

# THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND WORK IN A POPULATION OF PORTUGUESE YOUNG ADULTS

Filomena Parada et Joaquim-Luís Coimbra

Universit  de Porto – Portugal

Since its beginnings, the research project in which this study is included is concerned with the characterisation and understanding of the meaning of work and with the psychological process of its construction in our societies. This option is based upon the assumption that work, within the dominant culture of Western societies, has a key role in the way through which people construct meaning and interpret their lives, allowing their framing and understanding (Collin & Young, 1992). A significant portion of our personal and social definition comes from our occupational activity, in as much as it not only allows us to ground a sense of identity based on our actions' outcomes but also appears as something susceptible of being recognised and assessed by others (Savickas, 1990). In other words, the way in which we live our lives is strongly determined by what we do, by our work (Peavy, 1994 ; Richardson, 1993 ; Savickas, 1990). In addition, the performance of work roles cannot be dissociated from a person's needs and priorities in life, mirrored, among other things, in his or hers personal goals, feeling of fulfilment, sense of well being or desired life-style (Davidson & Gilbert, 1993). As Herr (1997) suggests, when thinking about work related issues, a person is confronted with the « who am I ? » question, making obvious the need to understand the interactions being established between this area and other life contexts, such as the family or the community (Manuele-Adkins, 1992 ; Super, 1980). This interactivity which characterises the « whole person » constellation of life roles and activities (Betz & Cornig, 1993) justifies the option for a wider perspective of human existence, being its aim the development of a meaningful, balanced and integrated sense of one's whole trajectory (Cochran, 1994).

## 1. FAMILY, WORK AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN OUR DAYS

Thus being, work appears as one of the main domains of people's lives (Alves, 1998 ; Claes & Quintanilla, 1994 ; England & Harpaz, 1990 ; England & Quintanilla, 1989 ; Savickas, 1990 ; Richardson, 1993), not only as a consequence of its importance as an essential element of the way through which people construct a coherent and continuous (personal and social) sense and meaning to their life paths (Cochran, 1994) but also due to the amount of time and energy they spend preparing to and practising a certain occupational activity - in Western societies, work roles and labour contexts fulfil, in average, one third of our individual existence. It, then, becomes impossible to overlook the prime role that, in our culture, is given to the act of working - it is believed that is through it that human existence is created, defined and guaranteed (Wilpert & Whitley, 1987) -, especially if one has in mind that it is also through the practice of an occupational activity that, each and every one of us, accedes and conquers a number of rights, namely the right to work, economic and social rights, such as the full use of citizenship or the realisation of a certain life-style (Santos, 1998). In fact, in Western societies, inclusion and exclusion criteria are

usually inferred through a set of external indexes which cannot be dissociated from the performance of a occupational activity, particularly in its more instrumental or extrinsic dimension (Gorz, 1988). The assertion of globalisation only helped to stress more this situation. Not only the number of those (temporary or permanently) excluded from the labour market increased - the recent uprising of phenomena such as persistent underemployment and structural unemployment, as well as the scarcity and de-regulation of employment access and maintenance conditions are good examples of this situation - but it also emphasised the growing generalisation of a consumering logic in all spheres of individual and social functioning, making people more dependent on fashions, social policies or market and economy cycles and less supported by solidarity links, that used to be organic and endemic to the (social, political, economic) system (Beck, 1992).

Family has also been caught up by this turmoil of changes. The increase in life expectancy, making it necessary to rethink intergenerational relationships, the decrease in birth rates (due, among other aspects, to the generalised use of birth control methods), which was accompanied by a reduction on the number of elements composing nuclear families, and women's higher levels of education and labour market participation, contributing to the redefinition of traditional male and female (work and family) roles, are some of the phenomena that most contributed to these transformations (Roussel, 1992). These structural changes are cross-sectional to most (if not all) traditional structures, organisation configurations and social relationships and have a deeper effect on family's primary socialisation function (Tedesco, 2001). According to this author, family is at risk of becoming an integrated net of solidary, but egalitarian individuals, which will have (and already have) some difficulties in accomplishing their traditional role of transmitting, from one generation to the next, a global perspective of the world (i.e., the moral and cultural patrimony) that helps people define a coherent sense of themselves, the world around and of the relationship established between them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that family has lost its importance. At least not to Portuguese adolescents and young adults, who still face it as a safe emotionally charged domain where they can look for self-accomplishment and develop a sense of personal autonomy (Freire, 2000 ; Vasconcelos, 1998). Obviously, economic factors might also play an important role in the valuation of family since more and more youngsters remain dependent of their origin families - due to longer education paths as well as youth unemployment or underemployment - for longer periods of time (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is possible to state that, even though new family values have emerged, this life context maintains its central part in (Portuguese) young people's values and social representation systems (Vasconcelos, 1998).

