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THE DIFFICULTY OF BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE : IMPACT ON THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF QUEBEC FAMILIES

INSTITUT NATIONAL DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE DU QUÉBEC

THE DIFFICULTY OF BALANCING WORK AND
FAMILY LIFE : IMPACT ON THE PHYSICAL AND
MENTAL HEALTH OF QUEBEC FAMILIES

DIRECTION DÉVELOPPEMENT DES INDIVIDUS ET DES COMMUNAUTÉS

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INTRODUCTION

This report on the subject of work-family balance falls within the scope of services provided by the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* to the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, under Article 54 of the Public Health Act. Thus, this knowledge synthesis is intended to support the Minister of Health and Social Services in its role as advisor to the government on healthy public policy.

Various players in Quebec society (unions, employers and public decision-makers) are becoming increasingly concerned by this issue. Since the early 1980s, researchers¹ have attempted to better understand the implications of the complex interactions between the spheres of family and of the work environment. However, they have not yet succeeded in developing an integrated conceptual model able to provide an overall portrait of the situation.² Numerous variables are associated with work-family conflict, including the number and age of children, partner support and work schedules. In addition, there are multiple relationships between the different variables, which make it difficult to conceptualise the problem in a way that takes into consideration the daily reality of families experiencing this situation.

Moreover, the very concept of work-family balance is limited in that it does not take into account the various roles that individuals are called upon to play outside of these two spheres, and the impact these have on their attempt to balance their lives. Lachance (2003) has noted the emergence of the concepts of “work/professional life integration” and “work/life-style integration”, which accounts for the fact that some individuals also pursue studies, are informal caregivers or are involved in their community.

The first section of this document provides an overview of the issue of work-family balance in Quebec and in Canada, describing the significant changes that have occurred during recent years on economic and demographic levels, as well as the transformation of families. These economic and sociocultural changes have created an imbalance, resulting in the fact that many individuals are no longer able to reconcile the dual reality of family and economic demands. This lack of harmony between social spheres has a significant impact on the individual, familial and community levels, documented in the second section of this report. The problem of work-family balance is both vast and complex. As such, we have chosen to study this issue by reviewing the literature addressing its impact on health.

¹ It is interesting to note that, while there are dynamic researchers and research teams in Quebec (for example, Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, Sylvie St-Onge, and Gilles Guérin and Lise Lachance) and in Canada (for example, Linda Duxbury and Chris Hoggins and Donna Léo), many of the studies on work-family reconciliation have been produced in the United States.

² A recent study by St-Onge, Renaud, Guérin and Caussignac (2002) attempts to fill this gap by developing a model that takes into account the bidirectional nature of the work-family conflict (i.e. the influence of work factors on family life and the influence of family factors on work) and the respective determinants and effects of these two types of conflict.

Work-family conflict has significant consequences for all social actors (health, social and economic impacts), resulting in the need for government to review the roles currently played by various actors, as well as the adaptation of public policy, in order to bring these factors in line with the new realities of professional activity and family life.

This knowledge synthesis has been prepared to coincide with the preparation of a government policy on this issue.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

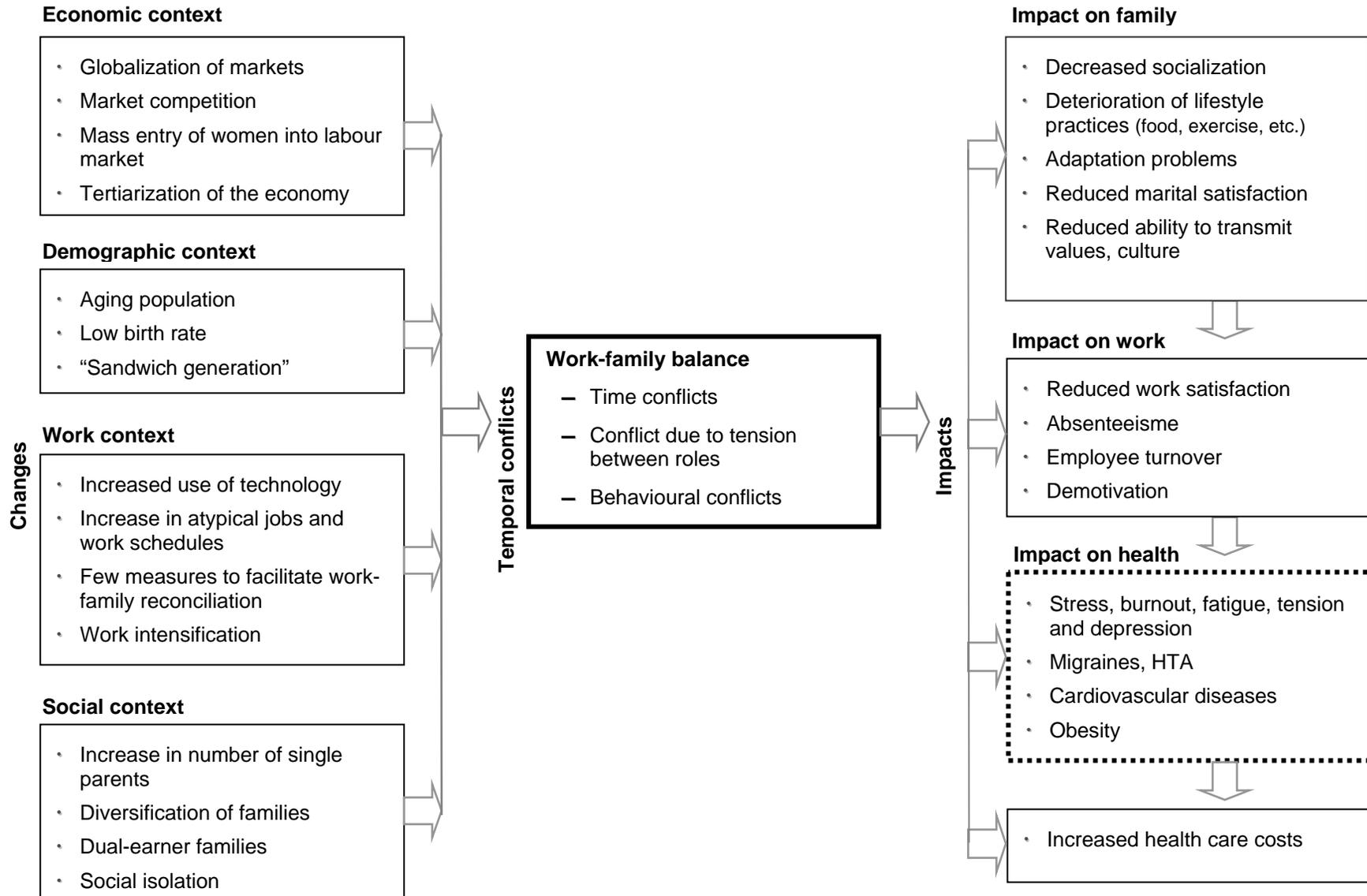
This literature review cites recent studies addressing the broad theme of work-family balance and health. The issue is analyzed with respect to the various contexts characterising work and family life in Quebec and Canada, which have changed profoundly in recent years.

