

Work and Family: An Exercise in Mixed Methodology

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Abstract: In order to present an exercise showing the importance of mixed methodology, this paper offers an exploratory approach to the simultaneous use of data sources clearly identified with qualitative and quantitative research styles. In doing so we took as a starting point a different platform than the one traditionally used in the field of labor studies, at least in Mexico. Instead of having as a main frame of reference a statistical database, we first analyzed qualitative information on a group of Mexican urban, middle-class women. One of the means we have found of linking the two sources has been to construct a typology—with quantitative data and similar to one previously elaborated in a qualitative study—to describe the possible links between four life trajectories (school, work, marriage and child-bearing). Combining a quantitative analysis with the results of a previous qualitative study was precisely what made it possible to both enrich and reinforce the proposal of the existence of diversity within homogeneity.

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1. Introduction

This text seeks to provide an initial approach to the complex debate between "quantitativists" and "qualitativists," through one of its many facets, expressed as the joint use of two sources of information clearly identified with each of the poles of the aforementioned dichotomy, in other words, a statistically representative survey and a set of in-depth interviews. The problem dealt with here concerns the development of female work trajectories. [1]

This paper contains a proposal constituting an exploratory approach that attempts to begin from a different platform from the one traditionally adopted in research on work trajectories. In other words, our starting point has been a purely qualitative study on a group of women from the urban middle class in Mexico, undertaken by one of the co-authors (BLANCO, 2002). The objectives of this study include analyzing the interrelationship between several of the life

trajectories comprising women's life courses. One of the most important trajectories is work, on the basis of which, in conjunction with the others (school, conjugal and reproductive), a typology was drawn up to describe the link between family and work. Subsequently, one of the ways we found of linking a qualitative source to a quantitative one was to construct a similar typology. First, qualitative material is used to construct a typology of the intersection of work and family in the life courses of middle-class women in Mexico. During a second stage, attempts are made to find these four types in quantitative data, which are then used to enrich the characteristics of the typology and to compare two cohorts, unlike the qualitative study in which only the trajectories of a single cohort are analyzed. [2]

2. A Look at the Methodological Discussion: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

In other texts (BLANCO & PACHECO, 2001; PACHECO & BLANCO, 2002) we have examined the way the debate between qualitative and quantitative approaches has developed in the social sciences, particularly since 1980. At this moment, suffice it to recall that this "struggle" between the two approaches saw a shift from recognition of the "enemy camp" to the idea of complementarity prevalent in the 1980s. This was followed by attempts to achieve integration until, in the late 1990s, a proposal was submitted to eliminate the famous qualitative-quantitative dichotomy, with some authors even postulating that "among the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, there is a continuum of methods" (NEWMAN & BENZ, 1998, p.11) in which, among other things, each approach provides feedback for the other. [3]

Certain authors (such as TASHAKKORI & TEDDLIE, 1998 and CRESWELL, 1995) who also support this proposal for a "continuum" of methods, spoke in the late 1990s of a "mixed methodology" as a means of taking up the effort that social sciences had made over several decades in order to achieve a genuine integration of approaches, methods and levels of analysis. Thus, following TASHAKKORI and TEDDLIE (1998), within this line there are four different ways of combining these elements: 1) Sequential: there are two separate stages, in other words, first of all a qualitative study is carried out followed by a quantitative one or vice versa, with the two eventually being combined; 2) Parallel or Simultaneous: qualitative and quantitative research is carried out at the same time; 3) Equivalent status: both approaches are used, and given the same importance in the understanding and explanation of the phenomenon under study; 4) Predominant Approach: although both approaches are used from the start, the researcher chooses one of them as predominant, meaning that the other is purely complementary. [4]

The exercise we will present on this occasion belongs to the first classification (TASHAKKORI & TEDDLIE, 1998, p.133) since although the study was initially a purely qualitative study on a group of women from middle-class sectors, statistically representative data sources were subsequently used for comparative purposes. [5]

3. Work-Family Link

The work-family link is now an essential topic in the discussion of women's work status. The relative absence of the diachronic dimension in the study of the work-family link in Mexico may have been due, among other things, to the difficulty involved in the theoretical and empirical handling of time in social research, as a result of which the main objective of this article is to use a longitudinal perspective to describe the process women have undergone over time. In order to achieve this, the problem has been classified within the life course approach, described in BLANCO and PACHECO (2003) that rejects homogeneity and temporal linearity and assumes a multidimensional conception of time. [6]