If balancing the ever growing demands of work, career and family appears, on one hand, as one of the major issues of our time (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1997), on the other, we also should have in mind the growing difficulties experienced by younger generations in acceding and remaining in the employment system or in guaranteeing the necessary conditions allowing them to establish their own family (Azevedo, 1999). In fact, not only structures and contexts in which (personal and social) psychological meaning is constructed are changing but something similar is happening to what shapes and gives sense to people's life trajectory (Tedesco, 2001). Having this in mind, a growing number of studies began to be concerned with a clearer understanding of the way in which all of these aspects influenced those facing the transition process to adulthood (i.e. – adolescents and young adults), especially in what concerns the accomplishment of the

developmental tasks nuclear to this process, such as the attaining of a (satisfying) job or the constitution of a family. It is broadly accepted that work and family (or love) related issues constitute two life domains that not only structure our lives making them meaningful but also offer considerable opportunities for growth and development (e.g., Merriam & Clark, 1993). In fact, the study of work and family connections have recently started to deserve a significant attention in psychological literature (Swanson, 1992). More and more researchers admit that the understanding of the full impact of work roles cannot be dissociated from the insight of its influence on a person's non-work life, namely on family or leisure (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991 ; Super, 1980). According to Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt (1999), young adults of our days present a more varied pattern of commitment to work and family roles, even though they do not differ significantly in the importance given to each of these domains which appear more and more as interconnected and reciprocal areas of personal involvement (Adams, King & King, 1996). Spade and Reese (1991) concluded that those college students participating in their study planned to have both a family and a career, not founding that many important differences between men and women concerning their career aspirations, marriage plans or the age anticipated by them for starting a family. Members of both gender categories also considered work as a central area in their lives as well as expressed the desire to establish themselves professionally before beginning a family. Nevertheless, one must not restrict the non-work life to family. If career is conceived as involving an individual's whole lifestyle, than other major areas of commitment (such as leisure, community or religion) must also be considered as a means of acquiring a better understanding of the relationship established between them and the work life (see MOW International Research Team, 1987). On the other hand, several studies showed a considerable association between work and non-work satisfaction and life satisfaction, particularly in what concerns life and job satisfaction (Swanson, 1992). Authors like Beutell and Wiltig-Berman (1999) propose a model in which family, job and career satisfaction concur to life satisfaction, often considered as an indicator of happiness or subjective well-being. According to them, this sense of personal satisfaction related to various life spheres will allow us to predict a global satisfaction with life, and, thus, the existence of an overall psychological well being. Obviously, all of these issues cannot be isolated from the way in which individuals develop a personal sense of meaning to their existence, in terms either of the goals they define or the feeling of fulfilment they experience (Cochran, 1994 ; Debats, 1998).

## **2. STUDY AIM**

In line with this research, this study intends to explore (a) the relationship established between work, family and other major life contexts, as well as between the sense of satisfaction and personal meaning given to life, and (b) the differences existing in these variables as a result of gender, education level and employment status (no civil status differences were assessed due to the composition of the study's sample).

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Sample

**Table 1. Subjects' general distribution**

Subjects	N = 236		
Mean age	23.43 (minimum 17 and maximum 30)		
Gender	Female	44.5 %	(105)
	Male	55.5 %	(131)
	Single	81.8 %	(193)
Civil status	Married	15.7 %	(37)
	Separated	0.4 %	(1)
	Divorced	1.7 %	(4)
	9th grade or less	33.1 %	(73)
Education level	Secondary education	47.9 %	(113)
	Higher education	19.1 %	(45)
	Employed	49.2 %	(116)
Employment status	Unemployed	26.7 %	(63)
	Seeking a first job	24.2 %	(57)

All sample subjects (N = 236), male (55.5 %) and female (44.5 %), are presently employed (49.2 %), unemployed (26.7 %) or seeking a first job (24.2 %). Their ages vary from 17 to 30 years, being its mean of 23.43. In terms of their education level, subjects were distributed into three categories (a) those presenting an education level equal or inferior to Portuguese basic education, i.e., grade nine (33.1 %), (b) those who have a secondary education diploma, i.e., finished grade 12 (47.9 %), and (c) those possessing a higher education degree (19.1 %). Concerning their civil status, a large discrepancy between the groups was found, since (a) 193 out of 236 subjects were single, (b) 37 were married, (c) only one person is separated, and (d) four are divorced.

**Table 2. Subjects' distribution concerning gender, education level and employment status**

	< or = 9th grade	Secondary education	Higher education
Employed (N = 116)	22.0% females 19.8% 17.5% males	30.5% females 45.7% 61.4% males	47.5% females 34.5% 21.1% males
Unemployed (N = 63)	48.4% females 54.0% 59.4% males	48.4% females 44.4% 40.6% males	3.2% females 1.6% 0.0% males
Seeking a 1st job (N = 57)	0.0% females 36.8% 50.0% males	93.3% females 56.1% 42.9% males	6.7% females 7.0% 7.1% males

A more detailed analysis of these data (see table 2), makes it possible to conclude that this is not a representative sample of the Portuguese population, since nearly 150 of the 236 questionnaires were answered by subjects that, at the moment, were attending an apprenticeship course at a vocational training centre. Obviously, this has had some effects in the distribution of subjects through the categories mentioned for the demographic variables under observation (gender, education level, employment status and civil status).

