



## FEATURED SCHOLAR

Each month the Work and Family Researchers Network spotlights the contributions of a scholar who is making significant advances in understanding work-family concerns. We are delighted to present the following interview with Marc Grau-Grau



Marc Grau-Grau

Assistant Professor of Social and Family Policies  
Universitat Internacional de Catalunya  
Spain

Experts Panel Link: <https://wfrn.org/expert/marc-grau-grau>

**WFRN - *How did you first get introduced to work-family issues and become a researcher in this field?***

**Marc** - After a bachelor's degree in business administration, I worked for four years in the corporate world (2004-2008). More specifically, I worked in the purchasing department of a chemical company, first as an assistant, and then as a purchasing manager. During those years I worked between the offices of Barcelona and Milano, with a good number of trips to the headquarters located in Düsseldorf (31 times to be more precise: I inherited from my grandmother the *need* to record all the trips. She did it in a notebook; I did it in a spreadsheet).

During these four years, and without any academic rigor, I observed my environment without any pretension (I guess) other than to understand it. My practical findings were: a) men suffer (in silence) too from a lack of work-family balance and b) it will not be easy being the father that I want to be.

With these two ideas in mind, I decided to quit the corporate world to start a PhD focusing on working fathers, parental time, and organizations. The result, after finishing a master's in political and social sciences at the Pompeu Fabra University (2008-2009), was a PhD in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh, under the supervision of Alison Koslowski and Ingela Naumann. In parallel, I worked as a research assistant at the International Center for Work and Family (ICWF) at the IESE Business School with Nuria Chinchilla and Mireia las Heras. This was how I started as a researcher in the work-family field.

**WFRN - *How did you first get involved with the WFRN? What do you value most about the organization?***

**Marc** - During my years at IESE (2008-2013), I was privileged to help with the organization of the International Conference on Work and Family which takes place every two years, which was perfect, because it fits well with the WFRN Conference, which takes place during the alternate years.

At one of the ICWF conferences, I met Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, who, with her generosity and joy, invited me to be involved in the Sloan Work and Family Research Network, which can be officially considered the predecessor of the Work and Family Research Network. My first participation in a WFRN conference was in 2014 in New York City, where I presented the preliminary results of my dissertation.

Since then, the WFRN has been part of my life. I had the honor of being an Early Career Work and Family Fellow (2017-2019), and I volunteered to help with a Special Interest

Group on Parenting and Caregiving. So, all these years involved in the WFRN were a gift to me. I especially valued the connection with other members, established or junior, who all shared the willingness to improve work-family balance, no matter their context of reference. I also valued the resources provided by the organization such as teaching activities and syllabi.

**WFRN - *Tell us about your current research, what are you studying?***

**Marc** - The object of my study has remained quite stable over the years: working fathers. My methodological approaches include quantitative and qualitative analysis, although I have a “natural” inclination towards qualitative research. In general, the research questions that have led my studies were: Why are working fathers more involved than others? Are working fathers as involved as they want? If not, why not? What are the barriers that limit their participation? Which strategies do they use to overcome such barriers? What is the role of the organizations and governments?

I have had the privilege of expanding my initial research on working fathers in Catalonia to other interesting contexts such as Ciudad Juárez (Mexico) and Buenos Aires (Argentina) through the invitation of great colleagues such as Silvia Liñán and Patricia Debeljuh. In a similar line, I started a lovely collaboration with Bobbi Thomason and Hannah Riley Bowles to understand the implications of the outbreak of COVID-19 for fathers in the United States.

I am also interested in the intersection between family policies and families from a micro dimension. For example, my colleague Xiana Bueno and I are using longitudinal qualitative data to understand the intended use and real use of unpaid parental leave by mothers and fathers. More recently, a new area of research has attracted my attention: children’s policies and children’s rights, and the intersection with family policies. In this line, we have started a small study conducting interviews with policymakers, managers of third-sector organizations, and families in vulnerable situations.