The studies chosen come from two main information sources: research published in peer-reviewed journals, and research and documents published by the provincial and federal governments. The strategy for locating recent and relevant studies consisted, first, of querying the following data bases: Medline, PsychINFO, Francis and Érudit, using combinations of key words such as balance and work and family; work and family and health (including mental and physical health); well-being and work and family and child; family and adolescent.

The websites of various provincial and federal ministries were also visited. Two meta-analyses (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton, 2000), as well as two recent reviews of the literature concerning the same subject (Canadian Council on Social Development, March 1999 and April 1999) also contributed to the identification of interesting studies on work-family balance.

There are numerous American and European studies on the subject, but studies from Canada and from Quebec were given preference so that our social reality would be reflected as closely as possible. However, certain questions, such as the impact of work-family conflict on the mental and physical health of individuals have been studied more extensively by American researchers. Given this reality, Quebec and Canadian studies serve as a complement to the American observations, particularly in this section of the literature review.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS



1. DEFINING BALANCE AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

While work-family balance can be defined in a number of ways (Carlson, Kacmar and Williams, 2000), the majority of researchers refer to the definition established by Greenhaus and Beutell. As early as 1985, they had defined the work-family thematic³ as a conflict between the different roles played by the same person. This conflict takes three forms: time conflicts, conflict due to tension between roles and behavioural conflicts.

Time conflicts arise when the demands imposed by different roles make time management difficult. The time spent performing one role makes a person unavailable to devote time to another role. Moreover, the preoccupations related to one role can affect a person's availability to perform tasks related to another role, even if the person is physically present. Conflict due to tension between roles results when stress generated while performing one role affects the way a person fulfills the demands of other roles. For example, the effects of fatigue and stress experienced at work can affect family life at home, and vice versa. Indeed, researchers are increasingly acknowledging the reciprocal nature of the relationship between work and family, and adopting a bidirectional perspective of the work-family conflict. Thus, they are considering two types of conflict: work-family conflict, which occurs when work interferes with family life, and family-work conflict, which occurs when the demands of family life interfere with professional obligations. Although these two types of conflict are strongly correlated, the results of studies show that each has its own specific determinants and effects (St-Onge, Renaud, Guérin and Caussignac, 2002). The results of the Quebec study produced by St-Onge et al. (2002) confirm that individuals claim to feel more work-family conflict than family-work conflict. The vast majority of them do not allow their familial responsibilities and problems to interfere much with their work. Thus, it seems that professional responsibilities interfere more with family life than the reverse. The last type of conflict described by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), behavioural conflicts, refers to the phenomenon by which behaviour specific to one role is incompatible with behaviour required by another role. Certain characteristics that are valued in the work world, such as objectivity and aggressiveness, can be incompatible with the needs and expectations of family members. The difficulty people have adapting to these divergent demands can generate behavioural conflicts (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

The conceptualization of work-family balance as a conflict is related to the deficit hypothesis, according to which individuals possess a certain amount of time and energy which must be distributed among the various roles they play (Goode, 1960 in Lachance and Brassard, 2003a). Another hypothesis, the accumulation hypothesis, proposes that each role played by a person represents an additional opportunity to reap benefits. The advantages associated with involvement in multiple roles include financial resources, better self-esteem, the possibility of delegating less stimulating or interesting tasks, opportunities for social engagement, and challenges (Barnett and Hyde, 2001 in Lachance and Brassard, 2003a). This second hypothesis does not yet seem to have generated much research.

³ In the English literature, the subject of work-family balance is often referred to as work-family reconciliation.

1.1 CHANGES

1.1.1 In the economic context

During the last 25 years, Quebec, like other industrialized societies, has undergone many changes in the economic and social spheres. These changes have called into question traditional ways of organizing public and private life, and have given rise to concern over the challenges of balancing family life and professional life.

A significant number of women holding paying jobs

The massive entry of women into the labour market has been one of the driving factors behind recent changes occurring in industrialized societies. Indeed, between 1976 and 2003, the rate of employment for Quebec women went from 41% to 65% (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2001). The greatest rate of increase in women's participation in the workforce is among mothers with children of less than 6 years old. In 1976, 30% of these women held jobs whereas, by 2003, the rate had risen to 75%. This trend is reproduced, on a more moderate scale, among single mothers with young children. In 2000, the rate of activity for those with children of less than 6 years old was 59% (*Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance*, 2002a).

