

# Perceptions of the State's Role, Productive and Reproductive Work: An Analysis of Rio de Janeiro\*

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes, from a survey applied to the entire state of Rio de Janeiro through a sample research, perceptions and representations of men and women about productive and reproductive work in our society. In order to do this, the survey takes up some issues already explored and analyzed in previous research conducted in 2003 and introduces new variables. The resulting information offers a rich panorama that can be analyzed together with other data sources provided by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics/IBGE) in order to outline the process of deconstruction of traditional gender identities. In this sense, perceptions about the roles of family, state and market in the possible arrangements under discussion vary greatly depending on the respondent's profile. Generally speaking, it highlights the fact that historically important variables such as educational level have a modified importance because of the increasing complexity of ongoing dynamics in recent years.

**Keywords:** Gender, Work, Care institutions.

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\* Received March 17 2016, accepted April 11 2016. Translated by Leslie Damasceno.

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## **Introduction**

The literature that discusses gender and reproductive work in Brazil customarily points out the blatant failure of currently structured public policy in facilitating an effective participation of the Brazilian state in the provision of services that would unburden women from negative aspects of their historical role as family caregivers. This is a picture showing little progress despite the intense changes that female identities and the very role of women in our society have undergone.

Despite successive increases in female participation rates in the labor market, the task of caring for children, the elderly, sick and deficient remains highly concentrated in the hands of women. The total hours of women's work, incorporating both labor in the market as well as so-called reproductive work, are considerably higher than men in all educational strata (Melo and Castilho, 2008). This scenario reveals a disparity between the intense advances of the female population in the public world and maintaining the standards that constrain women to continue developing in care-concentrated work.

The persistence of this scenario reflects a patriarchal culture, for which duties relating to the care and the very work of social reproduction are still socially constructed as exclusively family tasks. Although the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 marks, in many ways, an advance in a kind of egalitarian perspective to be built into policy in the field of reproductive work, it still reaffirms the family as the primary institution responsible for the care of its members.

The wording of the text stands out for the problematic perception that the state's participation in the process of care for dependent individuals occurs secondarily in cases of failure or absence of the family, understood here as the "natural" responsible for the shelter and protection of its members.

This kind of perception rooted not only in law but also still very evident in much of the population's daily practices, raises important questions regarding the discursive and political disputes

around the relationship between state, market and society in the field of social reproduction.

In this sense, this article aims to analyze the perceptions of men and women of the State of Rio de Janeiro in relation to the role of various institutions and agents designated to ensure and develop the care provided to households and the dependent individuals who are members of these households. This panorama allows us to see cultural elements that are still active in practices and values, making political demands change historically, but not always approaching more modern standards that reflect the thinking that social reproduction should be a task to be shared among women, men and the State itself through structured public policies.

The most extensive research into which this article is inserted, "Gender, Work and Family in Rio de Janeiro: changes and permanence in the last decade," proceeds from a state survey,<sup>1</sup> in sample form, and from a comparative perspective to research done ten years ago on the relationship between gender, work and family, and the organization of its resulting information for public divulgation. The extensive questionnaire of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), module Family Change and Gender Roles, updated and expanded, sought to investigate gender relations and the balance between paid work and unpaid domestic work, care responsibilities and family context.

### **1. Perceptions of the state's role: who should provide care and through what means?**

Political actors, such as the feminist movement, historically exercised an important role in pressuring the state to expand childcare, full-time schools and specialized care centers for the elderly etc. This type of policy directly impacts on gender relations

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<sup>1</sup> This research was coordinated by Professor Clara Araújo and financed by the FAPERJ (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro / the State of Rio de Janeiro Foundation to Support Research*). 1,198 questionnaires were distributed throughout the State of Rio de Janeiro.

by enabling women to spend less time on caregiving and more fully integrate into the labor market.

Recent studies on time use have shown that men still participate little in housekeeping (Dedecca, 2008). Another important thing that these studies have revealed is that although women still work less hours per week than men, they contend with much longer “double days” (productive work plus reproductive work) than men. As historically denounced by the feminist movement, this picture is not only a reflection of power relations within households, but also of the absolutely secondary role assumed by the State in this process.