Finally, I am fascinated by theoretical publications as well. Probably Bourdieu, Tönnies, and Pérez López opened my appetite for this type of writing. I am working with amazing scholars such as Ashlee Borgkvist to contribute to the work-family field theoretically.

**WFRN - *What are your big findings? Did you make any unexpected discoveries?***

**Marc** - Big findings sound big to me. My contribution has been more cumulative than disruptive.

On one side, my research applies a particular theoretical framework (work-family enrichment) to a specific object of study (working fathers). Empirical evidence based on in-depth interviews with fathers from different contexts (Catalonia, Mexico, Argentina) identified different forms and resources of work-family enrichment, in both directions (from family to work, and from work to family), highlighting the benefits of fatherhood involvement for families themselves and more interestingly, for the organizations fathers work for.

On the other side, my analysis of time-use diaries suggests that fathers spend (as we already know) less time than mothers at home, but they devote a similar amount of time to development care (playing, reading, talking) as mothers, which implies 1) that fathers are involved in crucial activities that contribute to the wellbeing of children, but also 2) that mothers continue to do (proportionally and literally) more physical, routine, and basic care than fathers.

Finally, other studies, like the one conducted with Sabrina Tanquerel, suggest that fathers want to be more involved at home, especially with their kids. Using Julia Bear's new concept, they have "caregiving ambition." However, despite having such ambition, fathers perceive different types of barriers that limit such ambition.

### **WFRN - *How can your research guide the formulation of social policy?***

**Marc** - In a recently edited book on [Engaged Fatherhood](#) (which surprisingly has more than 100K downloads), where we invited health experts, social policy scholars, and organizational scientists that have done excellent research in relation to fatherhood engagement, we found that the social policy field is probably the area with more innovative and creative ways to foster fatherhood involvement.

Our research suggests that despite interesting efforts, especially from the social policy field (i.e., paternity leave), and more recently in the organizational arena (i.e. flexible work arrangements), fathers, in general, perceive a lack of legitimacy to use such policies or initiatives.

In the same edited book, together with Hannah Riley Bowles and Milton Kotelchuck, and building from the cross-disciplinary discussion of the volume, we propose [three principles](#) for fostering engaged fatherhood that can guide the formulation of social policy: (1) create individual, non-transferable parenting resources explicitly for fathers, (2) reduce economic conflicts between breadwinning and caregiving, and (3) build supportive social networks for engaged fatherhood.

**WFRN - *Does your research inform workplace practice? How?***

**Marc** - For some authors, and this is also true in our studies, probably the biggest impediment for working fathers is the culture of their organizations.

A growing number of studies are indeed suggesting that fathers benefit from a fatherhood premium in their organizations, while mothers are suffering a motherhood penalty. Future research should try to understand whether engaged fathers also enjoy a fatherhood premium.

Fathers, compared to mothers, in general: 1) have fewer role models for their work-family aspirations, and as said before, 2) perceive less legitimacy to use gender-neutral policies and programs than mothers.

So, in the same line as social policy, organizations that really want to foster fatherhood involvement should (1) create individual, non-transferable parenting resources explicitly for fathers, (2) reduce the economic conflicts between breadwinning and caregiving, and (3) build supportive social networks for engaged fatherhood.

**WFRN - *Can you tell me about how your research might help individuals or families develop effective personal strategies?***

**Marc** - Our research suggests that fathers are not as involved as they want to be at home, especially due to organizational reasons. An Argentinian father summarized such tension well by saying: *my work allows me to give many things to my children but does not allow me to give myself to them.*

However, in some cases, the lack of involvement and engagement is due to internalized barriers. With Sabrina Tanquerel we identified two internalized barriers: the internalization of traditional gender norms, and the internalization of an ideal worker norm.

These two internalized barriers collide with a genuine need to be more involved at home, generating important tensions and dilemmas among working fathers.

