

## The myth of wonder woman: motherhood & entrepreneurship challenges

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### **Abstract**

In a patriarchal society, women feel the pressures of being good mothers, productive employees, housewives. The ideas and expectations around mothering impact all women: those women who are not mothers are frequently asked when they will become mothers, while the employees expect them to do unpaid overtime, to work evenings and weekends, because they consider that they would have no other responsibilities; working mothers are asked to be all things to all people. Society continues to label women no matter what they do: she's a careerist so she's not a good enough mother; she's working overtime so she neglects her family; she's staying home for too long so she's a mistress and so forth. We interviewed 10 entrepreneurs who are mothers about their relationship with themselves, with their partner, with their child, with the job and with the state. We wanted to see to what extent their privileges as access to a high level of education and financial privileges make their lives easier as mothers. The analysis carried out reveals health problems both physical and mental, a permanent feeling of guilt that they are not good enough mothers because they do not spend enough time with their children, being very active professionally, and a daily struggle to cope with everything.

**Keywords:** *motherhood, guilt, health issues, work-life balance, gender roles.*



## Introduction

Most working women see their careers as personally fulfilling, especially if they are active in the desired field. Women want to be able to maintain the balance between personal and professional life, to be productive at work, to solve problems at home, domestic work, childcare, emotional work, to use their creativity, to face the challenges of being open to new skills.

The time that women and men have for personal matters and their families has become a broadly debated issue in the EU. According to the 2018 Report on Equality Between Women and Men in the EU, women work on average six additional hours per week on paid and unpaid labor such as childcare and housework (p.9). As the Gender Equality Index 2019 underlines, through gender stereotyping, domestic and care work (mostly unpaid) is associated with women, and paid work with men. As a result, the unequal distribution of time spent on caring and house-work activities between women and men remains a major hurdle to progress on gender equality. The disproportionate amount of time women spend on care and domestic chores impacts upon their participation in employment and opportunities for social, personal and civic activities. It also affects women's employment patterns and prospects by exacerbating their involvement in precarious work, with consequences for gender gaps in pay and pensions. (p. 47)

In the late 1990s sociologist Sharon Hays introduced the idea of "intensive mothering" to describe the parenting of "the best mother" - a woman who always puts the needs of her children before her own needs, a full-time caregiver, the woman who makes children the center of her universe. This is a gendered model of childrearing that is child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive (Lockman, 2019, p. 198). Intensive mother has its roots in the traditional gender divide that positions men in the public sphere as breadwinners and women in the private sphere as caregivers. However, this model was criticized as many women began to enter the labor market and could not be full-time caregivers and full-time breadwinners at the same time. Nowadays working mothers still face overwhelming pressure to be "perfect" and they are striving to lead two lives – one at home and one at work.

In 2008, sociologist David Maume of University of Cincinnati, arrived upon the Urgent-Care Question. He boiled parental responsibility in dual-breadwinner couples down to one metric: If your kid gets sick, who takes time off of work? He found that 77.7 percent of women and 26.5 percent of men report that they are sole bearers of this responsibility. Maume concluded that not

much has changed since family researchers in the late 80s wrote that men accept child care responsibilities when they are away from work, but women adapt their work arrangements to their partners' schedules and the needs of their kid(s) (p. 282). This underlines the idea that in most couples women remain the default parent.

Another aspect that working mothers face is the so-called motherhood penalty as they attempt to make a steady climb up in their career. The motherhood penalty assumes that mothers aren't able to maintain the same professional footing as women who don't have children or their male colleagues. This can have an impact on the ability of working mothers to create a secure financial future (Correll, Benard, In Paik, 2007).

Out of a desire to conform to society's standards about women they come to face the wonder woman syndrome. The concept refers to the ability to be everything to everyone – managing family life, social life, and commitments outside the home. Most women agree that wonder woman is a myth, and yet many of these same women's extraordinary expectations for managing their professional and private lives seem based on superhuman standards. (Hays, 1986, p. 436)