Using mainly one of the methodological tools included in the life course perspective—the trajectory—the analysis approaches the work-family dyad by examining the way the various life trajectories that make up the course of women's lives are interrelated and coexist. More specifically, the aim is to describe the links between certain basic life trajectories (school, work, marital and reproductive) in shaping the life course of a group of middle class women in Mexico City, with the idea of comparing two birth cohorts on the basis of qualitative data. [7]

The practical way, then, of creating a qualitative-quantitative combination was to use a source of qualitative data and a statistically representative one to identify the various characteristic of the link between family and work through the possible interlocking between the four life trajectories already mentioned and thereby to establish a typology that initially emerged from qualitative information and was subsequently drawn up on this occasion for the "Encuesta Demográfica Retrospectiva" ["Retrospective Demographic Survey"] (EDER). [8]

4. Characteristics of Information Sources

As regards the qualitative empirical approach, this study began with a previous study undertaken by BLANCO (2002) in which it was decided to follow up a group of middle-class women from an initial universe of reference consisting of a school group comprising boys and girls that were classmates in secondary school (and in some cases, elementary and/or high school too) at a private school in Mexico City then regarded as middle-class, during the second half of the 1960s. In 1966, the first year of secondary school had two groups with a total of 96 students, 43% of whom were girls (data taken from the 1966 yearbook). Part of this group has continued to meet up sporadically over the years and in 1996 (thirty years later) there was a meeting attended by 19 women (of the 41 enrolled in the first year of secondary school, and therefore 46% of this total) and 18 men. Thus, the mere fact of attending this meeting and the possibility of obtaining a series of basic data became the first cut-off point in the process of selecting the women who would subsequently be interviewed. [9]

The attendees (both men and women) answered a short questionnaire with basic socio-demographic data such as their exact age, marital status and number of

offspring: the same instrument recorded information on their academic and professional trajectories and the type of work they were engaged in at the time. Finally, of the 19 women that attended the 1996 meeting, 12 agreed to be interviewed. Nearly all of them were born in Mexico City, and mostly in 1953 and therefore belong to a cohort or generation that also constitutes a school cohort. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out that virtually constituted life histories, all of which were recorded and fully transcribed. [10]

As for the quantitative empirical cut-off point, the Retrospective Demographic Survey (EDER) taken by INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics]) in 1998 under the coordination of a group of researchers from Mexican and foreign institutions, was used. This survey is the first Mexican biographical survey representative at the national level for three age cohorts (persons born between 1936 and 1938, 1951 and 1953 and 1966 and 1968), which follows up the life histories of men and women, focusing on three main aspects: family, work and migration. [11]

Since the youngest cohort (1966-1968) had not completed its childbearing period of life at the time when the survey was taken, we decided to compare the first two cohorts. It is worth noting that the 1951-1953 cohort coincides with the period of birth of the group of women interviewed for the qualitative study. [12]

EDER constitutes a sub-set of the sample of the National Demographic Dynamics Survey (ENADID) taken in 1997. The retrospective survey includes a maximum of 100 cases for each state in the Mexican republic differentiated by representative levels of urbanization for localities with under or over 15,000 inhabitants. It is worth noting that three calendar years were taken into account for each cohort to ensure that it was as homogeneous as possible. At the same time, all the events recorded in the survey had a duration of at least a year in the individuals' lives. [13]

In order to study middle-class women in the EDER, the selection criterion was that the women's fathers had been employed in non-manual jobs (as professionals, technicians, teachers, clerical workers and sales assistants) and that their daughters had completed at least one year of secondary school. This decision was made following the realization that a previous criterion, i.e. that the women should have completed at least one year of university, as in the case of the women in the qualitative study which operated as a proxy variable for the middle classes, was appropriate for the 1951-1953 cohort but not for the older cohort (1936-1938) since very few women fell into this category. [14]

In short, of the 2,496 cases of men and women interviewed, we worked with two sub-groups of approximately 400 women in each cohort with women from urban localities (201 women from the 1936-1938 cohort and 254 from the 1951-1953 cohort) being selected from these sub-groups. Finally, of the population of urban women, only 15 women out of the 1936-1938 cohort and 24 women out of the 1951-1953 cohort met the criteria of having completed at least one year of secondary school and having fathers who had engaged in non-manual tasks. [15]

5. First Step: A Typological Proposal

In the qualitative study used as the starting point for this article, an attempt was made to place the interviewees at two poles that are apparently present in any socio-economic group and specific occupation in which women are engaged: "never" having engaged in extra-domestic work either before or after marriage and "always" having worked extra-domestically, in other words, both before and after marriage and even without stopping work during the time when they had children. [16]