Several studies show how daycare and school coverage is far from universal in Brazil (Sorj, 2006). The low attendance of children in kindergartens and schools, particularly when smaller, is due to a number of factors that are not restricted to the lack of such services. According to data from PNAD 2013 (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios / National Research in Domicile Survey), at the age of 0-3 years, only 23% of children attended this type of establishment; and in the 4 to 6 years-old segment, this percentage reaches 81%. This is a low level compared to other countries.

Araújo and Scalon (2005) have pointed out in a previous study that parental resistance to putting the child in daycare when the child is still small (up to 3 years) persists in Brazilian society. This reality reflects the still very strong perception that family, particularly the mother, would be the best person to care for the child. On the other hand, the negative view in relation to daycare as care facilities for children may be associated with concrete experiences of the population. In other words: in addition to the issue of supply in the number of vacancies, which is less than the demand of families, it also puts into debate the issue of quality of care. In this sense, a negative experience with the use of daycare or even with little professionalized caregivers can have an effect that reinforces the concept of the mother's role as “preferred caregiver” in context of a service that is evaluated as poor.

Initially, we conducted a cross reference of the question “Who should care for children under school age?” by gender. The data showed no significant differences in the distribution of responses<sup>2</sup> between men and women: about 67% answered “family,” 23% affirmed that it was the “public day care centers or government institutions,” 5.3% of men and 3.2% of women cited services and private institutions. Another difference relates to the relative weight of the category “employers,” which was 2.7% in the male group and reached 6% in women. The option of “non-profit organizations” showed a very small percentage of responses.

As we addressed the same question by gender and according to educational level, the distributions are close to full baseline, being quite distinct only in the case of uneducated men, who answered “family” in 100% of the responses. This reflects a conservative standard, homogeneously shared by less educated men. An interesting element to note is that only in the case of women does the response for burden of care to “employers” increase gradually in relation to the educational level of the respondents, reaching 12.4% among women with undergraduate or graduate degrees. The “private services and facilities” in this group is also higher and reaches 5.6% of the responses. Even in this segment, which is more inserted into the labor market and has more openness to relativize the role of the family, the alternatives identified relate to individual strategies, since the response of public daycare centers also is low.

In general, this draws attention to the fact that, except for the more educated women and less educated men, the relative distribution of responses is very close. This picture points to a widely shared representation that normalizes the family as primarily responsible for childcare. This data indicates that daycare

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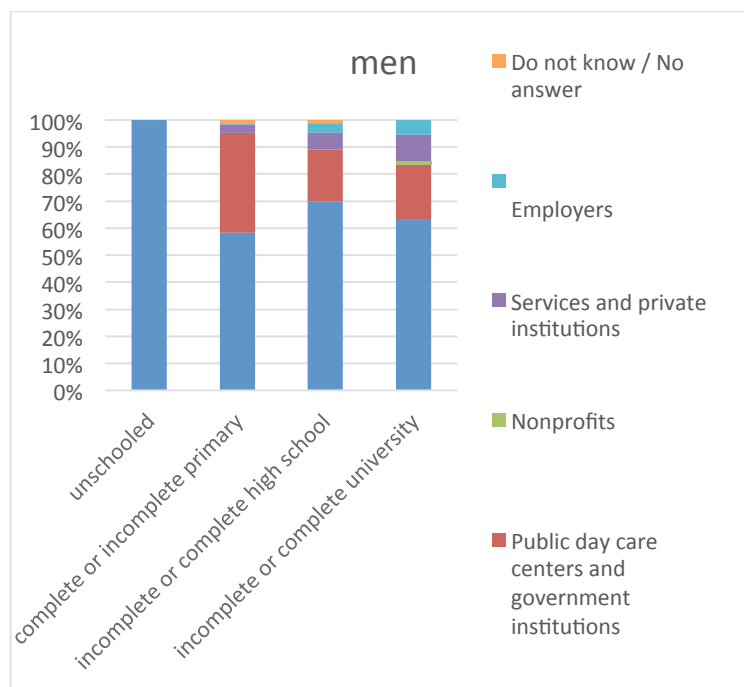
<sup>2</sup> The response options to the questionnaire were as follows: 1) Members of the family; 2) Public daycare centers or governmental institutions; 3) Non-profit organizations (ex: charity organizations, churches, etc.); 4) Private services and institutions (ex: private daycare centers, nannies, etc.); 5) Employers (companies in which the father or mother works, through local services); 6) Don't know / no response.

