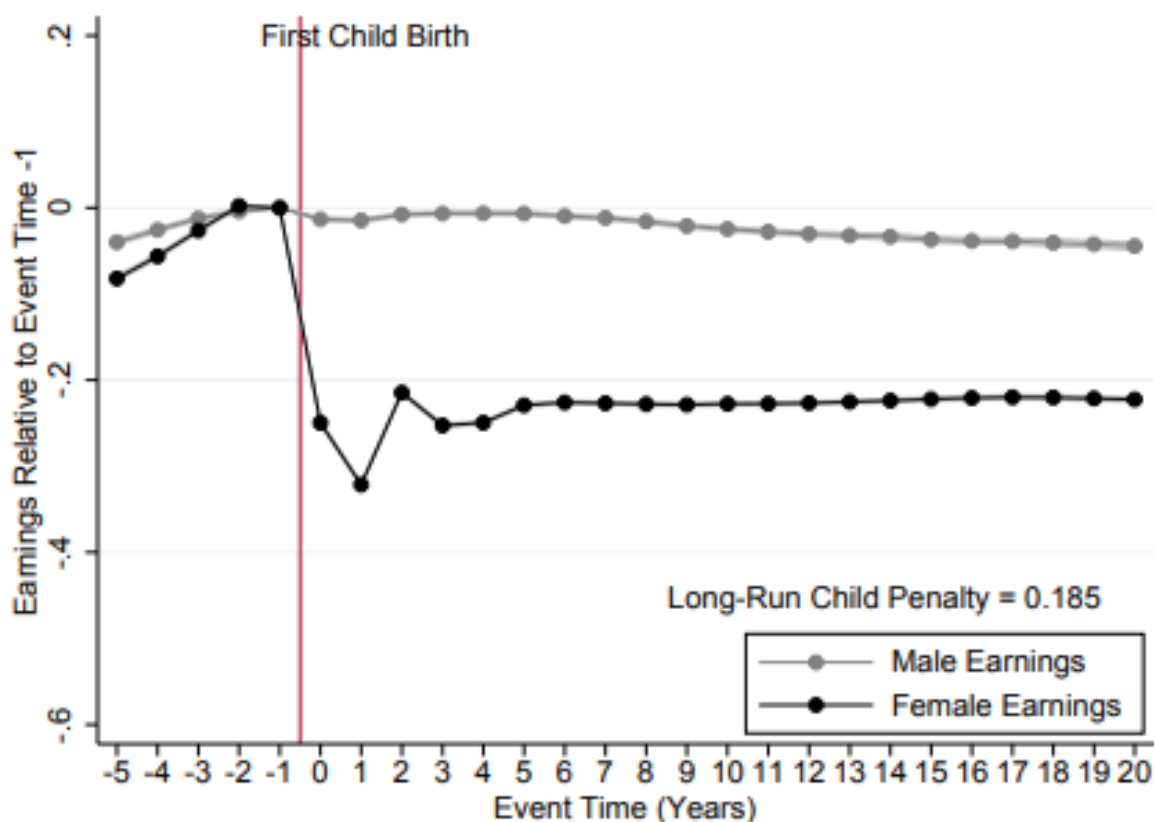


Figure 9 - Wages compared between men and women, 20 years after the birth of the first child
Source: Children and gender inequality: Evidence from Denmark (Kleven, Landais, & Søggaard, 2018).

In Brazil, women perceive the penalty on account of their choice for maternity, something that appears in a relatively normalized way. Although they realize that motherhood requires sacrifices, there is no regret for choice. Family values and mandates coincide with a share of personal stoicism and a problematic naturalization of the professional penalty to suffer. This position clearly reappears when it is established that motherhood does not automatically assume a preference for total immersion in the care of children. While one in five would rather stop working to take care of their children, the absolute majority would not give up being a mother to achieve their professional goals. In other words, the desire to reconcile career and family life persists.

When asked in a less direct way, if "being a mother, they had to set aside their goals", 5 out of 10 mothers agreed with the statement (Figure 10).