Marital and reproductive trajectories were incorporated precisely because of their close links with work trajectories. Thus qualitative research highlighted a key issue: bearing in mind the fact that the majority of the women interviewed had been engaged in paid employment at some time in their lives, when either single or married, an attempt was made to find the different forms adopted by the family-work dyad, in other words, the ways these women had exercised or developed this link. [17]

In order to determine these forms, four types were constructed that took into account both women's work trajectories over the years (approximately 20) and where the defining factor was the importance or pre-eminence given to either the work or the familial-domestic sphere. Although the work-family link had been present in three out of the four types over the years, the point was precisely to conduct a more accurate analysis and to observe the diversity and nuances of each type, in other to describe the various ways in which women have been linked to extra-domestic work throughout their lives, thereby rejecting the idea of homogeneity by class and stage in the life cycle. [18]

Thus, four types of trajectories were distinguished, for each of which, a representative passage was selected:

1. Women have never worked extra-domestically or else the period spent in the work sphere has been much shorter than the time devoted to the domestic sphere.

"... if everything had worked out as I planned, I would have finished my degree and worked, but it's something that happens to you, isn't it? In other words, things change, things turn up and there you are ... your home and all that that implies, the house ties you down more than your kids ..." (married home-maker with three children).

2. Women have clearly given family life priority, yet despite this, have engaged in part-time work, sporadic and even philanthropic work over the years. Moreover, as regards the income they generate, these activities have always been regarded as totally complementary to the family economy, in other words, the husband's income.

"your priority is your family and kids, but without forgetting about your job, so I have always tried to fit in my work, in other words, the hours I can work, without letting it affect the time I spend with my children ... obviously my family comes first, but I've always worked a bit as well ..." (married, with a social science degree, 2 children).

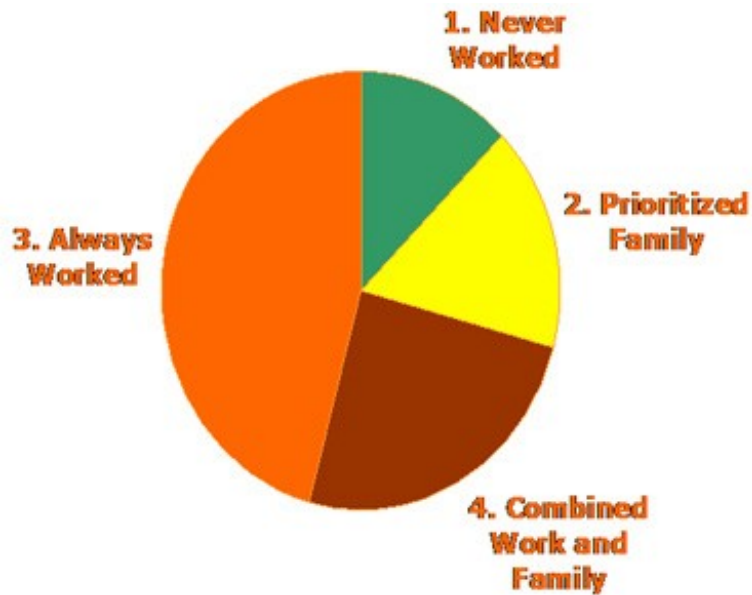
3. These trajectories display the greatest continuity, in other words, these women have worked from before the time they were married and motherhood has not always implied prolonged interruptions from or stopping work. Moreover, they have always worked in the same type of occupation and even in the same type of institution.

"I think the two areas [family and work] are very important, I think that I have always tried to combine them and keep the two areas as close as possible. I've worked all my life, I've never stopped working, not even when my daughters were born. Moreover, I have always needed to work for the money, for example, when my daughters were born, I didn't even think about stopping work ..." (divorced, degree and specialty in the area of social sciences, 2 daughters).

4. Despite a certain amount of discontinuity, due to having changed jobs or type of occupation several times (for example, from academia to the public sector or private enterprise and vice versa and having engaged in different types of jobs and activities) and having spent fairly long periods without working (2 to 3 years) due mainly to motherhood, these women have expressed an interest and sometimes have a financial need (for example, in the case of divorcees) to have a job, income and professional development.