### **3.2 Instruments**

Besides the following instruments, a brief questionnaire aiming at subjects demographic characterisation was also administrated.

#### *(a) Meaning of Working – Version A*

This questionnaire is a product of the work being developed by the Meaning of Working (MOW) International Research Team (see MOW International Research Team, 1987). In its original version this questionnaire contains 24 items through which the three main components of the meaning of working - work centrality, work goals and work societal norms - can be identified. These components are inferred through five indexes (work centrality index, assessing its relative and absolute importance ; expressive and economic goals associated to work ; and work societal norms associated to each person's rights and duties). For the purposes of this study only the item referring to work's relative importance was used. In it subjects were asked to distribute 100 points by five life domains, namely, leisure, community, work, religion and family.

#### *(b) Satisfaction with Life Scale*

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) and adapted to the Portuguese population by Neto (1993, 1997). Its main characteristic consists in being an instrument designed to assess subjects' global (psychological) life satisfaction. Participants are asked to think about their whole lives and then, in a seven point Likert scale varying from « totally disagree » to « totally agree », say in which degree they agree or not with each of the five statements there presented.

#### *(c) Life Regard Index – Revised Version*

The starting point for the development of this instrument was the realisation that several authors and theories stated the existence of a sense or meaning in life as absolutely necessary for psychological well-being. Generally, the life sense or meaning concept is defined as the presence or absence of a feeling of being able to construct a or find an order or coherence to personal narratives (see Debats, 1996, 1998). According to this, Battista and Almond (1973) - authors of the original version of the Life Regard Index (LRI) - concluded that speaking about a sense or meaning to human existence means to consider, on one hand, a reference « framework » based on which life goals, aims or even a philosophy can be developed, and, on the other, the feeling of « fulfilment » achieved (or under achievement) when trying to fulfil those same goals, aims or philosophy. The questionnaire they develop and later on revised by Dominique Debats (1990) is constituted by 28 statements being participants asked to say if they agree, disagree or have no opinion in relation them. Two scales — framework and fulfilment — with 14 items each compose it, being seven of those items presented in a positive manner and the other seven negatively.

### 3.3 Hypotheses

Based on previous research, as well as on the study goals previously mentioned, the following hypotheses were formulated :

(a) It is expected that work and family appear as two central life domains in Portuguese young adults lives, being predicted a predominance of family over work (e.g., Freire, 2000 ; Vasconcelos, 1998). At the same time, it is expected a negative association between these two variables (e.g., Kerpelman & Schvaneveldt, 1999), contrary to what is predictable for the remaining areas of commitment (leisure, religion or community). No negative associations are expected between each of these life contexts and work (e.g., Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991).

(b) Gender differences are expected concerning the importance attributed to family, being foreseen that female subjects will value more this area than their male counterparts (e.g., Freire, 2000 ; Vasconcelos, 1998). No differences are expected, concerning the importance of family, in relation to subjects education level or employment status (e.g., Vasconcelos, 1998).

(c) No gender differences are predicted regarding the importance of work in peoples' lives (e.g., Kerpelman, & Schvaneveldet, 1999 ; Moya, Expósito & Ruiz, 2000 ; Spade & Reese, 1991). It is foreseen that not only subjects presenting higher education levels value it more (e.g., Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991) but also that those currently working attribute it a higher degree of importance than all others considered by this sample (e.g., Claes & Quintanilla, 1994).

(d) No life satisfaction differences are predictable concerning subjects education level, employment status (Borgen, Amundson & Tench, 1996 ; Brief, Konovsky, Goodwin & Link, 1995) or gender (Arrindell, Heesink & Feij, 1999 ; Shevlin, Brunnsden & Miles, 1998).

(e) No differences related to experience of personal meaning (i.e., the meaning attributed to life, its framework and fulfilment) regarding subjects gender, education level or employment status are predicted (e.g., Debats, 1998). Positive associations are expected between those three dimensions (i.e., the meaning attributed to life, its framework and fulfilment) (e.g., Debats, 1998, 1996) and between each one of them and life satisfaction (e.g., Chamberlain & Zika, 1988 ; Debats, 1996, 1998).

### 3.4 Results

The study results will be next presented. They will be introduced according to the following data treatment procedures (a) descriptive statistics, (b) exploratory factor analysis, (c) group differences analysis, and (d) analysis of the relationships established between the dependent variables.

#### (a) Descriptive statistics

In order to understand the degree of average importance subjects' attributed to each of life's five major areas a frequency analysis was conducted. This procedure allowed us to verify that family, closely followed by work and leisure constitute the three central life domains. Their punctuation means were of 36.36 (family), 23.97 (work) and 23.43 (leisure).

The values found for the remaining life domains - i.e., community and religion - were of 8.10 and 8.06, respectively.