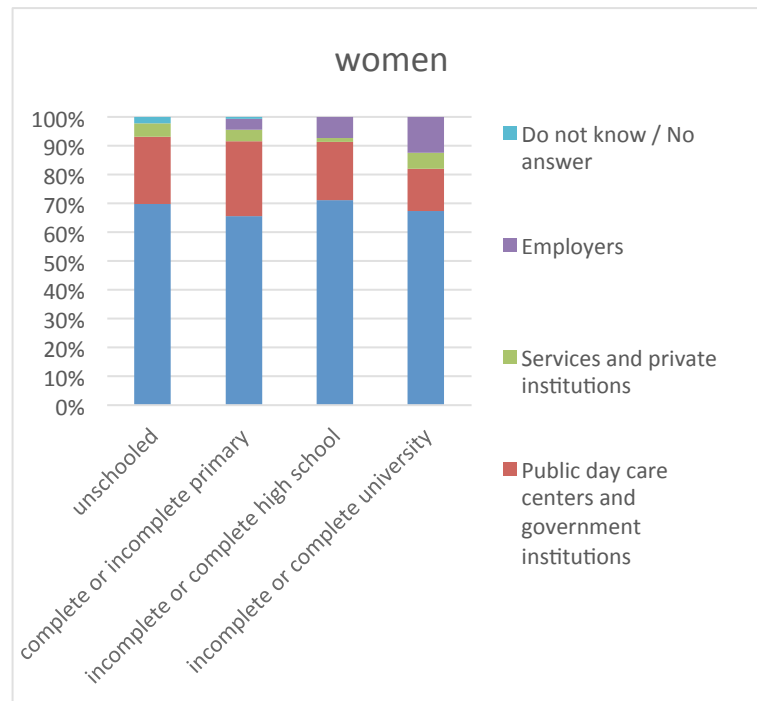
as a public policy central to the socialization of children and exoneration of women's historical role in reproductive history is still an embryonic concept in the values of the population as a whole.

Following the same logic, we crossed the question "Who should preferably cover the financial costs of childcare?" with the variable of gender. Relative distributions observed in this and previously analyzed questions are fairly close. This suggests a similar understanding between the investment of time (to take care of the task itself) and financial investment (who pays for it) in the care of children under 6 years, both items fundamentally understood as family roles. Again, in this second question, the relative distribution of responses between men and women is similar. Men have a somewhat higher percentage for the family response, with 71.8% of respondents while women represent 70.5%. The State / Government appears with about 21%, the employer with 4.5%, others accounted for 1% and the category of 'do not know' or did not answer 2% of respondents.

When we introduced the educational factor, however, some differences in distributions for men and women appear. The following graphs 1 and 2 illustrate these distinctions.

**Graphs 1 and 2. Distribution relative to the question “Who should, preferentially, cover childcare costs for below school-age children?” According to the gender and educational level of the respondent.**





Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 2014. Graphs elaborated by M. Guedes.

For men, the distributions are relatively close regardless of education. Again the weight of the “family” response is far superior only in the case of the uneducated group. Among women, however, an increase in education correspondingly demonstrates a small growth in the weight given to the response “family” and a reduction to the relative weight of the answer “State/Government.” This result is interesting in that relativizes the direct link between low education and a pattern of more conservative and family values. The data suggests that precisely among these women, who are also at the lowest income level, public daycare arises as a basic



need so that they can enter the labor market. This segment is the most penalized by the so-called double shift (“double day”), since, unlike the more educated women they do not have the resources to outsource services (nannies, maids or daycare centers and private schools for their children).

Regarding the care of children, it is important to emphasize that the benefits of attendance at daycare or schools for children under 6 years are not restricted only to the mother's work needs, but to the psychological and educational development of early childhood. The common sense that normalizes the family, particularly the mother, as the “ideal” full time caretaker ignores the fundamental experience that school allows the child.

In this sense, however, we see a great difference in Brazil between public schools and daycare centers and some private institutions. This is not only a matter of the existence of vacancies and the family's accessibility to placing children in this type of institution, since this demand for care also relates directly to the quality of the service offered.