We would like to review the concepts around which we center this research: mothering and working. On one hand, mothering is a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people. It is also the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society. At the heart of mothering as it is commonly understood in contemporary Western society is an ethic of caring-of knowing, feeling, and acting in the interests of another. Although mothering usually refers to the thoughts and activities of women who have willingly assumed the responsibility for the caring, nurturing and socialization of their biological, adopted, or stepchildren, the process of defining mothering is not this simple or clear cut (Forcey, 2001, p. 157). The feminist perspective emphasizes three aspects of care: social invisibility, the relationship between care and gender roles, and its importance to the maintenance of life. On the other hand, the concept of work has been traditionally associated with the traditional male ways of participating in the labor market (thus excludes unpaid work: domestic work, emotional work). However, the growing participation of women in the labor market has not resulted in changes in distributed housework, but in the double burden on women to meet demands in both the private and public sphere, a phenomenon called the second shift or double presence/absence (Tavero et. al, 2018, p. 2)

In general, the work that mothers do in the private sphere is devalued because it lies outside of the sphere of monetary exchange. This is the discourse of liberal feminism that sees equality as achievable only through women's increased participation in the public sphere. Success is defined almost exclusively by achievement in paid work and education and increasingly, this is seen to be the ideal for women as well as men (Kahu & Morgan, 2007, p. 59).

In this research we wanted to see what kind of challenges women who fit into the ideal model proposed by liberal feminism are facing in their everyday life. So, our target group was urban women who run their own businesses (entrepreneurs) and who have at least one child. We consider the entrepreneur mothers to be a considerably smaller group than marginalized mothers, single mothers or lower-class working mothers, but we also think it's an interesting subject to explore. Considering that these women come from privileged positions (from the point of view of education, financial resources etcetera), we wanted to see if it is easier for them to negotiate their time between work and family life, if it comes with greater flexibility or greater responsibilities, how they share their responsibilities in couple (dual-breadwinners couples), if they feel any kind of pressure from the society, if they feel the state should do more for moms and so on.

## **Methodology**

We considered qualitative research would be the most appropriate for this empirical approach, using the semi-structured interview as a tool. We interviewed 10 who are entrepreneurs (or practice atypical work) to see what challenges they encounter regarding the work-life balance (how these women negotiate their flexibility to combine the role of mother - is it easier when you are your own boss?); the relationship with themselves (me time), with the partner, with the child/children, with the society/other mothers (what kind of pressures they felt before they had a baby and after they had a baby), with the labor (how the return to work went?) and last but not least the relationship with the state (are they pleased with the current policies on birth support and work-life balance?; what do they feel that they have missed or are now missing from the policies of the state that addresses mothers?).

## **Results**

The interviewees are aged between 33 and 40 and they're all living in urban areas. Only one woman practices atypical work (combines three part-time jobs), the rest of them are entrepreneurs

(developing their own business from 0). Each woman interviewed has at least one child and only one woman is a single mother (divorced).

Their perspectives on the time spent with the child are different, if the period was short, enough or too long. Overall the period of parental leave ranged from 3 weeks to 2 years. Mothers who have spent only 3 weeks with their child/children consider it to be short, while mothers who have stayed for a few months (between 3 and 8 months) consider this period to be sufficient, and mothers who have stayed at home for 1 year or more than 1 year consider this to be a long time.

*It seemed like a lot, a time when I felt bad, I felt like I was going crazy every day. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*I wish I could stay home, I don't think I've spent enough time (...). My maternal grandmother and husband helped me a lot. - Interview 7, 33 years old*

*I think I was left with a trauma of that period because I didn't have enough time to enjoy motherhood. I was concerned about the start-up and it wasn't comfortable for me. I didn't realize in the first phase (...) it was hard. With a second child, I'd do it differently. - Interview 8, 36 years old*

In all 10 cases, the pregnancy was planned, whether it came from the desire of one of the partners or both. Women describe this decision in terms of awareness and planning. For all the women interviewed, pregnancy was not an accident, the child was always wanted by them.

### **Topic 1: Relationship with the self**

The main fear of pre-birth interviewees was related to potential health problems for either their children or themselves. There are also elements in their answers that indicate fear for the loss of freedom with the appearance of a child.

*The fear that I will lose my freedom, I will not have the same flexibility in time management. (...) What if Saturday I want to read a book all day? How will I be able to be myself after that? - Interview 8, 36 years old*

For most interviewees, the expectations they had before giving birth and the subsequent reality were very different. They describe how the post-birth period was accompanied by stress and a sense of guilt due to breastfeeding, the sometimes limited patience to spend time with the child,

the perception of loss of freedom and flexibility in managing their own program, both socially and professionally. From their answers, one can also identify the perception of the distorted reality of motherhood presented and promoted by society, which has led to a sense of external pressure to adopt a certain type of accepted social behavior, which has subsequently turned into an inner pressure to manage everything without mistake and real support, but with absolute control.