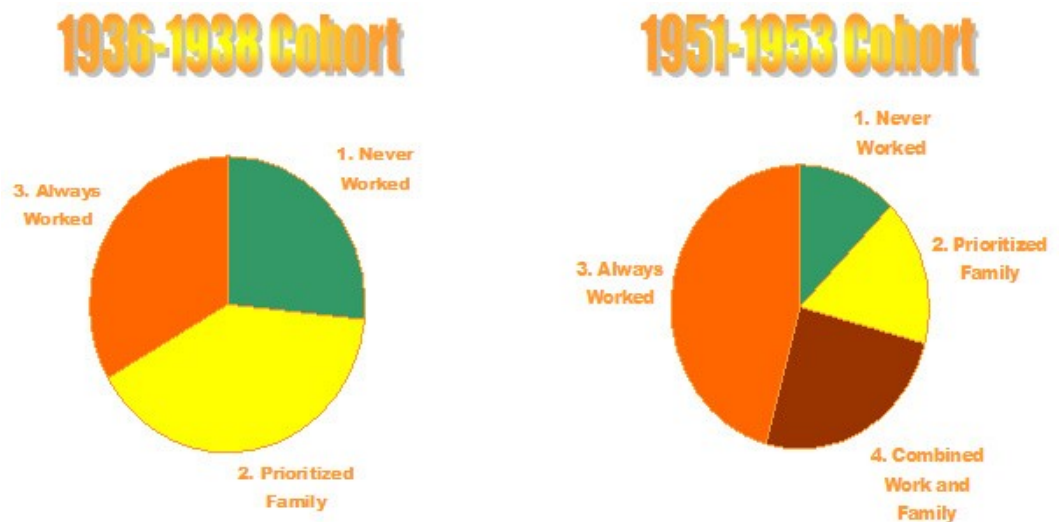
"I have taken a rather tortuous route. I was a bit confused about what to do, on the one hand, I wasn't sure whether I was cut out to be an academic or whether I should get a part-time job, get married and do what lots of professional women do, in other words, make sure that their work doesn't interfere with their obligations as a woman. In the end, despite a number of crises, I have always worked, but in lots of things and sometimes very different fields, ranging from writing television programs to working in research labs to other things ..." (married, with a degree in physics and math and an MA in the area of social sciences, 2 children). [19]

Although the link between family and work had been present in three out of four of types (shown in Graph 1 in the categories "Always worked," "Combined work and family" and "Prioritized family"), the first type is exclusively devoted to the familial-domestic sphere (see the "Never worked" section in Graph 1).



Graph 1: Typology of women in the family-work dyad (twelve middle-class women in Mexico City). [20]

However, as regards the construction of a typology on the basis of the EDER data, we sought first to locate the women that had never worked (type one of qualitative typology). Locating this type of women immediately took us back to the constant mention of women's increased insertion in the labor market, since of the cohort of women born between 1951 and 1953, only three out of the 24 women selected (just over a tenth) had never worked, whereas in the older cohort (1936-1938) this group comprised four out of the 15 women selected (in other words, about a quarter) (Graph 2).



Graph 2: Typology of women in the family-work dyad (women in the EDER survey) [21]

6. Second Step: Links between Life Trajectories of two Cohorts of Mexican Women

From the life course perspective, individual biographies comprise multiple, interlocking trajectories. Therefore, in this section we will describe the ways women have linked the four aforementioned types of trajectories throughout their lives. It is worth noting that in previous articles (BLANCO & PACHECO, 2001, 2003; PACHECO & BLANCO, 2002), a detailed description was provided of each of the life trajectories considered, but on this occasion, we aim to highlight the findings regarding the way they are linked and specifically, we wish to describe the different ways in which women implement the links between work and family ([Illustration 1](#) shows one example for each type of interlocking between trajectories). [22]

Since this article compares two cohorts, the first question that arises is whether different historical moments encourage different links between the group of women that have never worked. On the basis of the information available, it would seem that "never worked" included extremely similar life trajectories, despite the fact that the life courses of this type of women occurred at different times since they belong to two cohorts. One characteristic highlighted by the study is the fact that in the cohort of women born between 1951 and 1953, only three out of the 24 women selected from the EDER had never worked, whereas for the older cohort (1936-1938) this group comprised 4 out of the 15 women selected. On the one hand, the cohort born at the beginning of the 1950s showed a slight decline in fertility, whereas the offspring of these women spent longer in their parents' home as opposed to those of the older cohort, which probably suggests that women in the 1950s cohort spent more time devoted to the familial-domestic sphere. [23]

