

Mini review Article

**Career counseling and life trajectories in France:
research and perspectives for single parenthood**

ABSTRACT

The work–family literature is abundant, and there are a considerable volumes of manuscripts in the field. The main goal of this note is to show that certain social, affective and economic aspects affect single women' life trajectory. Our hypotheses is that this social path takes root in a process of territorial anchoring which can exacerbate, or on the contrary slow down, the emergence of certain health-related social vulnerability factors as well as their effects on the family unit itself. This note will focus on three aspects: the links between the social path and social/health vulnerability; to what extent does this articulation activates or adds other factors of vulnerability such as precariousness, health problems, difficulty in work/non-work time management, lack of mobility; the psychosocial determinants of single parenthood and their fit within a dynamic of attachment to a neighborhood/municipality. The article also discusses the orientation for future paradigms in career counseling.

Keywords: Single parenthood; career counseling; Professionals; social vulnerability; Family factors.

1. RESEARCH PARADIGM

Working time and leisure time is the product of social, cultural and legal developments that are anything but self-evident (Closon & Lourel, 2013; Mainguené, 2011). Far from being a natural idea, the notion is in fact one of major conceptual products of human and social sciences. The concept needs to

be seen as part of a long tradition of research, developed in particular in industrial-organizational psychology the last two decades. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the dominant social model has tended to determine the distribution of constrained time (i.e. working time) and the time spent outside the organization (i.e. 'leisure time').

The professional and private spheres of life constitute one of the major issue of current social debates, serving not only to construct and/or model the identity of the subject and to direct individual behaviors, but also to shape the social integration process. The work–family literature is abundant and there are considerable volumes of manuscripts in the field (see Powell & Greenhaus, 2012 for a complete review).

The construction, sometimes atypical, of the professional and/or personal paths of women, brings the issue of equal opportunity. This is unfortunately recurrent in terms of remunerated activities (the average gender pay gap is 17.5% in the European Union and 18.9 % in France) (European Commission, 2011) or non-remunerated activities (see Barrère-Maurisson, 2004). The studies prove that women are more exposed to precariousness. Among the main precariousness factors identified we can find job characteristics and unequal distribution of domestic/family household tasks. These factors lead to more frequent life path ruptures for women (Milewski, Dauphin, Kesteman et al., 2005). These potential hazards act as additional factors of social and health vulnerability or psychological violence (Desrumaux, 2011; Lourel, Hartmann, Closon *et al.*, 2013; Mouda, Lourel, Mouchard *et al.*, 2014). Thus it is essential to better understand these factors of over-exposure to precariousness and the ways in which they fit together. The changes in behavior standards are more common in the female populations, and especially for single mothers. They represent 9% of households in France and the number was multiplied by 2.5 over the course of 40 years.

Chardon & Daguet (2009) pointed out that 16% of minor children live in single parent families (vs. 63% with a couple). The study indicated that a single parent situation is an additional factor of inequality in terms of employment and health. It appeared that 90% of children live in couples in which at least one of the parents is a remunerated employee (vs. 66% in single parent families). This figure is explained by the fact that a single parent is most often a woman who spontaneously mentions that she is

unemployed (20% vs. 10% in couples). This requires a fine analysis of the life path and thus of the determinants that compose it. This is one of our three research objectives. Despite the fact that people in the Paris Region say that they are generally attached to their city, it seems that the urban housing area acts as an additional factor of social and health vulnerability, especially in an environment where the living conditions have often deteriorated (ARS Ile-de-France, 2011). In this context, the attachment to the neighborhood /municipality, defined as the affective component of the link between a person and a given place (Rioux, 2010), becomes a resource to draw on, and women in single parent situations often favor this attachment to the detriment of a job that would require territorial mobility (Rioux & Werner, 2011). This study tries to understand and analyze the psychosocial determinants of single parenthood within a dynamic of territorial anchoring.

The last annual report of "Secours Catholique" (S.C., 2009) indicates that women are highly exposed to poverty (n=780000). This report mentions that women poverty line is set at 908Euros/month. Poverty is aggravated when women handle parental responsibilities alone. The "Secours Catholique" statistics highlight that the proportion of single parents, mostly women, has grown by 7% over the last 20 years (22.8% in 1989 vs. 29.4% in 2008).

In France, recent studies argue that the traditional staff retention strategies are: integration period, pay, development of potential (strategic workforce planning, training and development, career development), content of work (professional interests and objectives), working conditions (flexible time management, time issues, social climate, ethics, values, etc.), and management style (organizational culture). However, there is increasing evidence of the development of a 'new' form of staff retention, structured around personal services. This new strategy includes a whole range of measures aimed at responding to the personal needs of employees (e.g. meal vouchers, purchase and subscription vouchers, "check service employment", nursery, inter-company child-care center...). But these measures are also aimed to meet corporate performance objectives (e.g. employee availability, reduced absenteeism, increased employee participation...).

In view of the deterioration of the state of public health (particularly among populations subject to additional factors of social vulnerability, e.g. in single-parent families), to what extent recent measures

constitute an appropriate response to social protection requirements (while contributing to the social construction of life trajectories)? Beyond simple activities and even systems that are strongly dependent on a significantly changing socioeconomic context, the juxtaposition of life spheres appears to be more a 'compromise' (see Lourel, 2008) than any kind of systemic exchange.

The study of the work-family balance requires a subtle analysis of life trajectories, and their relationships to certain factors of social vulnerability and health.

2. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

Labor organization appears to be contributing to increasing productivity gains. However, this will often be accompanied by an intensification of activity and also by a greater flexibility of life-times.

The paradigm of this research note is based on the idea that a social trajectory is rooted in the dynamics of a Complex nonlinear System (CS). The new paradigm on the CS in social science is presented in a recent research (Lourel, Petric-Tatu, Guéguen & Pascual, 2012). There is a substantial volume of publications in the field of complex systems (see Mittal, 2013; Kwapień & Drożdż, 2012 for a complete review).

According to Hassas (2003, p.13), a non-linear complex system is: "the set of variables allowing us to characterize its state and the functions expressing their evolution over time. When these functions are not linear, the system is said to be non-linear dynamic. In adaptive complex systems, the functions expressing the evolution of the system over time are indeed non-linear due to the non-trivial interactions (retroactions for example) that characterize these systems. Moreover, when the transitions from a state S of the system to state S_{t+1} are deterministic (i.e. not probabilistic), the system is characterized by a deterministic non-linear dynamic."

From the new perspective, the CS could explain health-related social vulnerability factors, as well as their impact on the family.

We hope that this note of research will help the researchers and professionals to develop new paradigms in career counseling, and to understand the life trajectories of single parenthood.

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