**Table 3.** Importance attributed to each of the five major live areas

Life areas	Total %
leisure	23.43%
community	8.10%
work	23.97%
religion	8.06%
family	36.36%

At the same time, partial crosstabulations with chi squared analysis were made concerning the demographic variables of gender, education level and employment status. Subjects' distribution within their cruised categories didn't allowed a global perspective on means differences resulting from the crosstabulation of these variables, since some cells presented a count lower than expected. Nevertheless, when looking at the significance levels of the partial crosstabulations it was possible to observe the existence of systematic group differences, concerning their distribution, in terms of gender and education level ( $\chi^2 = 11.677$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), gender and employment status ( $\chi^2 = 10.098$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ), and education level and employment status ( $\chi^2 = 44.701$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

*(b) Exploratory factor analysis*

Concerning the SWLS, a principal components exploratory factor analysis was conducted. In line with previous research (see Neto, 1993, 1997 ; Arrindell, Heesink & Feij, 1999) inter-item correlations yielded one component with eigenvalue exceeding unity which accounted for 56.738 % of the total variance. All the items had very high loadings ( $> 0.70$ ), except for item 5 which had a high loading ( $> 0.50$ ). Analyses of internal consistency reliability showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 and a level of homogeneity (mean inter-item  $r$ ) ranging from 0.35 to 0.65.

Regarding the LRI, and based on previous research results (e.g., Chamberlain and Zika, 1988 ; Debats, 1990, 1996), a principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation and two components extraction was conducted. This exploratory analysis showed that both these factors yielded eigenvalues exceeding unity, and accounted for 32.114 % of the total variance explained. The first factor extracted accounted for 24.696 % of the total variance being of 7.418 % the variance explained by the second factor. Further analysis showed that two items presented loadings justifying their elimination (item 2 loaded both factors almost equally and item 3 had a loading  $< 0.3$ ). Thus, 14 items loaded  $> 0.30$  one factor, named « framework », and the remaining 12 loaded  $> 0.30$  the other factor named « fulfilment ». The total variance explained became of 33.585 % (first component explaining a total variance of 25.605 % and the second component 7.980 %). The scale's 26 items (referring to the life regard index) revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, the « framework » component alpha was of 0.8130 and the « fulfilment » component alpha was of 0.83. Each

component presented a level of homogeneity ranging from 0.30 to 0.70, in which almost all the items that loaded > 0.30 on one factor had a loading < 0.30 on the other.

(c) *Group differences analysis*

Next, group differences will be analysed as a result of gender, education level and employment status in the dependent variables under study — i.e., subjects' attributed importance to leisure, community, work, religion and family ; life satisfaction ; life regard, framework and fulfilment.

**Table 4. Group differences as a result of gender**

	Student's t test			
	t	df	p	
leisure	-4,096	220	0.000	M>F
community	-0.539	220	>0.05	—
work	-0.058	220	>0.05	—
religion	2.970	220	0.003	F>M
family	2.402	220	0.017	F>M
life satisfaction	1.032	220	>0.05	—
fulfilment	3.950	220	0.000	F>M
framework	3.383	220	0.001	F>M
life regard	4.204	220	0.000	F>M

As showed in Table 4 significant differences between both gender groups were found for the following variables, leisure ( $t(220) = -4.096$  ;  $p = 0.000$ ), religion ( $t(220) = 2.970$  ;  $p = 0.003$ ), family ( $t(220) = 2.402$  ;  $p = 0.017$ ), fulfilment ( $t(220) = 3.950$  ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and life regard ( $t(220) = 4.204$  ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A deeper analysis revealed that female subjects attributed religion ( $M = 9.670$  ;  $S.D. = 7.970$ , for females, and  $M = 6.742$  ;  $S.D. = 6.719$ , for males), family ( $M = 38.990$  ;  $S.D. = 14.738$ , for females, and  $M = 34.197$  ;  $S.D. = 14.837$ , for males), fulfilment ( $M = 30.047$  ;  $S.D. = 4.459$ , for females, and  $M = 27.438$  ;  $S.D. = 5.229$ , for males), framework ( $M = 38.305$  ;  $S.D. = 3.645$ , for females, and  $M = 36.440$  ;  $S.D. = 4.414$ , for males), and life regard ( $M = 74.001$  ;  $S.D. = 7.578$ , for females, and  $M = 69.266$  ;  $S.D. = 8.929$ , for males) a higher relevance than their male counterparts. The only exception was leisure to which male subjects attributed a higher relevance than female subjects ( $M = 26.639$  ;  $S.D. = 13.883$ , for males, and  $M = 19.525$  ;  $S.D. = 11.530$ , for females).