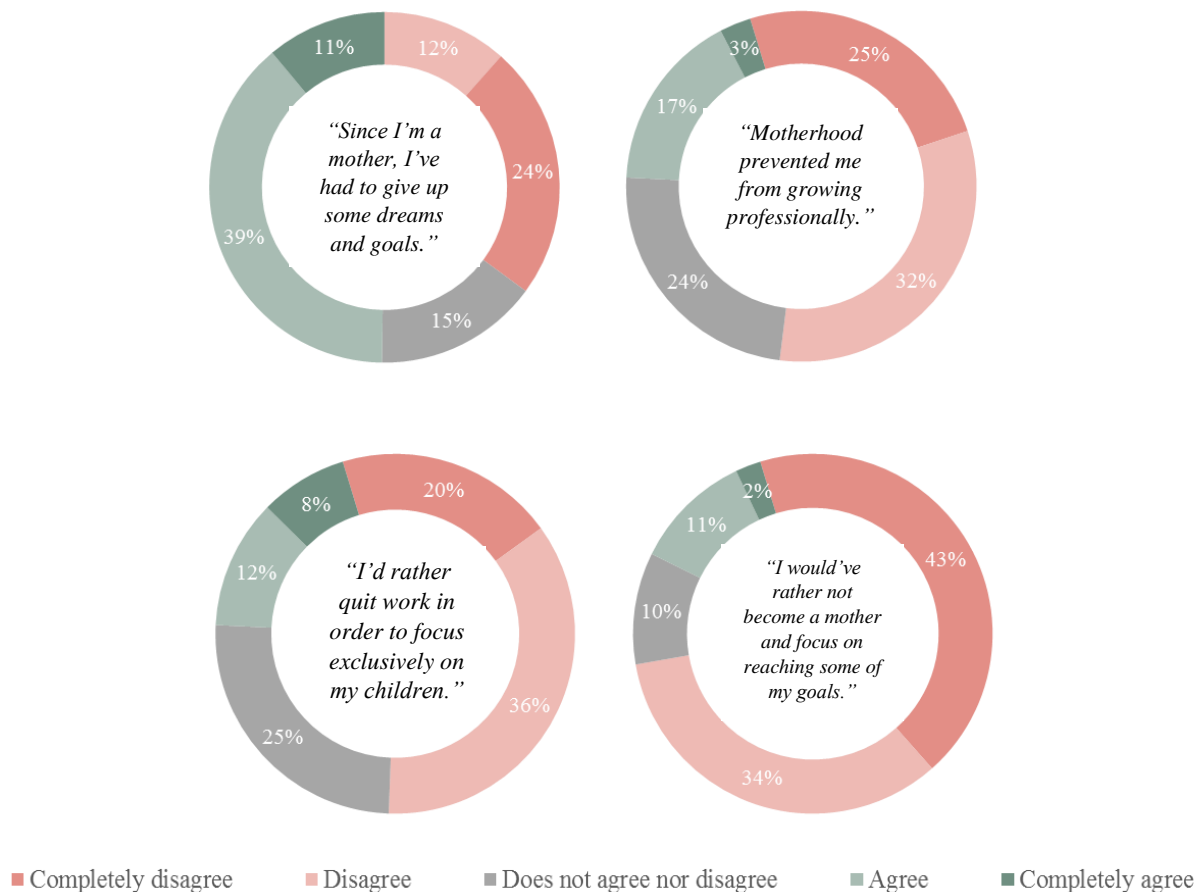


Figure 10 - Perception about the professional impact of motherhood among mothers
Source: Market Analysis Brasil.

3.1.2 Implications of the professional penalization of motherhood

Maternity is the period of the life of women where gender differences and inequalities are more evident, it is the moment in which culminates all the androcentric justifications that associate the feminine gender to lower productivity due to their role as mother. It is also noted that educational institutions and employers remain embedded in a model of work that does not absorb diversity and that has a binary view of gender roles, attributing to women the care of the family and to men the livelihood. Consequently, society crystallizes the denial of professional equality for the female universe, and companies and organizations lose the opportunity to innovate and solidify brands that respond to a positive agenda, thus becoming more potent.