Women's income and household financial security

The transition of women from the private to the public sphere has called into question the traditional model of the man as provider and the woman devoted to family matters, while at the same time allowing women to acquire a measure of financial independence and professional fulfillment. The paid work of women has also helped maintain the purchasing power of households. Indeed, according to data from Statistics Canada (2000) (in Johnson, Lero and Rooney, 2001) between 1989 and 1998 the average after tax income of dual-earner families with children increased by 6%, going from \$49,400 to \$52,100, while the average income of two-parent families with a single income decreased by 5% during the same period, going from \$37,900 in 1989 to \$31,000 in 1998.

Thus, women's income has become a more important source of household financial security. This reality is reflected in the fact that dual-earner families, including those with young children, are now the norm. In 2003, in Quebec, approximately 75% of mothers between the ages of 20 and 44 with a child of less than 6 years old were active⁴ in the job market (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2004).

The globalization of markets

These economic trends were accompanied by significant changes in the marketplace. During the 1990's, companies had to adapt to major changes in the economy. The globalization of markets, the proliferation of new technologies and pressures related to competition have led to major changes in the nature and intensity of work time.

⁴ Including unemployed and working women.

Tertiarization of the economy

The movement from an economy based mainly on manufacturing to one based on the service industry has also contributed to the proliferation of various types of atypical jobs. The presence of women in the job market and the aging of the population have increased demand for services outside of standard work hours. Indeed, according to Presser (2000) (in a *Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance* report, 2003b), the fact that many women work during the day has increased the demand for weekend and evening services because these women are not available to run errands during the day. In addition, the aging of the population makes the availability of health services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, necessary.

The presence of women in the job market is one of the factors explaining the expansion of the service sector, and the majority of the jobs in this sector are held by women. According to Statistics Canada (2000) (in Lachance and Brassard, 2003a), in 1999, 86% of women active in the job market worked in the service sector, whereas this was the case for 63% of men.

Division of familial household responsibilities

The strong presence of dual-earner families and the recognition of women's contribution to the economic stability of the family have led couples to reassess the distribution of family and household tasks, and made it necessary for them to consider the career paths of both spouses. Thus, each member of a couple must now reconcile the requirements of two work environments, while meeting the family's needs. Despite this reality, women continue to assume a double work load. According to the Time-Use Survey of Quebecers and Canadians (Statistics Canada, 1998), although fathers devote more time to family tasks than before, women still perform more of the housework (56% of tasks for dual-earner couples with at least one child under 5 years old) and provide more care to household members (61%) (*Institut de la statistique du Québec*, 2001). A gender-based division of labour still exists and continues to be a strong cause for concern because women are still largely responsible for ensuring domestic continuity and, as a result, they are often disadvantaged professionally.

1.1.2 In the demographic context

The aging of the population

The aging of the population is another issue related to work-family balance. Due to a low birth rate, the temporary but significant rise in the birth rate following the second world war and a gradual increase in life expectancy, the number of Quebecers aged 65 and over is expected to double between 2001 and 2031, going from 960,000 to approximately two million (*Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance*, 2003a).

The current Quebec birth rate is only 1.47 children per woman, whereas the rate required to ensure generational renewal is 2.1.

The “sandwich” generation

In addition, the fact that couples are waiting longer to start a family has given rise to the phenomenon of the “in-between” or “sandwich” generation, comprised of those who must care for an aging relative while raising young children. A study carried out by Statistics Canada in 2002 reports that, among parents aged between 45 and 64 years old whose children are under 25 years old and still living at home, approximately 27%, or 712,000 individuals, are also caring for an elderly person. More than eight out of ten of these individuals work, so many of them are forced to reduce or change their work hours or suffer a reduction in income. Women are more likely than men to experience this situation. On average, women devote 29 hours of care each month to an elderly parent, whereas men devote 13 hours (Williams, 2004).

1.1.3 In the work context

The growth of atypical jobs: a predominantly feminine reality

Currently, the work environment seems to be adapting to globalization, the spread of new technologies and the tertiarization of the economy through the creation of atypical jobs. Atypical jobs take many forms, all of which differ from a typical job as described by Desrochers (2000) (in Lachance and Brassard, 2003a): a full-time, salaried position held all year that includes employee benefits and whose duties are executed in an employer-designated location by a single person, under the provisions of an employment contract of indeterminate duration. Atypical work takes the form of part-time work, shift work, self-employment and temporary work. Atypical work can be analyzed specifically from the perspective of work hours. Traditional 9 to 5 work schedules are steadily giving way to atypical schedules: rotating, evening, night, irregular, split, etc. (Tremblay and Villeneuve, 1997).

According to data from Statistics Canada’s Time-Use Survey of the active population (Bernier Report, 2003), the proportion of Quebec jobs classified as atypical went from 16.7% in 1976 to 29.3% in 1995, and from 37.1% to 36.4% between 1997 and 2001. This represents a significant portion of jobs. In 1995, between 925,000 and 1,150,000 Quebecers held nonconventional jobs, which corresponds to between 29% and 36% of all jobs (Matte et al., 1998 in *Ministère de la Famille et de l’Enfance*, 2003b). This percentage is lower than that observed in Canada as a whole where, in 1998, 46% of workers held atypical jobs (Johnson et al., 2001). In 1999, women were still more likely to hold an atypical job (41%) than were men (29%).

This trend can also be observed with respect to part-time salaried work. Between 1976 and 1995, the number of part-time workers in Quebec increased by 127%. The majority of part-time jobs are held by women. Over the past 25 years, women have represented 70% of the part-time work force in Canada. In 2000, 28% of Canadian women worked less than 30 hours per week, compared to 10% of Canadian men active in the job market.