It is not easy to solve such tensions and dilemmas, which are explained by dozens of cultural and contextual layers, but our research suggests that fathers can benefit from 1) an open discussion with their partners, 2) an open discussion with their managers, and colleagues, 3) planning and prioritizing their work-family decisions and 4) taking

advantage of different institutional conversion factors such as parental leave (if this is available in the given context) or personal conversion factors such as the single fact of becoming a father, which brings a new perspective, and some time and energy to adjust your life according to your priorities.

**WFRN - *How do you integrate work-family topics in your teaching and/or training? Do you have an assignment or approach that is especially effective?***

**Marc** - I teach sociology of the family. During the course, we integrate work-family topics in different ways. One way is by introducing contemporary sociologists like Arlie Hochschild, who are relevant in the field. Second, we devote a full unit in the course to work-family relationships, where we discuss concepts such as work-family balance, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, time famine, or social acceleration from Hartmut Rosa. Third, we ask every student to prepare a time-use diary to understand the intersection of their multiple roles during a single day.

**WFRN - *What directions hold the greatest promise for discovery in the work-family field? I am thinking here of theory, methods, or research questions that might be posed.***

**Marc** - The work-family field is in its infancy despite the amazing research published in the last five decades. The outbreak of Covid-19, together with the democratization of flexible work arrangements offered by organizations, the rise of parental leave provided by the government, and the incorporation of technological devices in our daily lives have modified the way we work and care. I am not able to be very conclusive here, but I can imagine some potential directions.

The first direction could be to shed light and focus attention and resources on understanding marginalized contexts as well as marginalized people and occupations in privileged contexts. Understanding their difficulties and strategies to integrate work and family should be a priority. Some interesting research is emerging under the theories and epistemologies of the South (Connell, Sousa Santos, and many others).

The second direction could be to foster real cross-disciplinary collaborations. As we know well, academic research is quite fragmented and siloed. As a result, customary ways of engaging in research can limit capacities to fully integrate understandings of the objects of our studies. We need to work more with scholars from other fields that share our research interests. This is not always easy because it implies incorporating new vocabulary, learning new techniques, and having some (extra) difficulties when publishing interdisciplinary research, but it is probably the only plausible way to approach, deeply and broadly at the same time, our object of study.

The third direction could be to implement new techniques and methodologies in our field. I have just read a very informative article on [Hyperscanning](#), which involves the neuroelectric measurement of brain activity when two or more individuals interact. I can easily imagine a couple discussing work-family decisions, as well as a conversation about flexible work arrangements between a manager and an employee. The work-family field would benefit from such techniques from neurosociology. Another way would be to improve and add new elements to the current methods to make them more complete, such as adding perceptions and feelings to the time-use diaries.

**WFRN - *What advice would you give to graduate students or those early in their professional careers?***

**Marc** - Patience, patience, and patience. Research is (at least for me) a slow activity. It doesn't mean that days are not hectic, frenetic, or full of commitments. It means that good research requires time. Like a good novel, a painting, or a musical composition. I am not saying that research is art, but it requires some deep connection with the *piece*, which requires time and concentration.

Quality time and quantity time. We need both forms of time to read, conduct research, and write. It is probably not helpful to read this when the requirements of our profession and university systems are quite demanding, but my advice is (when possible) to not be fully moved by the requirements of our environment but to be moved by the demands and rigor that own process of research *requires* from us.

## ABOUT THE WFRN

The Work and Family Researchers Network's mission is to facilitate virtual and face-to-face interaction among academic work and family researchers from a broad range of fields as well as engage the next generation of work and family scholars. The WFRN welcomes the participation of policy makers and workplace practitioners as it seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of work and family issues among the community of global stakeholders.

To learn more about the WFRN, please visit our website [WFRN.ORG](https://wfrn.org). To become a member, please click on this link <https://wfrn.org/become-a-member/>.