**Table 5.** Group differences as a result of education level

	Oneway ANOVA			
	F	df	p	Scheffé
leisure	1.090	2, 219	>0.05	—
community	2.010	2, 219	>0.05	—
work	4.200	2, 219	0.016	higher ed.>9th grade or less
religion	1.470	2, 219	>0.05	—
family	1.306	2, 219	>0.05	—
life satisfaction	0.177	2, 219	>0.05	—
fulfilment	4.522	2, 219	0.012	higher ed.>9th grade or less
framework	0.224	2, 219	>0.05	—
life regard	2.392	2, 219	>0.05	—

Concerning group differences as a result of subjects' education level, it was possible to observe that those having an education level equal or inferior to 9th grade gave a significantly lower importance than those possessing a higher education degree to work ( $F(2, 219) = 4.200$  ;  $p = 0.016$  ; being the group means for higher education ( $M = 28.727$  ;  $S.D. = 14.591$ ) significantly higher than the group means for education level equal or inferior to 9th grade ( $M = 21.324$  ;  $S.D. = 12.711$ )), and fulfilment ( $F(2, 219) = 4.522$  ;  $p = 0.012$  ; being the group means for higher education ( $M = 28.727$  ;  $S.D. = 14.591$ ) significantly higher than the group means for education level equal or inferior to 9th grade ( $M = 21.324$  ;  $S.D. = 12.711$ )).

**Table 6.** Group differences as a result of employment status

	Oneway ANOVA			
	F	df	p	Scheffé
leisure	1.695	2, 219	>0.05	—
community	3.798	2, 219	0.024	seeking 1st job>unemployed
work	0.509	2, 219	>0.05	—
religion	0.662	2, 219	>0.05	—
family	4.011	2, 219	0.019	unemployed>employed
life satisfaction	2.541	2, 219	>0.05	—
fulfilment	5.221	2, 219	0.006	employed>unemployed
framework	1.547	2, 219	>0.05	—
life regard	3.259	2, 219	0.040	—

As a result of employment status significant group differences were identified for the following variables community, family, fulfilment and life regard (in this case, neither Scheffé's nor Bonferroni's test presented a  $p < 0.05$ ). Concerning the variable community, it was possible to conclude that subjects seeking for a first job gave a significantly higher importance than those currently unemployed ( $F(2, 219) = 3.798$  ;  $p = 0.024$  ; being the group means for seeking a first job ( $M = 10.019$  ;  $S.D. = 6.728$ ) significantly higher than the group means unemployed ( $M = 6.586$  ;  $S.D. = 5.932$ )). Regarding the family, it was possible to observe that unemployed subjects gave it a significantly importance than their employed counterparts ( $F(2, 219) = 4.011$  ;  $p = 0.019$  ; being the group means for unemployed ( $M = 41.069$  ;  $S.D. = 15.644$ ) significantly higher than the group means for employed ( $M = 34.618$  ;  $S.D. = 14.186$ )). Finally, it was possible to verify that employed subjects presented a deeper feeling of fulfilment than those in unemployment ( $F(2, 219) = 5.221$  ;  $p = 0.006$  ; being the group means for employed ( $M = 29.661$  ;  $S.D. = 4.862$ ) significantly higher than the group means unemployed ( $M = 27.198$  ;  $S.D. = 4.667$ )).

*(d) Analysis of the relationships established between the dependent variables*

From the analysis of the correlation matrix it was possible to observe the existence of a positive significant association ( $p > 0.05$  and  $r > 0.3$ ) between the following variables : community and religion ( $r = 0.387$ ) ; life satisfaction with fulfilment ( $r = 0.544$ ), framework ( $r = 0.399$ ) and life regard ( $r = 0.489$ ), fulfilment and framework ( $r = 0.565$ ), and life regard with fulfilment ( $r = 0.874$ ) and framework ( $r = 0.844$ ). A negative significant association was found between the variables family and leisure ( $r = -0.436$ ) and family and work ( $r = -0.416$ ).

**Table 7.** Correlation matrix of study's dependent variables

		leisure	community	work	religion	family	life satisfaction	fulfilment	framework	life regard
leisure	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.164*	-.283**	-.246**	-.436**	-.166*	-.228**	-.283**	-.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.015	.000	.000	.000	.013	.001	.000	.000
community	Pearson Correlation	-.164*	1.000	-.217**	.387**	-.298**	.033	.009	.061	.033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.	.001	.000	.000	.625	.897	.369	.621
work	Pearson Correlation	-.283**	-.217**	1.000	-.278**	-.416**	-.071	.055	.085	.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.	.000	.000	.291	.417	.207	.243
religion	Pearson Correlation	-.246**	.387**	-.278**	1.000	-.202**	.051	.150*	.115	.140*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.002	.451	.026	.086	.037
family	Pearson Correlation	-.436**	-.298**	-.416**	-.202**	1.000	.170*	.071	.085	.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.002	.	.011	.293	.209	.212
life satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.166*	.033	-.071	.051	.170*	1.000	.544**	.399**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.625	.291	.451	.011	.	.000	.000	.000
fulfilment	Pearson Correlation	-.228**	.009	.055	.150*	.071	.544**	1.000	.565**	.874**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.897	.417	.026	.293	.000	.	.000	.000
framework	Pearson Correlation	-.283**	.061	.085	.115	.085	.399**	.565**	1.000	.844**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.369	.207	.086	.209	.000	.000	.	.000
life regard	Pearson Correlation	-.276**	.033	.079	.140*	.084	.498**	.874**	.844**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.621	.243	.037	.212	.000	.000	.000	.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Differences found between the study's demographic variables (gender, education level and employment status) and general tendencies within Portuguese society, regarding the school-to-work transition process, might be explained by the specific characteristics of the sample used. These specificities might also account for the significant differences found concerning subjects' distribution within their categories. In Portugal, not only women but also secondary education graduates are the ones most affected by unemployment or integration difficulties in the labour market (Alves, 1998). However, it is also important to mention that the study's sample mirrors some recent tendencies that show young women as being the ones possessing (or, at least, intending to acquire) higher education levels, particularly in higher education (ibid.). According to the author, this could come as a means of allowing them enter later and in more competitive conditions in the employment system, usually adverse to them. On the other hand, this might also come as an indicator of the fact