Atypical jobs and work-family balance

Atypical jobs sometimes represent an alternative to traditional employment. Part-time work, for example, has been identified as a means of helping balance work and family life. It is, however, worth noting that many employees do not choose to work part-time. Indeed, in 1995, about 53% of Canadians working part-time were not doing so by choice (Lipsett and Reesor, 1997 in *Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance*, 2003b). In Quebec, between 1976 and 1995 the number of people working part-time because of personal and family obligations fell by 12% to approximately 5% (Matte et al., 1998 in *Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance*, 2003b). As observed earlier, part-time workers are more likely to be women, but a little probing reveals that they do not all work part-time by choice. Indeed, 44% of Canadian women between 25 and 54 years old who hold such jobs report doing so in order to care for children or an elderly person, or cite other family reasons, whereas 10% of men in the same age group cite these reasons (Marshall, 2000 in Johnson et al., 2001). However, as underlined by Lachance and Brassard (2003, p. 132):

“...new forms of atypical jobs are not always advantageous or well-adapted to the situations of women and mothers of young children. The flip side of the coin often reveals inconveniences that outweigh all the advantages, particularly when commitment to this type of job is not deliberate.”

For parents trying to reconcile family life and professional life, atypical work can represent another piece in the family organization puzzle. The search for daycare, in a context where the number of places is largely deficient, is particularly challenging and is among the concerns of parents for whom this is a daily reality⁵. In addition, the entire routine of family members must be organized around the parents' work schedule, school hours, errands, doctor appointments, etc.

Slow adaptation of the Quebec work environment

The various actors in Quebec's job market are becoming increasingly conscious of the issue of work-family balance. For example, 56% of human resources representatives questioned within the context of a joint study carried out by the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* and the *Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et en relations industrielles agréés du Québec* (2001), believe that problems related to this reality are increasing within their organization, while only 3% believe that this problem is diminishing. Moreover, some Quebec organizations have introduced practices that facilitate work-family balance⁶ and some have

⁵ On this subject, please see: ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance (2003b), *Le travail atypique des parents et la garde des enfants : description du phénomène et recension des expériences étrangères de garde à horaires non usuels* and ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance (2002b), *Évaluation des projets-pilotes de garde à horaires non usuels. L'horaire de travail des parents, typique ou dynamique, et les modalités de garde des enfants*, in *Étude longitudinale du développement des enfants du Québec (ÉLDEQ 1998-2002) – De la naissance à 29 mois*, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec : ROCHETTE, Maude and Jacques Deslauriers (2003).

⁶ For examples of what is being done in various Quebec companies, please see: *Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main d'œuvre* 2001, *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* (2003), *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* (2001), Tremblay and Villeneuve (1997).

done so in an innovative manner, as the choice of recipients for the 2002-2003 *prix ISO familles* attests⁷.

However, the *Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre* (2001, p. 5) observes:

“Despite this progress and these efforts⁸ (within Quebec organizations)... the development of practices that promote the reconciliation of work and family life could evolve much further, given that such practices are in the interests of both employers and employees.”

Indeed, Statistics Canada's 1995 survey of work hours and work arrangements reveals that only a quarter of employees who must reconcile familial and professional responsibilities have access to flexible schedules. The same situation exists in Quebec, where provisions for work time arrangements are still relatively rare in collective agreements, with 6% allowing flexible schedules, 15% allowing for a compressed work week and approximately 2% accommodating a reduced work week (*Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre*, 2001). A survey conducted by Tremblay and Amherdt (2000) (in *Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre*, 2001) involving 250 private Quebec companies supports the conclusion that only 10 to 20% of companies have introduced measures, such as allowing more flexible work schedules or providing daycare services in the workplace.

Given this situation, the *Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre* (2001, p.12) has concluded that:

“The various players in the work community have not yet fully realized the tangible benefits of facilitating and actively supporting the reconciliation of work and family obligations, nor have they assumed their share of responsibility in this area.”

⁷ The ISO familles prizes, an initiative of the Conseil du statut de la femme, were given out in 2002 and in 2003. Awarding of these prizes has since been suspended, but will be resumed in 2005 under the responsibility of the Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité sociale du Québec.

⁸ For the *Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d'œuvre* (2001, p. 5) this progress and these efforts consist of the implementation, by Quebec organizations, of measures that facilitate work-family life reconciliation and of the attempts being made in recent years within unions and among employers, to better understand this issue.

2. IMPACT ON HEALTH, INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

2.1 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT: A DIFFICULTY PREVALENT WITHIN QUEBEC AND CANADIAN SOCIETY

Interest in work-family balance has led to surveys that provide information about the extent to which this reality affects family life. A survey of Canadian workers conducted in 1999 by the Conference Board of Canada found that 46% of workers found it moderately or very difficult to reconcile these two spheres of their life. Among women, this percentage rose to 52%. These figures represent a considerable increase over those of a survey conducted ten years earlier, which indicated that 27% of workers experienced this difficulty (Mcbride-King and Bachman, 1999 in Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). A study carried out by Tremblay and Amherdt (2003), who surveyed organizations belonging to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), revealed that 61% of the 567 respondents experienced difficulty balancing work and family life, while this percentage was 55% and 42% respectively for the 1,045 women and men in Quebec's health, education, government and private enterprise sectors. These data indicate beyond a shadow of a doubt that work-family balance is currently an issue of strong concern to working parents.

2.1.1 Lack of time: a significant source of stress for parents

The difficulty of balancing work and family life also results in a higher degree of stress related, among other things, to the feeling of not having enough time. This is particularly true for parents and single mothers, aged 25 to 44 years old, who hold full-time jobs. According to the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) (Statistics Canada, 1999), these individuals report the highest levels of time-related stress. More precisely, 26% of fathers and 38% of mothers, whether they are in a couple or are single parents, report experiencing this type of stress.