*I expected to be more patient with my child but sometimes I'd rather work than play with the baby.* - Interview 3, 35 years old

*I thought I was going to manage everything to perfection, but it wasn't. I was pretty stressed out because I breastfed him, he was fat and I was obsessed with not being obese.* - Interview 8, 36 years old

*Society promotes much bullshit, does not tell the truth about what a child means. I do not condemn people who do not want to have children and I think society is very hypocritical in this regard. It's 3-4 months of discomfort. The experience of the birth is overlooked, we are presented with only the full part of the glass...When in fact you won't have any form of gratitude, you just give and you're the baby's trash can. There's a lot of pressure on the moms.* - Interview 9, 36 years old

Regarding postnatal recovery, the interviewees say that the physical one was easier than the mental one.

*Physical recovery took me about two weeks, but the mental recovery was harder and I didn't have any help. It was a shock to me not being used to housework.* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*Physical recovery was easy, the mental recovery I didn't feel at the time. I was experiencing continuous fatigue, I was experiencing lack of sleep and energy, I became aware of these things a year ago.* - Interview 9, 36 years old

Three of the interviewees admit they experienced postpartum depression. The answers show a difficult adaptation to the "traditional" role of mother, wife, woman, who must forget about herself to care for the child, as well as the lack of real support from those around her to face the challenges of caring for a newborn. That is why most of the women interviewed stated that they went to a

psychologist or they were aware of the need for specialized help for the feelings of sadness, anxiety they faced at the time.

*I am sure I had postpartum depression; and not just a month or two, but a longer period of time and that had to do with the lack of help. Maybe therapy would have helped me then. I didn't feel okay at all changing diapers all day, cleaning, cooking and so on. And you don't really want to go talk about it anyway.* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*I recognized the signs of depression and went to the psychotherapist.* - Interview 7, 33 years old

*I've had depression for almost three years. I'm only more balanced since the end of last year. Fatigue culminated when I returned to work. In addition to support from my family, I have overcome this situation with the help of a psychotherapist.* - Interview 9, 36 years old.

Interviewees experienced an increased level of vulnerability during child-rearing leave in terms of resuming work because they had management positions or were the ones running the business and had a sense and perception of loss of control.

*I wanted to get back to work as soon as possible, to get back to the office.* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*I felt pressure from the employer as I was a zonal sales manager (responsible for 6 counties) and it was a lot of work. At home I didn't have any pressure, but my husband helped me a lot, he trusted me.* - Interview 5, 35 years old

*I felt pressure from myself as I am the person running my own business. I had the feeling that nothing can work as well if I'm not at the office to coordinate the work.* - Interview 10, 40 years old

## **Topic 2: Relationship with partner**

Interviewees are in relationships with their partners from 3 years (the shortest period) to 22 years (the longest period).

The interviewees recount various changes that have occurred in the couple's relationship after giving birth, from the quality of the time spent in two, including intimate relationships to separation. They consider that the pregnancy and the period during which they were forced to care for a newborn (at least the first months) was an important test for the couple's level of maturity and showed the problem of managing the situation from two different perspectives: the 'modern' approach in which the two partners share their tasks fairly and the 'traditional' approach in which the mother is the main person responsible for the care/raising of the child. The challenges of the interviewees in their daily lives are related to their professional activity and personal life. "Time, fatigue and stress" are keywords in their responses. Interviewees say although they are apparently part of the "modern family," tasks are not always fairly divided between partners.