A second type corresponds to women that have prioritized family life: 6 out of the 15 women in the 1936-1938 cohort and 4 out of the 24 women in the 1951-1953 cohort. This group includes women that have slightly fewer children than those in the previous group, yet is characterized by the fact that they stopped working when they had children. The length of their work trajectories is shorter than that of the groups we will subsequently review. This second type shows greater heterogeneity within each cohort and between cohorts. There is also a two-year difference in the time of entry into the labor market between the two cohorts. Nevertheless, this entry still took place at a relatively young age (between 16 and 18 on average in each cohort respectively.) This heterogeneity is also reflected in the number of years worked, which ranges from 1 to 17 years. Finally, there is a sharp difference between the fertility of the older cohort and the 1951-1953 cohort. [24]

A third type represents the opposite of the women who never worked, in other words, it corresponds to those with continuous work trajectories (5 out of the 15 women in the first cohort and 11 out of the 24 women in the 1951-1953 cohort). Since this type includes married, separated, divorced and single women, it shows the heterogeneity within a common feature, even though the largest proportion

corresponds to the group of married women or those living with their partners. It is also worth mentioning that this group contains women that do not have children. The number of years worked varies from 24 to 34 years of continuous economic activity (in a comparison of the two cohorts at the age of 45), the longest period of time for this cohort. [25]

A fourth type corresponds to women that, despite having worked intermittently, have given priority to their extra-domestic over their domestic work (none in the first cohort and 6 in the 1951-1953 cohort.) One of the primary differences in relation to the previous group lies in the number of years worked since this ranges from 14 to 24 years, with periods of not working of less than four years and age at first job being higher than in the previous case. [26]

In short, one could say that in the case of the generation born between 1936 and 1938, there are two opposite types of behavior. On the one hand, there is a predominance of the model representing the roles traditionally assigned to women, in other words, never having worked or having given priority to the family over extra-domestic work and on the other hand, albeit to a lesser extent, this group includes women that have worked continuously. Women in the 1951-1953 cohort show how having been born at a different time in history is reflected in a change in roles that are socially assigned by gender. Thus, nearly half are located in the group of the typology corresponding to a continuous work trajectory. They also display a more heterogeneous pattern in the family-work dyad, thereby reducing the number of cases that would correspond to the type of "never having worked" or rather of "having prioritized the family" and finally, there is clear evidence of the attempt to combine domestic and extra-domestic work (see Illustration 1 in the [Appendix](#)). [27]

7. Final Considerations

On this occasion, attempts have been made to undertake an exercise on the methodological problem involved in the simultaneous use of two data sources derived from two research strategies long regarded as being at opposite ends of the spectrum. [28]

The answer to the question of what type of combinations occur in the interrelationship between family and work in middle-class women is provided by drawing up a typology that describes the heterogeneity and diversity within a fairly homogeneous universe. [29]

The background to this is a feature that emerges in the majority of studies on women's work trajectories, in other words, the fact that they are characterized more by discontinuity in the long term and intermittence in the short term. The search for differences and nuances proved to be a common objective for the two types of data sources used. Indeed, we believe that having combined a quantitative approach with the results of an earlier qualitative study was precisely what made it possible to both enrich and reinforce the proposal regarding the existence of diversity within homogeneity. [30]

In comparing the two birth cohorts, it proved useful to take historical contexts into account when trying to analyze women's economic participation and the latter's connection with the familial-domestic sphere. During the 1930s, Mexico was virtually a rural country, when most women did not work outside the home, although for those that did engage in paid work, it was difficult to separate the domestic and extra-domestic spheres. By the 1950s, the situation had already changed. The country's industry was rapidly developing and Mexico City was growing rapidly, as a result of the combined effect of country-city migration and high fertility. Thus, whereas women born in the 1930s displayed a sharply polarized pattern, in other words, they either "never worked" or "always worked," women born in the 1950s showed greater diversification as regards the links between the life trajectories considered, particularly the combination between the domestic-familial spheres and extra-domestic work, meaning that the pre-dominant modality was the one that attempted to reconcile work and family. [31]

At the same time, qualitative information provided certain socio-cultural referents that have assigned women to the domestic sphere and the dilemma that "having" to choose between a professional career and raising children represented for many years, at least for middle-class women born during the second half of the 20th century in Mexico. Finally, implementing a specific mixed methodology proposal made us aware of the diversity of patterns that may exist in the links between the various basic life trajectories of a group of middle-class women-whom one might initially think would have very similar life courses, hence the idea of the existence of diversity within homogeneity. [32]

Appendix

Illustration 1: [Types of interlocking between trajectories](#) (PDF file, 97 kb)

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