2.2 IMPACT ON MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

A great number of people struggle daily with tension resulting from the accumulation of their roles as parent, spouse, worker and community member. The extent of this problem calls for action on the part of stakeholders and decision makers concerned with public health, because researchers have shown the negative impact of attempting to balance various spheres of life on the health, well-being, marital and family life of individuals.

The next section reviews studies addressing the impact of work-family conflict on the health and well-being of individuals. The studies reviewed focus specifically on the impact of reconciling work and family on overall life satisfaction, family life satisfaction, the mental and physical health of parents, and the quality of their relationships with their spouse and children.

2.2.1 Dissatisfaction with life in general and with family life

One way to assess the impact of reconciling work and family is to measure the degree of satisfaction felt by individuals with regard to their lives and their work. According to Kossek and Ozeki's meta-analysis (1998),⁹ individuals experiencing a high degree of work-family conflict tend to be less satisfied with their job and their life in general. A meta-analysis prepared by Allen et al. (2000) demonstrates that work-family conflict is also related to dissatisfaction with family life. A Quebec study by St-Onge et al., (2002) involving 1,306 unionized members of the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN) arrived at the same conclusions. Their study showed that employees who feel that the demands of their professional life conflict with those of their family life are less satisfied with life in general, as well as with their family life. The difficulty of balancing family and professional life also leads to dissatisfaction with leisure activities (Rice, Frone and McFarlin, 1992).

2.2.2 Impact on mental health

The sometimes contradictory demands made by the worlds of work and family life lead to dissatisfactions that have an impact on the various spheres of an individual's life. Researchers have been seeking to understand the impact of work-family balance on the mental health of individuals. Some of the most alarming observations are found in a meta-analysis prepared by Allen et al., (2000), which indicates a high correlation between this social phenomenon and depression. Indeed, many studies show that a high degree of conflict between professional and familial responsibilities increases an individual's risk of depression.

Correlations have also been established between work-family conflict and a high degree of anxiety, irritability and overall stress in one's life; stress which translates into feelings of frustration and tension. In a study involving 2,700 workers, Frone (2000) demonstrates that individuals who report experiencing work-family conflict are more likely to be clinically diagnosed with mood disorders, to experience anxiety, or to suffer from drug or alcohol dependence than individuals not experiencing this type of conflict. In addition, the results indicate that there are gender-based differences in the type of problem experienced, with women being more likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders or to experience anxiety and men being more likely to report a dependence on drugs or alcohol. Concern is raised by a 4 year longitudinal study confirming that depression and the abusive consumption of alcohol persist over time (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997).¹⁰

⁹ In this section on the impact of work-family reconciliation on health, the available studies are mainly American. Relevant Quebec and Canadian studies are also cited, when available.

¹⁰ See also Frone, Russell and Barnes, 1996 and Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992 and 1993 regarding the impact of work-family conflict on mental health.

2.2.3 Impact on physical health

The strain of balancing family life and professional life is linked to mental health problems in parents/workers, but its impact goes beyond these problems. Indeed, individuals experiencing conflict between these two spheres of life consider their physical health to be worse than that of other people in the same age group. This subjective assessment is supported by other studies, which demonstrate that work-family conflict is associated with hypertension, high serum cholesterol levels, cardio-vascular and gastro-intestinal problems, allergies, and migraines (Duxburry, Higgins, Lee and Mills 1991; Frone, Russell and Barnes, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). The difficulty of reconciling professional and familial responsibilities has also been associated with an increase in psychosomatic symptoms such as fatigue, lack of appetite and nervous tension (Allen et al., 2000).

2.2.4 Impact on dietary habits and lifestyle of families

It is interesting to consider the impact of work-family conflict on physical health in relation to the food choices and physical activities of families who daily race against the clock, rushing between work, daycare, grocery shopping and meal preparation.

Although few studies have considered this question, Devine, Connors, Sobal and Bisogni (2003) examined it in an original qualitative study. They found that in the United States, many workers report lacking the time and energy needed to shop for and prepare meals that correspond to their ideal of a healthy menu. Various surveys indicate that lack of time is one of the main obstacles to healthy eating for Canadians (Health Canada, 2003a) and for Quebecers (Dubé et al., 2002; Hitayesu, 2003). This lack of time is attributed, notably, to work, and Canadians surveyed reported lacking the energy needed to prepare a healthy meal when they got home from work (Health Canada, 2003a). Four out of ten people responsible for meal planning stated that they would plan healthier meals if they had more time or energy (Health Canada, 2003b). Thus, speed and convenience are determining factors when it comes to food choices. Consumers develop various strategies for trying to reconcile work demands and the nutritional needs of the family. Some of the methods used demonstrate the creativity and strong organizational abilities of families, while others turn out to be costly and raise questions about the health effects of frequently eating in restaurants and buying frozen food. A survey conducted in 2002 indicated that nearly one Canadian in two had heated up a frozen meal during the previous seven days. In addition, 37% of Canadians reported having eaten in a restaurant at least once and 33% admitted having ordered or bought pre-prepared food during the previous seven days (Ipsos-Reid, 2002). Thus, the food consumption habits of Quebecers have changed over the last several years. For example, the proportion of restaurant meals eaten rose by 3.4% between 1986 and 2001 (Hitayesu, 2003). The sub-category of pre-prepared foods has been a colossal success. During the same period, pre-cooked dinners have increased in popularity by 470% while the popularity of other pre-cooked, prepared foods has risen by 700% (Hitayesu, 2003).

Lack of time and atypical work schedules can also result in family members being less available to share mealtimes. Indeed, data from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (in Zuzanek, 2000) indicate that the time devoted to at-home family meals decreased steadily

between 1981 and 1998. Yet, mealtimes are considered to be privileged occasions for socialization (Sobal 2000 in Devine et al., 2003), allowing for interaction related to food choices (Gillepsie and Achterberg 1989 in Devine et al., 2003) and opportunities for transmitting nutritional culture (Blum-Kulka and Sheffer, 1993 in Devine et al., 2003). Shared mealtimes are also a way to ensure that children's nutritional needs are being met (Gillman et al., 2000 in Devine, 2003). Family meals are not only occasions for eating, but are also periods of transition between professional and family obligations. They offer important opportunities for parent-child contact. Indeed, according to the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors (2000) (in Zuzanek, 2000), eating meals together as a family has a positive emotional effect on parent-child relations.