*Our relationship has changed. Sexually, we also give ourselves very little time, perhaps because of fatigue. We're more concerned about the baby, and the romantic part doesn't really exist anymore.* - Interview 3, 35 years old

*We walked away from each other because I didn't have that much time to devote to him. Because of the hormonal storm I was getting very angry very quickly and I couldn't find understanding from my partner. Until he got away from everything. He was unable to manage the situation and accept the changes that occurred after I gave birth.* - Interview 4, 43 years old

*We spend less and less time together and of worse quality. He supported me in raising our child. The first year was a disaster and he went through a strange period of weight gain.* - Interview 8, 36 years old

*I think you need to have a stable relationship to get over this period. Our relationship has changed for the worse compared to the period before.* - Interview 9, 36 years old

*It's been a downward slope for many years, but now we're back on our feet. Harder, but that's it, we both made it.* - Interview 10, 40 years old

*What do we do with the child when she's on vacation and we're at work? Where should we send him?* Interview 1, 40 years old



*The challenges are about the same every day. First of all, challenges from work are the main ones that cause stress, luckily I'm a pretty resilient person. The rarer challenges are with children when they are sick. Otherwise, we're still lucky that I have my parents who take care of them, take them from school/ kindergarten, take care of them until we get back from work. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*The fact that he wasn't physically there, his lack of understanding, his escape from responsibilities, my inability to manage moments of crisis, to be more understanding. I wish he'd understand me then. - Interview 4, 43 years old*

*I wish we could spend quality time together, stop fighting. Working together conflicts are more and more frequent. I'd like us to accept our flaws. - Interview 8, 36 years old*

The daily routine of the interviewees involves going to the office in the case of both partners, leaving the children in the care of someone else, whether we are talking about nursery/kindergarten/school, in some cases the help also comes from grandparents, and taking over the child/children at the end of the program. Thus, because they are left with a large part of the child/children's upbringing, the partners help with certain things when they are explicitly asked for help. Although it has not been explicitly called into question, the education of children is one of the responsibilities of the mother.

*I don't think it's fair, but I thought the woman could carry more than the man. We're divided over periods of time. - Interview 2, 36 years old*

*He was doing outside activities like taking out the garbage. Mostly he wasn't involved, he was minding his own business. He'd go out with the baby, feed him, but I was putting him to bed; he was not playing with the baby. If I asked him, he'd do things. - Interview 4, 43 years old*

*Tasks are divided 50-50. I'd even say there's more to my husband. He does the dishes every evening and when it's cleaning time he still does more than I do (...). Tasks are somewhat balanced because I do things that he doesn't like, for example I iron, I cook. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*The division is not fair. (...) When I get home, his duties stop. - Interview 7, 33 years old*

*I'm 90% in charge of the children's school. I also take care of housekeeping and cooking. However, I work for 6 hours/day, while my husband is working 10 to 12 hours daily. - Interview 10, 40 years old*

### **Topic 3: Relationship with the child/children**

Among the challenges in parenting, interviewees specifically mention keeping calm in relation to the child, as well as guiding them towards finding passions or developing skills that will be useful to them in the future. As a perspective, the relationship with the child over 10 years is seen by the interviewees positively, harmoniously and based on values such as understanding and sincerity.

*To make her a better person. It's hard for me to compete with technology. I want to teach her to understand what's right and wrong, to feel her close to me, not to be marginalized or to face bullying. - Interview 3, 35 years old*

*To gain balance in the relationship with the child: not to be drastic, but not too soft. To not raise my voice when it is not appropriate; in the benevolent vs. restrictive paradigm I would like to raise my child somewhere in the middle. - Interview 4, 43 years old*

*Find a balance. To understand the character of the child and his personality so that I can bend the education, not to get to deviate. I don't have enough time for him. - Interview 8, 36 years old*

*Fears or challenges for the future are how I'm going to deal with what she's going to like or how I'm going to help her in this regard. I don't want to urge her to anything, absolutely nothing, I have no field for her. I'm not good at it and she doesn't ask for anything; at the moment she likes to play in her grandmother's yard but that's not going to be enough forever. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*To be a good example and to be able to prepare her with what she needs for any kind of challenges of life. - Interview 9, 36 years old*

The guilt of the mothers is related to the time left to spend with their children, the fact that they work hard.

*I work too hard and we don't have much time to spend together. Maybe she wanted to eat something and I didn't have time to cook it for her. I generally feel guilty because I'm not really present at home. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*I feel guilty a lot when I work and I'm not with her or when I don't get to her lunch sleep. - Interview 7, 33 years old*

*Every day I feel guilty when I'm working overtime, when I'm not in the mood for playing with him, when I'm caught up with other things, superficial. - Interview 8, 36 years old*

*I felt guilt when I lost my patience and raised my voice, when I didn't listen to the children because I had work to do, when I wasn't paying attention to their wishes. - Interview 10, 40 years old*

The most difficult in the child-parent relationship, from the point of view of the interviewees is communication with their children, because their main desire is that in the relationship between them and the children there would be transparency and sincerity.

