

The Hidden Role of Women in Family Firms

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Abstract: Women have historically played an important hidden role in family firms, and a great deal of research is now shedding light on this role. In spite of the more formal nature of their work in the present day, still a considerable volume of women's contributions remains invisible to official statistics. This study, based on interviews with over 500 women in small and medium family firms, brings this informal work into view, quantifying it in terms of hours worked and monetary value, exploring the reasons for its informality and examining the risks and precariousness it entails.

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1. Introduction

Research into the participation of women in family firms or gender issues within family firms has been driven, particularly in recent years (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Cappuyns, 2007; Barrett and Moores, 2009; Dugan et al., 2011; Lerner y Malach-Pines, 2011; Hamilton, 2013), by a general increase in the registered labor force participation of women, the increasing visibility of their work as self-employed or employed workers, the growing number of women entrepreneurs, and the recognition of gender as an important analytical variable. As indicated in the review conducted by Martínez (2009) of 74 scientific publications about women and family firms since 1985, and by Benavides et al. (2011) of international scientific literature about family firms from 1961 to 2008, the majority of studies have been carried out in the last two decades, and highlight the changes that have taken place during these years regarding the growing incorporation of women into the labor market, and the increased visibility of their participation in family firms. However, in spite of this swell of literature, there is still insufficient research incorporating gender as a central analytical variable in comparison with other issues researched in relation to family firms.

The starting point of the study is that women have historically played an important 'hidden' role in family firms, a role that is being highlighted now by numerous studies within the fields of economic and business history¹. In fact, although this work is becoming more formal and visible in today's society, a considerable volume of women's work and contributions to family firms still remains invisible to official records and statistics. Hence, specific research is required along the lines of this paper in order to tackle the scale, complexity, and importance of this phenomenon that, although fairly widespread, presents specificities in different contexts, something that cannot be fully comprehended given the absence of such studies. However, it is possible to make some progress with regard to certain theoretical aspects and the knowledge gained thus far about family firms from the perspective of gender.

Another starting point is that family firms, just like households, function through cooperative conflicts (Sen, 1990; Agarwal, 1997; Katz, 1997), on the basis of pillars such as gender or age, which determine the bargaining power of their members, as well as the capacity to control and decide on the resources and work required to sustain them. Family firms are organizations in which gender roles are dually reproduced by bringing into play not only the

¹ See, among others, Horrell and Humphries (1995), Sarasúa and Gálvez (2003), Gálvez and Fernández (2007), Solà (2008), Humphries and Sarasúa (2012), Schmidt and van Nederveen (2012), Borderías (2013), and Zucca (2014).

gendered division of labor, but also the influence of normativity around the traditional nuclear family and the roles associated with women therein. The historical and hierarchical division of public and private spaces has imposed a firm distribution of tasks according to gender, assigning employment to men (with their own earnings, rights, and social standing, and freeing them from care duties, which has enabled them not only to participate in the labor market with freedom, but also to model the norm of what work is or is not on the basis of its reality, turning that particular form into something universal) and women to unpaid care work (relegated to gratitude and, in theory, to altruism and invisibility). A division of spaces that has also given rise to a gendered construction of identities, in the sense that women are socialized to be altruistic in the home as mothers and spouses who care for their family, whereas men must achieve fulfillment through their profession in the market. As a result, in family firms, the role of women continues to be invisible on two counts: first because of the neutrality assigned to their contributions in the family sphere, given that this is considered to be their role; and second because of the informality that usually characterizes their help or collaboration in the family firm, even more so the current context of crisis in which falling revenues and business closures can lead to the replacement of paid labor with unpaid family work, as part of the rise of the informal economy found by Benería and Floro (1994) to occur during episodes of economic crisis.

From the theoretical postulates indicated above, this research has been structured around the following questions:

1. What is the volume of formal and informal work, and the working conditions of women in small and medium family firms?
2. Which factors determine the informality of work carried out by women in family firms? Are they business or socio-demographic factors?
3. What is the economic value of the informal work of women?

Based on original research, this article aims to help bring into view the volume and characteristics of unreported labor carried out mostly by women within small family firms today, and which escapes legislative measures as well as conventional statistics and analyses, moving beyond a merely descriptive analysis to study the consequences this entails for their autonomy and empowerment, since 'invisibility' acts to reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes.