As is the case for food consumption, few studies have focused on the effects of work-life conflict on the practice of physical activity. However, it seems likely that time and energy constraints also affect this aspect of life. In a 1991 study of parents in the Montérégie and Bas-Saint-Laurent regions, the main barrier to involvement in physical activities proved to be lack of time. Lack of time was attributed to work or studies (cited by 63% and 61% of parents in the two regions surveyed) and to family obligations (cited by 56% and 54% of the parents) (Kino-Québec, 1994). In Quebec, the frequency with which physical activities are practiced is significantly lower for parents than for single persons or couples without children. For example, 16% of women and 19% of men living with children engage in physical activity three or more times a week, compared to 22% of women and 30% of men living alone (Laberge et al., 2000). In multivariate analyses, education and family context have been shown to be the two most important factors affecting the frequency of physical activity in women between 25 and 44 years old (Laberge et al., 2000). Discussion groups held in 2000 involving women in this age group clearly highlighted the issue of work-family balance. Women report feeling exhausted by the accumulation of tasks: work, housework, child care and activities with their spouse. They reported feeling guilty for practicing a physical activity "just for themselves" instead of performing household duties, caring for children, preparing lunches, etc. (Laberge et al., 2000). Finally, in a recent review of the determinants affecting the practice of physical activity, the authors conclude that parenting is a factor related to a more sedentary lifestyle and that this should be examined in more depth (Troost et coll., 2002).

2.3 IMPACT ON THE MARITAL AND FAMILY LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS

2.3.1 Impact on marital and family life

The results of a meta-analysis prepared by Allen et al. (2000) indicate that the difficulty of balancing work and family life also has an impact on marital life. Indeed, a high degree of tension between family life and professional responsibilities decreases marital harmony. However, as the authors point out, the results of research in this area are not consistent. For example, according to Coverman (1989) (in Allen et al., 2000), work-family conflict is associated with a lower degree of marital satisfaction among men but not among women, whereas two other studies demonstrate the opposite: namely, that tension between family life and professional life is linked to dissatisfaction with conjugal relationships for women but not for men (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998; Mathews, Conger and Wickrama, 1996 in Allen et al.,

2000). Burley's study (1995) of 275 American psychologists belonging to a couple where both spouses worked identified a link between work-family conflict and dissatisfaction with conjugal life, on the part of both spouses.

The multiple roles played by parents/spouses/workers oblige them to juggle the various demands and responsibilities of each of these roles. Clearly, they have too much to do in too little time. Slightly more than half of people between 25 and 44 years old complain about a lack of time for family and friends (Statistics Canada, 1999).

However, lack of time is not the only variable affecting the conjugal life of people who must reconcile this aspect of their life with their work. In some individuals, a long list of daily activities and concerns can provoke anxiety and a sense of being overburdened, which can lead to withdrawal from conjugal life. These people feel that so many demands are being made on them in the various spheres of their life that they cannot respond to the demands of conjugal life. By withdrawing, they attempt to alleviate their sense of being overburdened. Others, in contrast, react to family-work/work-family conflict by becoming depressed and channelling angry behaviour toward their partner (Mac Ewen and Barling, 1994).

People in difficult work situations are more hostile toward their spouse, show less warmth toward the latter and are less able to offer them support. These factors influence the perception partners have of the quality and stability of their conjugal relationship (Matthews, Conger and Wickrama, 1996).

Male spouse's participation in family tasks: a stabilizing factor

According to a Quebec study by St-Onge et al. (2002) involving 1,306 employees belonging to the CSN, support provided by male spouses is a determining variable associated with the reduction of work-family conflict. The results of a multisectoral survey conducted by Tremblay (2003) confirms these results, specifying that tangible support from male spouses, that is, participation in family tasks, contributes significantly¹¹ to reducing work-family conflict. This conclusion is supported by Burley (1995) whose study demonstrates that the unfair sharing of tasks diminishes conjugal harmony in dual-earner couples.

2.3.2 Impact on children and adolescents¹²

The presence of women in the work force initially raised concerns about, among other things, the impact of the absence of mothers on children's development. Data collected by Statistics Canada's 1995 General Social Survey is interesting in that they reflect ambivalence toward this social change. The survey reveals that 59% of men and 51% of women agree or completely agree with the statement that a pre-school age child was likely to suffer if both parents worked. On the other hand, 59% of men and 67% of women agree or completely

¹¹ The results of the study indicate that subjects who receive a significant level of support from their male spouses rate their ability to balance work and family almost twice as high as others.

¹² A team of Quebec researchers has studied the particular challenges presented by work-family balance for parents of children with an intellectual deficiency. See: Lachance, L., Côté, A., Poulin, J. R. and Richer, L. (2003b).

agree, that a working mother could establish just as warm and reassuring a relationship with her children as a mother with no paid employment (Ghalam, 1997).