*Multi-channel communication, depending on age, depending on the problems they have (real or imagined) and this aspect also takes into account the gender of the child. - Interview 2, 36 years*

*You have to encourage the child, you have to know how to get him/her to communicate with you or you have to have some skills. I don't know if all children naturally come to talk to their parents, I guess most of them don't. Then there is education because in the context of our country you do not know how much it is necessary to come in addition or at least in support, to support what the child is doing in school. It's obviously necessary but where do you set the limits?! - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*To understand each other because the child is right too. To be able to give the child a context when you're not well. - Interview 9, 36 years old*

*Finding a way for children to open up. - Interview 10, 40 years old*

#### **Topic 4: Relationship with society, other mothers**

Interviewers characterize a good mother through her love for the child and mention the importance of self-love. They also emphasize that there is no socially accepted definition of a "good mother".

*A good mother would help and be empathetic with her children. I believe all mothers are good in their own way. - Interview 2, 36 years old*

*First of all, what makes a good mother is the relationship with the self. If you're not happy with yourself, you won't be able to have a good relationship with others, and you won't be able to focus on what are the issues you want to improve in your relationship with your children or others. (...) Until you're okay with yourself, there's no way you're going to be with those around you because any sense of guilt about yourself will make you misjudge your relationship with others. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

A bad mother is a mother who either abuses or abandons her children in the eyes of the interviewees. From their answers, it can be seen that everything related to violence, abuse and neglect of children is quite excluded from the intellectual sphere. Abandonment is perceived as total and is not considered or related in any way to the work and involvement of the mother in the workplace.

*Abuses, such as physical aggression of the children, not feeding them and so on. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*Abandoning children, but you're not a bad mother when you want to go to work. - Interview 3, 35 years old*

*A bad mother is that one who no longer cares for her children. Yet there are good mothers who need to leave their children to work abroad - that doesn't make them bad mothers. I would say that only those who have given up their children are bad mothers, others are just good mothers who don't know they are good mothers or need to improve their relationship with themselves. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

To please everyone, women should be wonder women or super women. Interviewers admit that thanking everyone is not the kind of philosophy they follow.

*There's no such thing! Why would you want to please everyone? Everyone will want something from you and you can't do that.* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*The worst thing is to please everyone because you will never succeed.* - Interview 2, 36 years old

*To be multifunctional, indulgent and not to have expectations.* - Interview 7, 33 years old

Society's expectations for them as mothers are unrealistic, as they have to perform their multiple roles perfectly, which can lead to frustrations and health problems.

*They're unrealistic and that has to do with the level of education.* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*We went to another extreme, from the submissive woman to the self-sufficient woman, who is not realistic. Social pressure is a little high and causes a lot of casualties.* - Interview 2, 36 years old

*Mothers are still human beings; (the society) it's asking a lot from mothers. There is a desire to create an environment for your family (as a mom).* - Interview 5, 35 years old

*Society lives in a science fiction story. Expectations from women are sick and toxic!* - Interview 9, 36 years old

### **Topic 5: Relationship with the labor market**

Of the 10 interviewed, only one works part-time (30 hours/week); the rest work full-time or full-full-time as they describe it. Interviewees consider that their greatest professional achievement is their financial independence acquired through the development of their own business, respectively being a manager, all by their own powers.

*My greatest achievement was that I managed to do a business of my own and I don't depend on anyone.* - Interview 4, 43 years old

*I have my own business, I've made a profit since the first year and I've got five employees.* - Interview 7, 33 years old

*Developing a business from 0.* - Interview 8, 36 years old

*My own business.* - Interview 9, 36 years old

Returning to work was a difficult process for the interviewees, but considered necessary and beneficial for their development not only professional, but also psycho-social. Part of it is that the combination of all roles in the context of the professional position and their work has led to health problems, chronic fatigue. In one of the interviews appears the concept of "wonder woman" which is impossible to achieve.