The idea of care is linked to different representations when it comes to children, where the central element relates more to education, and the elderly, whose set of issues is more related to the health field. In this case, the choice is more restricted because the type of care available to the elderly is often costly and sometimes of an emergency nature.

In general, response to the question “Who, preferably, should be responsible for the elderly?” demonstrated a higher concentration compared to the question focused on children, the response of “family” with over 80% of respondents as a whole. But in this case, the gender difference is greater. Table 1 below illustrates these distinctions between men and women.

**Table 1. Distribution relative to the question “Who, preferably, should be responsible for the elderly?” According to gender of those interviewed.**

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Members of the family	82.2	86.8
Government Institutions appropriate for these services	13.5	11.2
Non-profit organizations	0.6	0.6
Private companies that offer this type of care	1	0.6
Don't know / no response	2.5	1
Total	100	100

Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Table M. Guedes.

In the women's group, we observed a greater focus on the “family” response. This finding is interesting because it suggests that even though the main “caretakers” of the elderly are women, women have more difficulty in relativizing the possibility of doing it jointly with other institutions or specialized services.

We call attention in this regard to a certain ambiguity in the wording of the question, since the idea of sharing care among members of the family is not clear. Nevertheless, the distribution suggests the maintenance of an unequal socialization in which women grow up knowing that the family, i.e., themselves, will be responsible for parental care. Men, on the other hand, gave a greater relative weight to public institutions, or private institutions, as care options for the elderly.

Another important dimension that is not captured in the question is the heterogeneity in the degree of dependence of the elderly. With the successive increase in the overall population's life expectancy, we experience different types of care, from monitoring that does not require intense live-in care (including cases in which the elderly live alone and perform everyday tasks well) up to those who already have very serious health conditions and effectively require permanent care. In this second group, to “take

responsibility” represents an expenditure of time and huge resources, which sometimes make it impossible to carry out other tasks. In the case of poor women who cannot afford to pay caregivers or for full time health care, the option of taking care of elderly relatives often results in their abandoning the labor market.

In relation to financial costs for care of the elderly, we received results quite different from the previous question. As these costs are high and often related to health needs, the idea that it is government's role to bear these costs through public policies is more shared, with about 55% of respondents. However, as shown in the table below, the response distribution between men and women is different.

**Table 2. Distribution relative to the question “Who, preferentially, should cover the financial costs of elderly care?” According to gender.**

	Men	Women
The elderly themselves and their families	51	58
The State/Government or Public funds	45	38
Do not know / No response	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Table M. Guedes.

Again a higher proportion of women think that the provision for elderly care falls to the role of the elderly and their families while in the case of male respondents there is a greater relative weight given to the “State/Government or public funds” option. Here, one sees highlighted the idea of public health as a right to which the citizen should have access.

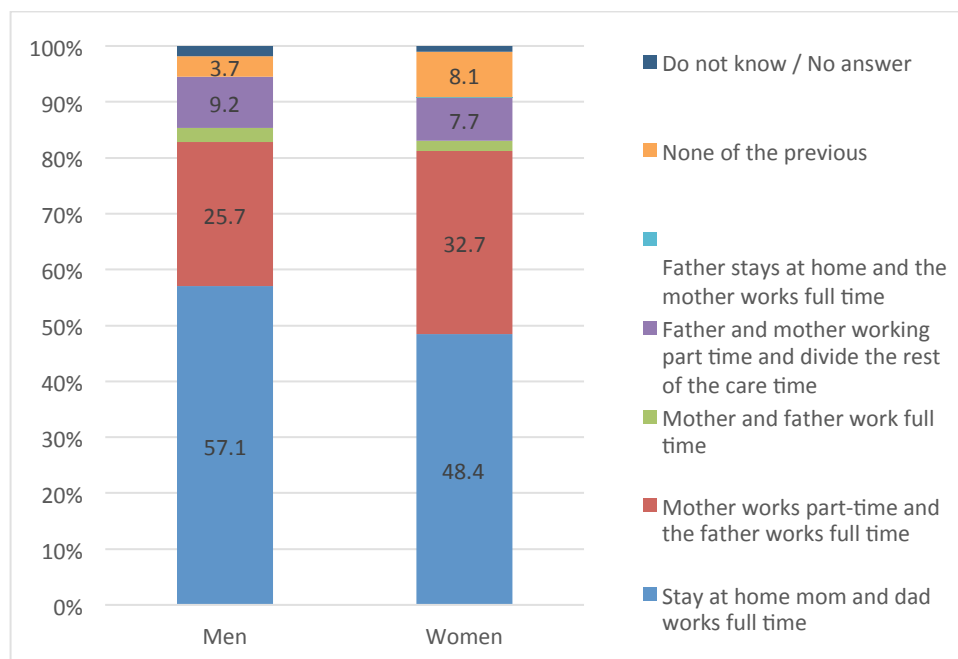
When we analyze the distribution of the question pivotally to the variable of education there is no clear relationship between the two, but it is noticeable, both among men and women, that for the

