

## Ideological dilemmas and everyday life: A qualitative research about Spanish female teleworkers

### Dilemas ideológicos y vida cotidiana: Una mirada cualitativa sobre las mujeres que teletrabajan en España

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#### Background

Our research examines tensions and contradictions defining our daily life, specifically in the topic of telework. Around three decades ago, teleworking stormed the labour scene as a revolutionary and emancipatory promise. It was defined as a form of employment that would be capable of tackling some of contemporary society's greatest challenges. One that was consistently referred to was that of improving work-life balance. Nevertheless, other studies were quick to show that teleworking is more than just a technology that solves problems arising in the context of employment. It is a new logic or even a new rationale that ushers in deep-seated social changes. For example, it breaks down the dividing line between the workplace and the home, bolsters women's traditional roles and even alters the spatio-temporal coordinates of what are regarded as work activities.

#### Aims

With regard to the situation in Spain, there are still no qualitative studies looking at what the teleworking experience means to its users and what kind of transformations it leads to in their everyday lives. Our work aims to broaden the scope of the new literature arising in Spain in this area and, more specifically, to answer two hitherto unasked questions. Firstly, it examines how users define their telework practice. And, secondly, it analyses whether this management helps them achieve a better work-life balance.

#### Method & procedures

Our research is a qualitative work carried out following the proposals of a feminist social-constructionist tradition based on two main ideas: a) the meanings that social actors produce in their everyday life are a key variable shaping our shared social reality; b) discourses, explanations, speech acts and so on are important tools to produce this reality. In this sense our work focuses exclusively on the experience of women. The reason is that women carry out more regular home-based telework than men and, in most contexts, they appear to do so mainly in order to balance work and family-related tasks. Our study is based on individual interviews carried out on a sample of 24 women, and on 10 focus groups held with a sample of 48 women in Spain. The total sample included 72 female teleworkers with family responsibilities. Some 20% of the women were full-time teleworkers and the other 80% performed telework between one afternoon and three days a week. A snowball sampling method was used (Patton, 2002) in which we contacted individuals in companies and public bodies that we knew had telework programmes, and distributed e-mails to colleagues about our search for teleworkers.

#### Results & discussion

The study proposes ideological dilemmas as a conceptual and research tool to examine the tensions and contradictions defining our daily life. In this sense, we present a qualitative research whose object of analysis is the daily laboral experience of Spanish teleworkers having dependent people on their charge. The article highlights the dilemmatic nature of teleworking and how this is a very amplification of tensions existing in the Spanish women labor market. These tensions

are based on what we have called “flexi-patriarchy”. The main ideological dilemmas described in the study are: collapsed lives vs. emancipated lives; secluded lives vs. empowered lives; and the desired career vs. the lived career.

### Conclusion

Research underscores that ideological dilemmas do not constitute crossroads that force teleworkers to choose between competing options or alternatives. On the contrary, dilemmas have a value in themselves and are deployed and maintained as explanatory resources and axiological evaluations denouncing specific situations of tension. In this vein, the three aforementioned tensions are based on what we have called “flexi-patriarchy”. This is the situation denounced by Spanish female teleworkers.

**Keywords:** daily life, flexi-patriarchy, ideological dilemma, telework, work-life balance

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