*The restart of my professional activity went well; I wanted to come back so I could socialize again, to stop going crazy (at home). It was like a vacation for me to go back to work. When I returned I actually changed my job, I was among friends (for the new job).* - Interview 1, 40 years old

*It was really hard, I had health problems. I didn't understand the limits. We have to pay for something, and I paid with little care for myself. I'm not a wonder woman. Over time, I've gained a lot of extra pounds.* - Interview 8, 36 years old

*A year and a few months after I returned to the office I had back problems, gained extra pounds and experienced chronic fatigue.* - Interview 9, 36 years old

Regarding the balancing of personal and professional life, interviewees find various ways to be present as much as possible both in the workplace, in the family and in their relationship. The balance is supported, in large part by help from others, such as the extended family, grandparents, and by putting clear boundaries between the two. An interesting aspect that emerges from the answers is that in "personal life", the details of personal time, for themselves, are not considered so relevant.

*I'm trying to balance through vacays. We take advantage when we're traveling together. When I feel like I can't work anymore (because of fatigue or stress), I take a 3 days break and go somewhere with my family (travel).* - Interview 2, 36 years old

*I balance them well, because my parents support me.* - Interview 4, 43 years old

*I spend more hours at the office than I spend with my family doing relaxing activities. The fact that I spend the weekends and evenings with them, let's say it is saving the situation a bit. My daughters have somehow substituted the relationship with me with*

*their relationship with my mother (their grandmother) and they feel very good there because they can sit outside and play a lot (in the yard). I don't know how that will be reflected later in their psyche, as adults, but I hope not in a negative way. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*I try to manage my time, schedule the days. For example 1 day of the weekend I spend it in the family and usually in the evening I spend time with my child. - Interview 9, 36 years old*

*Putting limits on my business and professional goals. - Interview 10, 40 years old*

### **Topic 6: Relationship with the state**

Regarding the relationship of mothers with the state and the potential facilities that it should adopt and implement to support them, the respondents call into question the poor health and education systems, the lack of help, the double burden, the insufficient number of nurseries, the lack of support groups for mothers (free access to psychotherapy) and for other family members involved in child rearing.

Regarding the Romanian state's birth support policies, although they are not considered to be financially disadvantageous, 2 year parental leave is perceived as too long and they complain about the lack of other means of supporting families (e.g. a good nursery system and decent standards).

Even though the respondents say they did not necessarily have financial problems during their child-rearing leave or after returning to the office, they are concerned about the lack of financial means for vulnerable families who do not have child support and depend on allowance and education in the public system. In relation to money, two of the respondents point out the role of "wonder woman", who must also produce material resources and "mother of sacrifice", because these financial resources involve sacrifices.

*I think it's not fair if you don't have support from someone; your personal life becomes a professional life, you get home and start another job: washing, cooking, ironing. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*Education and health systems must come first for a state, but (in our case) it is not. Unfortunately, there's not much support for young moms or infrastructure. (...) Access*

*to education and health should not have a financially based criterion for children. I have the kids in the private education system, but it doesn't seem right to me (I admit my privilege). - Interview 2, 36 years old*

*The nursery system is underdeveloped. It should adapt to the needs of the mother. Private ones are expensive. Not many people have help (What do you do if you can't afford a private system?). - Interview 3, 35 years old*

*I think there should be support groups for women before and after birth. To have free access to psychotherapy especially for women with postpartum depression and even nationwide education programs dedicated to husbands, grandparents (the family members involved in child rearing). I'm a lucky, a privileged case because I could afford all this. - Interview 9, 36 years old*

*I think that 2 years (post-natal leave) affects the mental health of mothers, it seems to me a long time. I think six months would be enough and after this period of time you have to go back to work. But nurseries are a problem. I didn't go through that because my daughter didn't go to daycare and I could hire someone to take care of her. Otherwise, the conditions in Romania are not that bad, we have the longest duration of child-rearing leave and the allowance is about 85% of the salary. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*I would describe state policies as a mockery! Insufficient monthly allowance, lack of predictability, uncertainty. - Interview 2, 36 years old*

*The policies are bad! The state supports you for two years, and then? It does not support the child until he/she finishes the educational cycle (in the 12th grade), it is not considering the whole context. (...) It seems to me like the state helps for the first 100m and the rest of it (like 100 km) leaves you alone. (...) I pay because I can afford it, but what about the ones who can't? - Interview 4, 43 years old*