more educated strata the relative weight of the category “family” increases while the weight of the category State decreases. This result suggests that the perception of the state's role as the main provider of elderly care is directly related to the need of the population unable to shoulder the cost of this service in the private sector. At any rate, it is interesting to note that educational access does not necessarily create a demand for public policies that would unburden families and particularly women.

## **2. Perceptions regarding the division of reproductive labor between men and women**

A more equitable division of social reproduction work, which historically fell to women, involves not only sharing among family members as well as the State, but also within the couples themselves. In this respect, we analyze the following two questions that capture the perceptions of men and women regarding the divisions of care and providing for care in daily life, and paternity leave as a policy to deconstruct the traditional gender identities, in the sense that this does not normalize infant care as obligatorily being the mother's task.

**Graph 3. Distribution relative to the question “In your opinion, what would be the best way for parents (father and mother) to organize childcare?” According to gender of the respondent**



Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Graph M. Guedes.

In general, the graph highlights the high concentration of responses according to classic notions of the division of work: the mother at home and the father working full time. The more egalitarian arrangements, with both genders inserted in the same way into the labor market (either as full or part time), carry a fairly low relative weight. This suggests that the arrangement experienced in practice by most Brazilian families (with both mother and father included in the labor market) is far from the representation regarded as “ideal.” It is interesting that this traditional arrangement, in which the woman does not perform the so-called productive work, the man is more pressured to earn a

high income to sustain the whole family, since he is the only provider. In this sense, to work in the labor market signifies not only autonomy for women, but also, and fundamentally, a sharing of the expenses. According to IPEA data (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada / Institute of Research in Applied Economics: 2008), the weight of female earnings reaches on average 40% of family income, a percentage that makes it impossible to analyze their income as secondary.

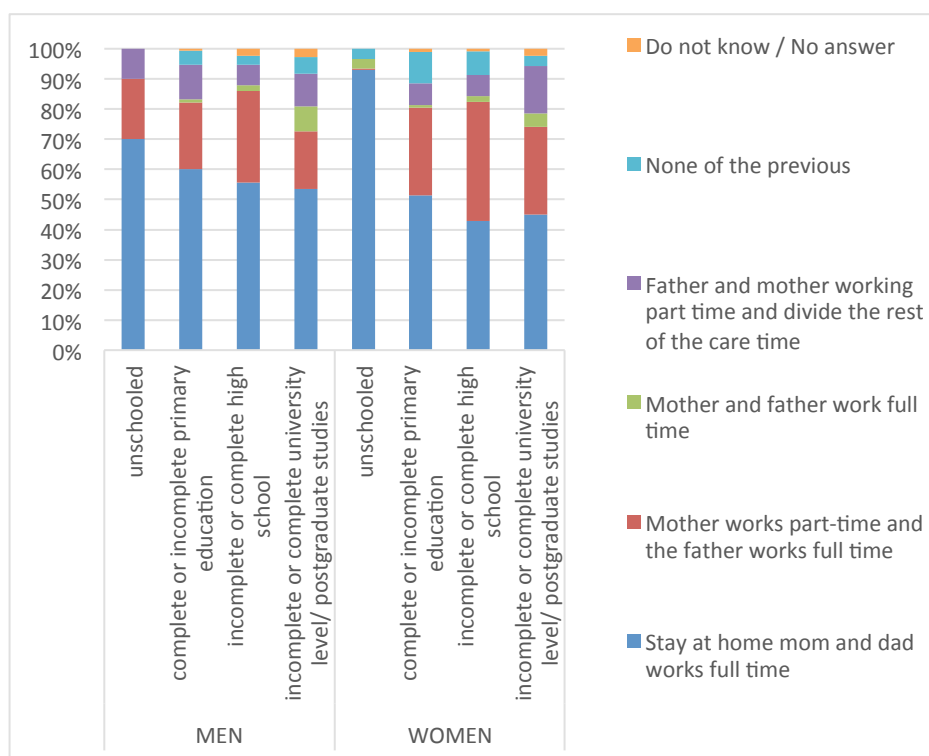
This scenario reflects possible changes in the gender division of labor. Kergoat (2009) conceives of it as being the priority allocation of men to the productive sphere and women to the reproductive sphere. Its organizing principles are those of separation (the existence of male and female work) and hierarchy (male jobs are better paid than female jobs). This form of the social division of labor, however, is undergoing changes that re-signify the classic dichotomy of the male breadwinner and female caregiver.