that Portuguese males socialisation process does not favour their adaptation to the school context, since the number of dropouts is higher than the one found for females (Pais, 1998). To try and understand the way in which each and every one of these aspects (separately or jointly) relate themselves to the school to work transition process, especially regarding the association established between work and family projects (e.g., their expectations, meanings, commitments) appear as interesting research hypotheses to be followed in the future.

According to what would be expected, work appears as one of the major life areas in Portuguese young adults lives. Nevertheless, we must not overlook the fact that, not only family presents the highest average punctuation but also leisure presents a score extremely close to the one of work. Even though, at the moment, these results cannot be extended to a broader population, one cannot help thinking that a new set of life meanings and ways of making sense out of our daily lives might be raising within younger generations. In spite of this, previous research (Brief, Konovsky, Goodwin & Link, 1995) shows us that subjects presenting lower education levels tend to value mainly works extrinsic or instrumental dimensions (e.g., financial, of prestige or power) while subjects possessing higher education levels are more focused on work's self-fulfilment and personal development aspects (i.e., more expressive or intrinsic). As such, they also present higher expectations concerning this domain, being also possible to presuppose higher levels of commitment to work. This probably explains the differences resulting from subjects' education level found for the variable work and fulfilment. At the same time, significant changes have been introduced in the challenges and demands workers have to face, due, among other aspects, to the (economic and technological) transformations in course. If, on one hand, workers are expected to be multivalent as well as are required to adjust to creativity, adaptability and fast readjustment needs faced by enterprises (Azevedo, 1999). Couldn't it be that higher work demands make it harder for people (or they choose not) to commit with the same intensity to work and family simultaneously? (see Kerpelman & Schvaneveldt, 1999). On the other hand, individuals presenting lower and less specialised qualifications, are equally confronted with a marked emptying of the contents traditionally associated with their jobs and, thus, of the links and mechanisms of solidarity that used to characterise them (e.g., Sennet, 1998). Could this not help to explain why subjects with lower education levels, not only attribute an also lower degree of importance to work (at least when compared with higher education graduates) but also mention a not so deep feeling of fulfilment?

Once more, according to what was expected, family appeared as one of the main commitment domains for our sample subjects. Both emotional and economic reasons could be held as an explanation for this situation. If, on one hand, labour market integration difficulties (one of the landmarks of the transition process to adulthood) are experienced in a more obvious way, on the other, family appears as a fundamental context for personal growth and self-fulfilment (Freire, 2000). Thus being, one cannot stop wondering if family's importance does not appear as a consequence of its double function as support network and means of accomplishment of personal autonomy, and, thus, understand why unemployed subjects commit more to it than those who are employed. In turn, the fact that, among (Portuguese) adolescents and young adults, prevails a traditional way of thinking that considers women as the primary house and child caretakers, even though they recognise the need to divide those tasks by the couple (Vasconcelos, 1998), might allow us

to better understand why females commit more to family than males. Especially because this does not mean that they do not commit to work or other non-work areas of their lives, even though there is a clear choice of priorities resulting in a negative association between these two dimensions (Kerpelman & Schvaneveldt, 1999). According to the authors, the development and maintenance of traditional standards of role commitment, in this case to gender roles, appears as a not so feasible attitude, since more flexible patterns of commitment are required by nowadays life conditions. Since male subjects tend to express more traditional patterns of gender role commitment than females, it is possible to consider that a somewhat lower depth of fulfilment, a relative diffusion of their framework and, thus being, of their personal life meaning, might be related to this aspect and reflect some adjustment difficulties on their behalf. However, this might also raise the question of how non-traditional are, in fact, young women's gender role commitments ?