*I think from this point of view the Roman state does enough, i.e. it does quite well with the 2 years of parental leave and it gives mothers 85% of their income. I think for a woman who worked before it's okay, I don't see what else could be done. The state can not support you until the child is 4 years old (and even if the state would do so, at that*



*age the child is still not independent). The only difference would be that at the age of 4 you can enroll him/her in kindergarten and somehow the child immunity is formed. At the age of 2 it's more complicated because there are not enough nurseries. Perhaps the increase in the number of nurseries is an aspect that could be improved. - Interview 6, 34 years old.*

The image of the mother at the social level is still linked, according to the respondents, to the "traditional image" of the woman in charge of the care and education of children, only now she has even more tasks in the social environment. Thus, pressure swells for women to take their place in the family at the expense of the professional activity and are considered to be more "emotional".

*Society sees us as super-woman, I don't think it would ever have the same demands from men. - Interview 6, 34 years old*

*I would describe it as the mother of sacrifice. Interview 8, 36 years old*

*It depends a lot on the current, on the area. I am from Bucharest and here I see this "liberal current" - women, mothers are independent and they rebel against men because they do not assume more roles (within the family). I think there are certain fields where mothers are more prepared, I don't know. For example, I'm the only one who goes to the doctor with my kid, I make appointments, I go to school to speak with her teachers. - Interview 1, 40 years old*

*Society is putting pressure on you to stay home with the kids, the family. (...) After having a baby, the woman's yield will be lower, she is "waking up" after 6 months (...). If a mother works hard and has a business she will be blamed, but if the father makes the same he is considered the head of the family. - Interview 9, 36 years old*

The woman is considered weak, judged for being emotional, that she does not focus on work, but I truly believe that a mother will be as productive as possible in the office to leave her time at home to spend with the child (without thinking about priorities at work).- Interview 7, 33 years old

Respondents do not agree how mothers are treated by the Romanian state, not from the point of view of birth support policies, as much as from the point of view of their support as individuals during the leave and after returning to work, because flexible work schedules do not apply, are not

supported by employers and society, do not have alternative means of support with education and child care or when the child is ill.

*The Romanian state thinks that it favors mothers if they spend 2 years at home with the child, but in the two years if you do not have resorts to research, to stay connected to what happens outside the domestic area of child rearing, you are going crazy. -*

Interview 1, 40 years old

*A flexible working schedule for mothers and 100% paid leave when the child is ill should be considered. - Interview 10, 40 years old*

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the responses led to a series of conclusions on how motherhood can influence female entrepreneurs, who are financially independent and professionally successful in the context imposed by the Romanian society and the gender roles. Although privileged from the point of view of access to education, of the social class, they are in relationships where they are the "main engine" (in charge of everything, like "wonder woman"). In general, their partners help them punctually when they explicitly ask for it. The women interviewed feel motherhood with pressure and with the conception that they must do everything without mistake, both personal life and professional activity.

Their sacrifice to make everything perfect is seen in the health problems they have, both physical and mental health. All of them mention the lack of time for themselves, but also for the romantic relationship, fatigue (even chronic fatigue), external and inner pressures and feelings of guilt towards the relationship with their own child (the guilt of not being a good enough mother because they don't spend enough time with the child).

Even if they have multiple opportunities for childcare, their responses show the need for society to be less "demanding" and "judgmental", and for the state to be a real partner, especially in the education of children. Everything related to children's health and education is still the responsibility of the mother. Most of the interviewees have enrolled their children in the private education system but this is a privilege due to financial resources and many of them would like not to have to invest money in the private system, but to have a public system of trust in terms of standards and quality.

An important aspect of the interviews is free access to specialized psychology/psychotherapy services, both during pregnancy and after giving birth. Women say they need moral support, especially when they don't find it from their partner or loved ones. Thus the state could support mothers with policies that take into account these not discussed issues related to the period of motherhood.

Last but not least, there is a tendency towards stereotypes about the perfect mother that can be stigmatizing for career women, who also focus on working life. This aspect should not label them as bad mothers or mothers who are not good enough for their children. Interviewees are aware that the society blames them when things are not in perfect balance which is extremely difficult to achieve outside a fair partnership in which tasks are divided and without work-life balance policies.

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