An interesting element of the data is that there is a pattern of differential response between men and women. The male population seems to be more heterogeneous than the female. On the one hand, it demonstrates a higher concentration regarding the model of the traditional male breadwinner and the caregiving woman (57.1%); in contrast to the result for women, which is 48.4%. On the other, it also points to the higher relative weight given in respect to arrangements in which both are inserted into the labor market in the same manner: 9.2% for couples who work part time and 2.5% among those with full time jobs. This suggests that a more conservative profile prevails in the male group while at the same time it is also in this segment that one finds the equitable response pattern.

Although women do not show such a high concentration as the men in the response that indicates the most conservative arrangement, the high relative weight (32.7%) given to a "gender division according to reduced work," which presents the woman working part-time in the market while the man holds a full-time job, stands out in this group. Thus, it is noteworthy that, although

there is an acceptance of women as providers, the idea that the public world and the working life are characterized as fundamentally masculine fields still prevails. The educational level item in the graph below is important in order to assess, as it was found historically in several studies (Sorj, 2005; Bruschini, 2007), the extent to which educational level corresponds, in fact, to a more egalitarian system of values.

**Graph 4. Distribution relative to the question “In your opinion, what would be the best way for parents (father and mother) to organize childcare?” According to gender and level of education**



Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Graph M. Guedes.

By introducing the educational issue, we realized that, despite the different levels, both in the female population and in the male, the traditional arrangement of male breadwinner and female caregiver loses relative weight and is no longer perceived as being the best model, as the educational level increases. In the case of the most educated women, results draw attention to the increased option for arrangements in which both work part time and care for the children. The fact that this option presents a greater weight relative to the arrangement in which both are fully integrated into the labor market tends to validate the time spent on child care and to deconstruct the idea that "the greatest dedication possible" to the public world would be ideal for both men and women. This is an interesting finding that contrasts with the less educated women, a segment in which almost all the respondents conceive of the division of labor according to gender as the classical ideal.

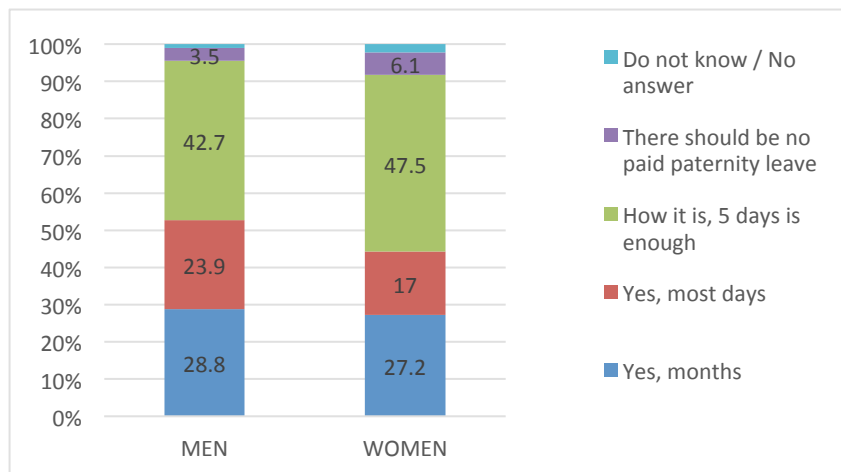
In general, there is more heterogeneity in the pattern of female responses, suggesting that the variable of educational level relates more strongly, in this group, to a set of more egalitarian values both in terms of female presence in the labor market and the possibility of men participating in the care of the children. One notes, in the more educated male group, the fact that the relative weight given to the option "both inserted fully into the market" is greater than the "inserted both part-time" option. However, possibly this response option also involves the realization that if both work less that would represent a family income lower than that earned when both work full time.