What about leisure ? How could the results found be explained ? Before anything else, we should have in mind that leisure activities are usually perceived as something under personal control (at least, in what concerns time occupation) as well as a commitment context in which people can feel free to creatively and meaningfully use their free time (Imaginário, 1997). In a society in which people live for and in the present, seek immediate gratifications, and emphasise individualism and self-fulfilment, leisure allows them to fulfil these needs (Beck, 1992) and, at the same time, counterbalance other less positive situations, such as the absence of work (Borgen, Amundson & Tench, 1996 ; Brief, Konovsky, Goodwin & Link, 1995). At least partially, this helps to understand why males commit more to leisure than females. According to Edwards and Bloland (1990), in an attempt to satisfy internal needs, subjects turn to ways of satisfying them externally - i.e., through leisure. The inverse association identified between leisure and family could be a result of their inclusion, by subjects, in their non-work life, putting them to compete with one another. Thus being, it is only natural that a person's leisure needs and family responsibilities, at a given moment, might collide with each other resulting, as Super (1980) suggested, in a permanent change of priorities across the life-cycle. What about those seeking for a first job ? Why are they more willing to commit to their community than unemployed subjects ? Maybe because they never worked, they find it easier to substitute work as a fount of meaningful results in life, finding in alternative activities a response to their expression and personal organisation needs.

There was, as predicted, an absence of differences as a result of gender, education level and employment status for subjects feeling of life satisfaction. The generic character of this measure, not focusing on a specific domain of life, helps to understand these results. Something similar happens with the results attained for LRI global index and the framework subscale as a result of subjects education level or employment status. According to previous research (e.g., Debats, 1998) it is not our education level or our employment status that make have a framework for our lives, and thus some meaningful goals we wish to attain. Up till now the absence of a framework or of a feeling of fulfilment, and consequently a lower life regard, has only been observed in clinical samples (Debats, 1996). On the other hand, when people positively are committed to some meaningful purposes (have a framework), and see themselves has being able to fulfil or has having fulfilled them, it is possible to assert that some kind of meaning is being attributed to their existence - i.e., individuals experience a sense of personal significance - contributing to their subjective well being or life satisfaction (Debats, 1998). Not only this explains the

relationship found between life satisfaction and personal meaning variables, but also reinforces the nature of the association existing between framework, fulfilment and life regard.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, G.A., King, L.A. & King, D.W. (1996). Relationships of job and family involvement, family social support, and work-family conflict with job and life satisfaction. *Journal of applied psychology, 81*, (4), 411-420.
- Alves, N. (1998). Escola e trabalho : atitudes, projectos e trajetórias. In M.V. Cabral & J.M. Pais (Coord.), *Jovens portuguesas de hoje - resultados do inquérito de 1997*. (pp. 53-133). Oeiras : Celta Editora.
- Arrindell, W.A., Heesink, J. & Feji, J.A. (1999). The satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) : appraisal with 1700 healthy young adults in the Netherlands. *Personality and individual differences, 26*, 815-826.
- Azevedo, J. (1999). *Voos de borboleta : escola, trabalho e profissão*. Porto : Edições Asa.
- Battista, J. & Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. *Psychiatry, 36*, 409-427.
- Beck, U. (1992). *The risk society : towards a new modernity*. London : Sage Publications.
- Betz, N. & Cornig, A. (1993). The inseparability of 'career' and 'personal' counseling. *The career development quarterly, 42*, 137-142.
- Beutell, N.J. & Wittig-Berman, U. (1999). Predictors of work-family conflict and satisfaction with family, job, career and life. *Psychological reports, 85*, 893-903.
- Borgen, W.A., Amundson, N.E. & Tench, E. (1996). Psychological well-being throughout the transition from adolescence to adulthood. *The career development quarterly, 45*, 189-199.
- Brief, A.P., Konovsky, M.A., Goodwin, R. & Link, K. (1995). Inferring the meaning of work from the effects of unemployment. *Journal of applied social psychology, 25*, (8), 693-711.
- Chamberlain, K. & Zika, S. (1988). Measuring meaning in life : an examination of three scales. *Personality and individual differences, 9*, (3), 589-596.
- Claes, R. & Quintanilla, A.R. (1994). Initial career and work meanings in seven European countries. *The career development quarterly, 42*, 337-352.
- Cochran, L. (1994). What is a career problem. *The career development quarterly, 42*, 204-215.
- Collin, A. & Young, R.A. (1992). Constructing career through narrative and context : An interpretative perspective. In A. Collin & R.A. Young (Eds.), *Interpreting career : hermeneutical studies of lives in context*. (pp. 1-12). Westport : Praeger.
- Davidson, S. & Gilbert, L. (1993). Career counseling is a personal matter. *The career development quarterly, 42*, 149-153.
- Debats, D.L. (1990). The Life Regard Index : reliability and validity. *Psychological reports, 67*, 27-34.
- Debats, D.L. (1996). Meaning in life : clinical relevance and predictive power. *British journal of clinical psychology, 35*, 503-516.