A Quebec study carried out by Royer, Provost and Coutu (1998) reveals that, compared to fathers, mothers have a greater tendency to report being less satisfied with their performance as a parent because they are working. They are more likely than fathers to believe that working negatively affects their parenting abilities. However, according to Stewart and Barling (1996), studies have amply demonstrated that the working status of mothers does not affect the behaviour of children. It seems, rather, to be the working conditions of both parents that affect the behaviour of children. The studies referred to below have established links between the stress parents experience at work, their sense of being overburdened and the quality of their relationships with their preadolescents and adolescents, as well as the behaviour and well-being of these children. Mothers facing stress at work and who feel overwhelmed by their multiple duties tend to show less warmth towards their adolescents. Fathers in the same situation also show less warmth and are more inclined to engage in conflict with their adolescents. Galambos, Sears, Akmeida and Koleric (1995) have observed that conflicts between parents and adolescents are more pronounced in families where the father and mother are under stress. Adolescents maturing in such a context have lower self-esteem and display more behavioural problems, ranging from "looking for trouble" to stealing objects worth between \$2 and \$50. They are also more likely to socialize with friends who have behaviour problems (Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire and McHale, 1999; Galambos et al., 1995). Stewart and Barling (1996) have studied the impact of fathers' working conditions on the behaviour of their children. They observed that, for fathers, certain working conditions (relating to decision-making power and work-family conflict) indirectly affect the behaviour of their children¹³ (academic ability and behavioural problems) because these conditions affect the father's emotional state (negative mood), which affects his parental behaviour (imposing punishments).

The paid employment of mothers outside of the home also raised concerns about the time they had available for children. In this case, research suggests that the nature of time spent with children (quality time) has a more determining affect on their behaviour and their academic performance. This applies to both parents (Cook and Hertzman, 1998 in Canadian Council on Social Development, March 1999). However, Zick, Bryant and Österbacka (2001) note that there is still very little research that empirically demonstrates the relationship between the nature of time spent with children, and their behaviour and academic performance. In a study based on data from the American National Survey of Families and Households,¹⁴ these authors observe that parents share time with their children (reading and helping them with their homework) more often in households where the mother works outside of the home¹⁵. According to them, this observation demonstrates that mothers compensate for the loss of time devoted to the physical and non-physical care of their children (for example, helping a child solve a problem) with other types of activities likely to enrich the

¹³ Stewart and Barling conducted a study (1996) of fathers with children in primary school. The behavioural problems of the children were assessed by their teachers.

¹⁴ The data for this survey were collected at two different times: between 1987 and 1988, and between 1992 and 1994.

¹⁵ Compared to families with mothers who are not active in the job market.

parent-child relationship (quality time). These data also confirm the hypothesis that fathers become more involved with their children when the mother has a paid job. This study, whose data were collected at two different times (between 1987 and 1988, and between 1992 and 1994) indicates that the involvement of parents in this type of activity during the preschool period diminishes children's behaviour problems and improves their academic performance.

Such studies, including that of Galinski (2000)¹⁶ on children and adolescents, provide interesting avenues for reflection on the potential impact of work-family conflict.

2.4 IMPACT ON THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Work-family balance also has an impact on the professional life of individuals. Workers who experience difficulty balancing their professional obligations and their family life are less satisfied with their jobs than those who do not have difficulty balancing these two spheres of their life. A study prepared by Duxbury and Higgins (1998) revealed a significant difference in the degree of work satisfaction felt by these two groups. Only 27% of those experiencing significant work-family conflict report being satisfied with their work, whereas 80% of employees in the second group feel satisfied. Professional dissatisfaction among employees leads to added costs for employers and for the health system because it is associated with increased absenteeism, higher turnover and health problems among workers. Employees who are satisfied with their work live longer and are less likely to fall ill (Robbins, 1993 in Duxbury and Higgins, 1999).

A meta-analysis prepared by Allen et al., (2000) demonstrates that employees having difficulty balancing work and family life think more about changing jobs and are more likely to succumb to professional burnout. A study by Duxbury and Higgins (1998) involving employees in Saskatchewan produced similar results. The results of this study indicate that 30% of employees having difficulty balancing professional obligations and family life think about changing jobs, as opposed to 4% of those who report experiencing no such conflict (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998). Difficulty balancing work and family life is also linked to poorer professional performance, an increase in absenteeism, high employee turnover and lack of motivation (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998).

Work-family conflict also seems to be associated with the perception employees have of their work performance. Indeed, according to a study carried out by St-Onge et al., (2002), the more employees feel that their professional and familial obligations are in conflict, the less favourable an opinion they have of their professional performance.

¹⁶ Galinski's study: Ellen Galinsky, Ask the Children: The Breakthrough Study that Reveals How to Succeed at Work and Parenting, July 2, 2000.

2.5 ECONOMIC COSTS FOR COMPANIES, THE HEALTH SYSTEM AND THE COMMUNITY

Many stakeholders are increasingly interested in what daily work-family balance entails because, among other things, this reality represents a cost to them, although this cost can be difficult to assess.

“As a national organization that groups together the main unions and employers’ associations in Quebec, the CCTM is directly concerned by current difficulties related to reconciling the demands of work with parental and familial responsibilities, because these difficulties have costly consequences both for companies, and for employees and their families.” (*Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d’œuvre*, 2001, p. 5)

Companies, for example, can estimate a portion of the costs inherent to the difficulty of balancing family and professional life by looking at employee absentee rates. A Statistics Canada survey of the active population indicates that, in 1997, 1.2 out of 7.4 employee days-off were attributed to family or personal reasons (Akyeampong, 1998 in Duxbury, Higgins and Jonson, 1999).

Duxbury and Higgins attempted to assess the cost of work-family conflict to companies and to the Canadian health system. Using complex calculations modeled after those of a study that attempts to assess the cost of stress to the European Union’s work community (Cooper et al., 1996; Levi and Lunde-Jensen, 1996 in Duxbury and Higgins, 1999) these researchers estimated that days-off taken by employees having difficulty balancing their professional and personal lives cost Canadian companies 2.7 billion dollars in 1997. As for the health system, its costs are estimated at 425.8 million dollars for the same year, and this is strictly for medical consultations of workers experiencing work-family conflict. Adjusted for Quebec’s population, this estimation indicates that difficulties reconciling work and family result in 100 million dollars per year in health care expenses. Although the scope of these estimates is limited, notably by the sample and the choice of variables measured, they nevertheless provide an initial assessment of the social cost of work-family conflict (Duxbury and Higgins, 1999). Thus, “when considering the cost of measures aimed at facilitating work-family balance, we must also take into account the cost of inaction or the absence of measures” (*Conseil consultatif du travail et de la main-d’œuvre*, 2001, p.8).