The other question analyzed, "Are you in favor of paid paternity leave longer than the current one?" points to an important matter of analysis: the possibility of the deconstruction of the current form in which the state conceives of the role of men in caring for newborn children. In this sense, the answers offered range from the consistent improvement (increase of months), through maintaining the current standard (five days) to a revocation of this right. This allows us to map an extremely



conservative segment of the population that is critical of the State's conception of paid paternity leave.

**Graph 5. Distribution relative to the question “Are you in favor of paid paternity leave longer than the current one?” According to the gender of the respondent**



Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Graph M. Guedes.

Again the male pattern of responses is distinguished from the female only in relation to level, but the overall design of the graph bars is similar. The vast majority of both men (42.7%) and women (47.5%) think that the current license for five days is sufficient. However, in the extremes we see important differences: the more conservative perspective that finds paid paternity leave unnecessary shows 3.5% of men and 6.1% of women (a relative weight that is almost double). In the more egalitarian pole, which supports the extension of the benefit, we have 23.4% of men preferring an extension for more days, while only 17% of women; for more months, these levels are closer, reaching 28.8% in the male group and 27.2% in the female group. It is important to note

that the relative weight of the group that is in favor of the extension of months is much higher than that in favor of an extension of only days. Another important element is that if we add the two groups that are in favor of the extension of paternity leave (without the length of time distinction) we see that their relative weight exceeds that of the group favorable to maintaining the current five days in the case of men, and comes to a very close level for women.

This picture shows clearly the greater interest of men to expand their participation in the care of the child after birth through access to paid leave. In a way, it is surprising to note that women do not perceive this change in the same way. The data suggest that there is greater resistance in the female population to the idea that it is important for the father to receive the benefit for a longer duration, as a way to be able to strengthen ties and engage more actively in routine childcare.

This result suggests different readings. In the first, there is a female resistance to accept policy change on the leave, mainly because care cannot be read only as a burden, but also as a place of power within the family. From this logic, the acceptance of male leave could also be read as a possible "competition" to maternity leave and a way to diminish the sacred role of women in primary socialization and care for very young children.

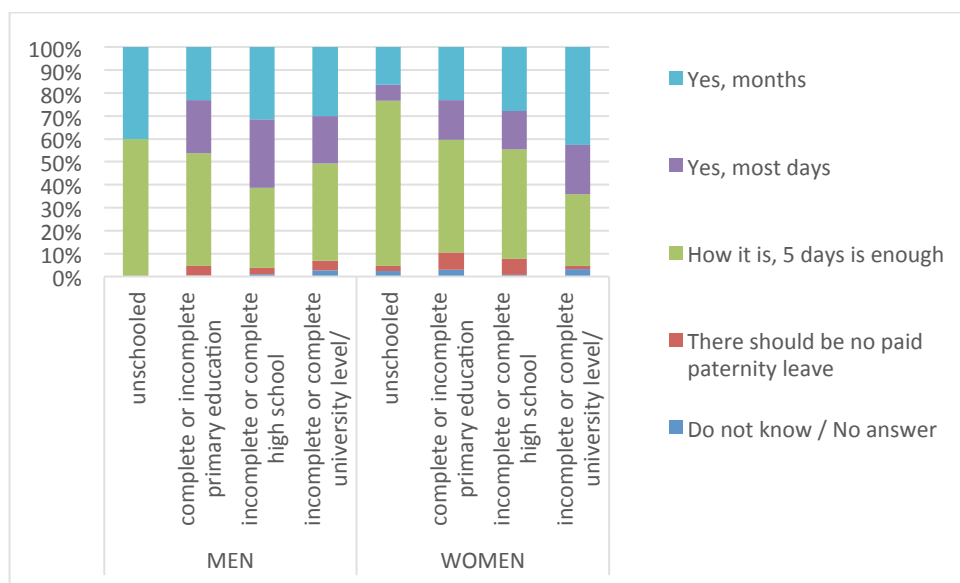
In another sense, one can point to a reading anchored in daily life or even experiences already gained in practice where the realization that having a father at home does not necessarily translate to a sharing of tasks. From that perspective, it would not make sense to extend paternity leave. Thus, it is worth asking ourselves whether the change in policy alone would be enough to change practices in this area.