- Debats, D.L. (1998). Measurement of personal meaning : the psychometric properties of the Life Regard Index. In P.T. Wong & P.S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning*. (pp. 237-259). Mahwah : Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R., Larsen, R.J. & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of personality assessment*, 49, 71-75.
- Edwards, P.B. & Bloland, P.A. (1990). Integrating leisure guidance into career counseling centre. *Journal of career development*, 16, (3), 185-194.
- England, G.W. & Harpaz, I. (1990). How working is defined : national contexts and demographics and organizational influences. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 11, 253-266.
- England, G.W. & Quintanilla, A.R. (1989). Major work-meaning patterns in the national labor forces of Germany, Japan and the United States. *Advances in comparative management*, 4, 77-94.
- Freire, S. (2000). Valores familiares dos estudantes finalistas da Univeridade do Algarve. *Análise Psicológica*, 3, (XVIII), 345-353.
- Gorz, A. (1988) Méthamorphoses du travail : quête du sens. Paris : Éditions Galilée.
- Herr, E.L. (1997). Career counselling : a process in process. *British journal of guidance and counselling*, 25, (1), 81-93.
- Imaginário, L. (1997). Questões de orientação. Paper presented at the Conference « Escola-Família-Comunidade », Guarda, Portugal.
- Loscocco, K.A. & Roschelle, A.R. (1991). Influences on the quality of work and non-work life : two decades in review. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 39, 182-225.
- Kerpelman, J.L. & Shvaneveldt, P.L. (1999). Young adults anticipated identity importance of career, marital and parental roles : comparisons of men and women with different role balance orientations. *Sex roles*, 41, (3/4), 189-217.
- Manuele-Adkins, C. (1992). Career counseling is personal counseling. *The career development quarterly*, 41, 313-323.
- Merriam, S.B. & Clark, M.C. (1993). Work and love : their relationship in adulthood. *International journal of behavioral development*, 16, (4), 609-627.
- Moya, M., Expósito, F. & Ruiz, J. (2000). Close relationships, gender and career salience. *Sex roles*, 42, (9/10), 825-846.
- MOW International Research Team (1987). The meaning of working. London : Academic Press.
- Neto, F. (1993). The satisfaction with life scale : psychometrics properties in an adolescent sample. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 22, 125-134.
- Neto, F. (1997). Escala de satisfação com a vida : propriedades psicométricas numa amostra de adolescentes. In F.F. Neto (Ed.), *Estudos de psicologia intercultural : nós e outros*. (pp. 347-359). Lisboa : Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian e Junta Nacional de Investigação Científica e Tecnológica.
- Pais, J.M. (1998). Grupos juvenis e modelos de comportamento em relação à escola e ao trabalho : resultados de análises factoriais. In M.V. Cabral & J.M. Pais (Coord.). « *Jovens portugueses de hoje - resultados do inquérito de 1997* ». (pp. 135-187). Oeiras : Celta Editora.
- Parasuraman, S. & Greenhaus, J.H. (1997). Integrating work and family. Westport : Quorum Books.

- Peavy, V. R. (1994). A constructivist perspective for counselling. *Educational and vocational guidance, 55*, 31-37.
- Richardson, M.S. (1993). Work in people's lives : a location for counseling psychologists. *Journal of counseling psychology, 40*, (4), 425-433.
- Roussel, L. (1992). *O futuro da família. Sociologia : problemas e práticas, 11*, 165-179.
- Santos, B.S. (1998). *Reinventar a democracia*. Lisboa : Fundação Mário Soares & Gradiva Edições.
- Savickas, M.L. (1990). Work and adjustment. In D. Wedding (Ed.), *Behavior and medicine*. (pp. 149-161). St. Louis : Mosby.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *La corrosión del carácter : las consecuencias personales del trabajo en el nuevo capitalismo*. Barcelona : Editorial Anagrama.
- Shevlin, M., Brunsten, V. & Miles, J.N.V. (1998). Satisfaction with life scale : analysis of factorial invariance, mean structures and reliability. *Personality and individual differences, 25*, 911-916.
- Spade, J.Z. & Reese, C.A. (1991). We've come a long way, maybe : college students' plans for work and family. *Sex roles, 24*, 309-322.
- Super, D.E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of vocational behavior, 16*, 282-296.
- Swanson, J.L. (1992). Vocational behavior, 1989-1991 : life-span career development and reciprocal interaction of work and non-work. *Journal of vocational behavior, 41*, 101-161.
- Tedesco, J.C. (2001). Jóvenes, construcción de la identidad y educación. Paper presented at the Conference « Jóvenes, construcción de la identidad y educación », Porto, Portugal.
- Vasconcelos, P. (1998). Práticas e discursos da conjugalidade e de sexualidade dos jovens portugueses. In M.V. Cabral & J.M. Pais (Coord.), *Jovens portugueses de hoje - resultados do inquérito de 1997*. (pp. 215-306). Oeiras : Celta Editora.
- Wilpert, B. & Whitely, W.T. (1987). Why study the meaning of working ?. In MOW International Research Team, *The meaning of working*. (pp. 1-14). London : Academic Press.