Are companies prepared to deal with the diversity present in the labor market today? One way to ensure a leadership role is to include the challenge of maternal-professional recognition during the training of the organization's future managers. Companies can also adopt family leaves instead of maternity leave and include among their benefits childcare, nursery, flexible hours or home-office for new parents. The implementation of actions and licenses that encourage the greater participation of the father in the life of the child and a more proportional division of the parental tasks would be of great value to foment more equality since the home. Another interesting initiative is to adopt affirmative policies to include and encourage mothers in the workforce.

Public policies and initiative also play an important role in this; governments have the ability to shape how children will be raised by changing the structure of parental leave and improving public equipment (day care, school) so that the mother can continue her work.

There are several actions that have already been successfully implemented by companies, institutions and governments, several work fronts that can be adopted to mitigate the differences and inequalities of the labor market.

With regard to parental benefits, there are now several examples of companies that understand the needs of mothers and fathers and offer improvements for the reintegration and transition of these new parents. This is the case, for example, of Natura, Embraco, and Netflix. In addition, there are companies that develop affirmative policies to include and encourage women who opt for maternity as an employee, such as Unilever and Grupo Boticário. Or even companies that offer services aimed especially at mothers such as Maternativa, a company that, realizing this market gap, has turned to foster maternal entrepreneurship or the contrateumamae.com.br platform, which helps mothers to relocate in a professional position.

There are still few companies that adopt policies that bring more equity to their workforce, especially when the focus is the retention of mothers in the staff. However, there are noteworthy examples, such as Natura, which offers twice the paternity leave, 6 months of maternity leave, nursery and daycare in its premises. Embraco not only offers nursery for employees' children, but also allows its employees to start working 30 minutes later to breastfeed their child, an activity that can be carried out in the middle of the day and at the end of the day when they are released 20 minutes earlier. Unilever also offers nursery, flexible schedules and home office for new mothers. In addition, it provides courses for pregnant women and lectures with specialists in childhood and youth. The Boticário Group, famous for its actions in this sense, has a program of pregnant women in which it offers courses, lectures and practical classes, in addition to a home visit of a nursing professional soon after childbirth. The company also has a breastfeeding support room, where the woman can empty her breasts, storing her milk in previously sterilized containers. Boticário also counts on nanny aid and child education aid. Of the younger companies, Netflix offers 1 year maternity / paternity leave, flexible hours (for both parents), and the employee can return to work full or part time after leave (with full salary).

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the central relevance of motherhood in society, there is increasing evidence that it is one of the main mechanisms for explaining the persistence of wage inequality and career opportunity differences between men and women.

Maternity and career are still today, in contradiction, which ends up leading women to the postponement of maternity due to the search for career consolidation. Or, on the other hand, it leads to the abandonment or compromising the career for motherhood.

This unprecedented study aimed to scale up this problem in Brazil and broaden the debate on business policies that help reduce and overcome the contradiction between career and maternity.

To the extent that mothers lack the flexibility and opportunities to invest in their professional and educational development as a priority, they also encounter barriers to achieving the desired material security and a better future for themselves and their families. That is, professional achievement is fundamental to maintaining a sustainable society.

Managers and decision makers can replicate a traditional view of gender roles, even if unconsciously, because they are deeply rooted in collective thinking. Thus, a professional condition unfavorable to women and, especially, mothers, who see their careers impaired, is perpetuated. It is extremely important to highlight these inequalities and generate reflections on these issues.

Market research is a bridge between the needs of individuals and institutions, clarifying the dilemmas and fundamental tensions to enable more assertive actions to mitigate and abolish these inequalities.

Research can be a valuable tool to identify the demands of women in the labor market and clarify their perceptions regarding market insertion and professional achievement. In addition, it can clarify how the market absorbs and embraces these demands and how it would be possible to fit gender issues into the organizational culture, which would make the most sense for each organization. Research studies can elucidate the mutual impact of motherhood and career and offer direction to the actions of managers, civil society actors, and rulers, helping to understand how gender differences can impact their reputations.

It is the responsibility and function of the research industry to broaden the field of knowledge and remedy misunderstandings and gaps between organizations and society.

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