The way this division in care changes in practice is not always quick. Therborn (2010) points out that the family would be an institution surrounded on the open battlefields of gender relations, delineating open competition across borders between members and non-members, substituting the perpetual struggle for rights and obligations. These varied over time and are central to

the tensions and negotiations in the daily lives of couples regarding the division of social reproduction work.

When we cross-analyze the question from the educational variable, we see that the distributions are close in the case of men and more differentiated in the case of women.

**Graph 6. Distribution relative to the question “Are you in favor of paid paternity leave longer than the current one?” According to gender and educational level**



Source: ISSP Research, realized in the State of Rio de Janeiro. 2014. Graph M. Guedes.

Again the male and female distributions are very different. Among men there is no clear pattern, and in all educational strata, the greater relative response “as is, five days is enough.” For women, there is a clear increase in the relative weight of the answer “yes, for months” corresponding to an increase in the educational stratum. If we add this category to that that thinks that there should be more days (which also increases following the

same trend), the position favorable to increase paternity leave reaches more than half of women in the stratum with partial or complete university level, or a graduate education. This distribution is very close to the men in the same educational segment, suggesting a shared perception among most educated men and women that public policies should enable greater engagement of parents in infant care.

Just as in the previous questions, the most conservative response pattern is observed among women without schooling, in which the vast majority (70%) think that the leave should remain as it is. The men of the same educational background, however, show a high weight relative to the option to extend leave by months (40%). In a way it is surprising to note that the “there should be no paternity leave,” despite the low relative weight, appears in almost all educational strata. This option repeats the conservative perception that the care of the young child is an exclusively female task.

However, this result also reflects positions such as those being raised by union activists on the issue. The reaction of many working women who do not want the extension of parental leave is due mainly to the perception that having both parents at home would not lead to sharing the baby care and would hinder more than help.

### **Final considerations**

Historically, the state of Rio de Janeiro, and particularly its capital, the city of Rio de Janeiro, is characterized by a population of more educated women with higher rates of labor participation and lower fertility rates than tendencies found elsewhere in the country (Piglet and Camarano, 2006). This framework results in less unequal gender relations and important analytic singularities compared to what we see elsewhere in Brazil as a whole. Having in mind the values and more egalitarian practices in the field of gender relations, the present results tend to be more advanced than the national averages.

Among the results found in the cross-referenced survey data, we would emphasize some elements. The first is the persistence of the belief in the family as the principal care institution for children and elderly in the perception of the vast majority of respondents regardless of gender. In practice, this represents a huge concentration of reproductive work in the figure of the mother or other women in the family. This situation calls into question the very construction of political demand in relation to the state's role in the process of relieving women of reproductive work. Inside the couple, the traditional gender division of labor - male breadwinner and female caregiver - is still largely perceived as the best model, but it is interesting to note distinctions in the pattern of male and female response. Men, particularly the less educated, are more conservative. Educational level is associated with values and more egalitarian perceptions in the case of women, who generally showed a pattern of greater polarized responses than men. In this sense, it is interesting to draw attention to the heterogeneity of female labor in the labor market (Hirata, 2011; Guedes, 2015), which may result in diversification not only in practice, but also in the values and perceptions that guide gender relations.

Regarding the role of education as a vector of change in traditional gender identities, we would highlight the intense advances<sup>3</sup> that have modified the profile of the university-level population in Brazil. They suggest caution in recent analyses and in the type of relationship now established in regards to ongoing processes of social change. The issues discussed here suggest that the representations change more slowly than the intense advances seen in the educational field.

From the perspective of everyday arrangements of time spent on productive and reproductive labor, gender inequalities

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<sup>3</sup> Policies such as the REUNI (Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais / Restructuration and Expansion of the Federal Universities) and the PROUNI (Programa Universidade Para Todos / Program for University for All) have been democratizing access to the university and have made it so the relative weight of the population that has concluded a course of higher education in Brazil has doubled from the Census of 2000 to that of 2010.

are still constraining women, particularly black and poor women, both in their full development in the workplace as within families, little open to forms to experience care decentralized from female hands.

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