2.6 HEALTH IMPACT OF SPECIFIC PUBLIC POLICIES

In order to provide information about **the direct and indirect health effects of various public policies aimed at facilitating work-family balance**, we consulted the relevant data banks as well as a number of researchers in this field. It is important to note that very little has been written on this subject. Nevertheless, consultation with various researchers and experts in this field allowed for the identification of work-family balance research partnerships. A collaborative approach to research on this issue would facilitate the sharing of results, so that they could be better linked to strategies for developing measures and, thus, better support decision-making.

3. SUMMARY

Work-family balance presents a very real challenge to Quebec society, as well as to other industrialized nations. The scope of this conflict, as revealed by studies, confirms what can be observed on a daily basis: families and individuals are having more and more difficulty establishing and maintaining a balance between the numerous, and sometimes contradictory demands of work life and family life.

Research shows that this race against the clock has a significant impact on physical and mental health and on their determinants, as well as on an economic level.

Implications for physical and mental health, and on their determinants

1. According to the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), parents and single mothers aged 25 to 44 years old report the **highest levels of stress** related to lack of time.
2. There is a strong correlation between situations of work-family conflict and **depression** (noted in the meta-analysis done by Allen et al., 2000).
3. There is a relationship between situations of work-family conflict and **anxiety and mood disorders**, particularly among women (Frone, 2000).
4. There is a relationship between situations of work-family conflict and **the cost of medical consultations for workers** (Duxbury and Higgins, 1999).
5. There is a relationship between work-family conflict and the incidence of physical illnesses **such as hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, gastro-intestinal disorders, allergies, and migraines** (Duxbury, Higgins Mills, 1991; Frone, Russe/Barnes, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995).
6. Difficulty balancing work and family life has a **negative impact on dietary habits** and on **physical activity** practices (C. Dubé et al., 2002, Hitayesu, 2003).
7. Work-family conflict is associated with an increase in **alcohol dependence and drug consumption**, particularly among men (Frone, 2000).
8. Parents who feel overburdened by their multiple tasks tend to show less warmth toward their adolescents and are more inclined to **engage in conflicts with them** (Galambos, Sears, Akmeida and Klokeric, 1995).
9. Work-family conflict is related to **dissatisfaction with family and conjugal life** (St-Onge et al., 2002).
10. Atypical work schedules and work-family conflict have been associated with a **lack of time for family meals**. And yet, these are considered as being privileged occasions for socialization and as having a positive emotional impact on parent-child relationships (U.S. Council of Economic Advisors (2002).

Professional and economic implications

1. According to Duxbury and Higgins' study, 27% of people experiencing work-family conflict report being satisfied with their work, compared to 80% of employees who are not in this situation.
2. The meta-analysis done by Allen et al., (2000) demonstrates that employees having difficulty balancing work and family life **think more about changing jobs and are more likely to experience professional burnout.**
3. Work-family conflict is also linked to poorer professional performance, an **increase in absenteeism**, higher employee turnover and loss of motivation (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998).
4. Professional dissatisfaction among employees leads to added costs for employers and for the health system, because it is associated with **increased absenteeism, employee turnover and health problems among workers.** Employees who are satisfied with their job live longer and are less likely to fall ill (Robbins, 1993 in Duxbury and Higgins, 1999).
5. Researchers have estimated that days-off taken by employees experiencing difficulty reconciling their professional and personal lives **cost Canadian companies 2.7 billion dollars** in 1997 (Cooper et al., 1996; Levi and Lunde-Jensen, 1996 in Duxbury and Higgins, 1999).
6. This last study leads to an estimate of more than **100 million dollars per year in health care costs associated** with the difficulties of reconciling work and family life in Quebec.

A review of the literature banks and consultation with experts turned up no documentation on the health impact of governmental measures that specifically target the issue of work-family balance.

CONCLUSION

In a recent report by the OECD on measures being put in place by various countries to facilitate work-family balance, the organization calls for public policy that promotes work-family reconciliation¹⁷ through measures involving uninterrupted assistance to parents with babies and with children in the first years of their life. These measures include parental and maternity leave, tax provisions, social benefits and access to high-quality, affordable daycare services.

Quebec public policy related to work-family balance is distinct from those of other Canadian provinces and of the United States. Concrete measures guided by principles of equity have been adopted to support families and to counter the declining birth rate. Despite these measures, the problem seems to persist.

A government policy on work-family balance, aimed at improving the quality of life of Quebec families, is currently being prepared. In compliance with its mission, the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* has prepared this report to provide the *Ministre de la Santé et des Services sociaux* with information on the health impact of policies related to this issue and, thus, support it in its role as advisor to the government on healthy public policy. Based on currently available scientific data, this report demonstrates that the difficulty of balancing work and family is a common phenomenon in our society and that it is associated with a number of negative effects on the health of those experiencing it. The adoption of effective policies could result in significant health advantages for the population, as well as in reduced pressure on the health system. These arguments have been almost absent from debate surrounding these policies, until now. In our view, they constitute a significant, additional justification for implementing measures that provide adequate support to parents. The INSPQ strongly supports the implementation of such measures, as soon as possible.

¹⁷ Babies and Bosses – Reconciling Work and Family Life (Vol. 3): New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland. Consulted on December 13, 2004 on the following internet site:
www.oecd.org/document/63/0,2340,en_2649_37419_31588543_1_1_1_37419,00.html

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