The ultimate goal is to contribute to generating an in-depth understanding of the amount and precariousness of this work in order to report on the scope of this situation of gender inequality, thereby reducing it, since this work is often precarious, low grade, undeclared and unpaid, with little or no access to social protection or organizational capacity to defend their rights, no access to decision-making, or to social and family status as an employee of the

company. In this respect, the contributions made by this research are new and original because they provide information about the amount of informal work carried out by women in family companies, and also analyze the conditions under which this work is carried out from the perspective of gender, thereby indicating the causes and consequences of its existence, and its interweaving with the social organization of gender within companies and families, and the associated perpetuation of stereotypes

The article is structured into six sections. Following this preliminary introduction, the second section presents the theoretical approach used to make the economic contributions made by women visible from an integral perspective, in order subsequently to anchor it more specifically for work carried out within family firms. The third section provides a review of the empiric evidence that, particularly within the disciplines of economic and business history, has contributed to uncover the role of women in family firms. The fourth section explains the methodology used to obtain and analyze data, and the context in which this study has been conducted. The fifth section summarizes the main findings, comparing the time and working conditions of the different types of female workers analyzed: on the one hand, women registered as being self-employed, and on the other, unreported or informal female workers. It also analyzes the monetary value of the work carried out by this latter group, in order to highlight the relevance, not only socially but also economically, of women's work. The final section provides the conclusions to this debate.

2. Women's work in family firms

When analyzing economic processes from a more holistic perspective that brings into view the contributions of tasks associated historically with women, it is first necessary to acknowledge the gendered division of labor that structures the economic system, as well as the undervaluation of female work inside and outside of the market, uncovering the gender connotations implicit in all of this. Specifically, non-market activities linked with the domestic/reproductive space have historically been relegated to analytical, political, and social invisibility, giving rise to a distorted vision of reality (Hartmann, 1979; Folbre and Hartmann, 1988), in which part of the fundamental processes required to sustain people's living conditions remains hidden.

The term 'invisibility' as it is used here does not refer exclusively to the fact that it is not measured or taken into account, but also to the capacity of the subjects responsible for this sphere to define how they want the whole to function, their economic, political, and social power, and their recognition as full members of society. In this respect, the unpaid work carried

out by women is paradigmatically invisible: there are no data, there are no concepts to understand it, it is not paid, it does not generate social taxes, and there is no public and political bargaining to regulate it. Therefore, it is a non-neutral invisibility of gender about which more needs to be known, endeavoring to undermine and/or transform the dominant concepts in order to tackle and change these paradigms (Scott, 1986).

In this regard, in order to ‘uncover’, recover, and make visible the tasks carried out historically by women, the notion of work needs to be expanded, using, for example, the understanding based on the ‘third person criterion’ flagged up by Margaret Reid in the 1930s and which Himmelweit defines as: “activity with a given objective, which requires time and energy spent; it is part of a social division of tasks and is inseparable from the person who does it” (1995: 4). In other words, work is considered to be all activities that could be delegated to a third person in exchange for a salary. The incorporation of these ideas, as feminist economics has been theorizing for decades, indicates that the spheres of production and reproduction must not be considered in terms of a dichotomy but rather as a close relationship (Chant and Pedwell, 2008).

Looking more closely at the market, there is also an important part of labor that escapes conventional instruments of observation. The informal economy, for example, occupies the mid ground between the visible and the invisible: it is a mechanism used by companies to outsource costs; at the same time, it is a way for people to obtain minimum earnings to live. However, it does not have an ‘essence of its own’ or any firmly established limits (Camarero and Oliva, 2004). In this informal economy, women are concentrated in activities in which the boundaries of invisibility are much more palpable owing, fundamentally, to their close relationship with the domestic and family sphere, as is the case of the help they provide to small family firms. This is not due to a neutral or natural process, but rather is motivated by the role imposed upon them historically, by their socialization as altruistic caregivers for the home and the people who live there, and by the historic sense of guilt inflicted on those who did not abide by this rule. In other words, the different positions of men and women in the economy and in society, with differentiated roles and responsibilities according to their gender, explain the invisibilization of women in family firms (Rowe and Hong, 2000).

Such businesses constitute a middle ground between the market and the home, between paid and unpaid work, highlighting the limits of using such dichotomies when analyzing the work carried out by women therein (Philipps, 2008), since these types of companies become a kind of ‘black box’ in which conventional concepts and instruments of measurement are limited. Institutional, economic, and social forces affect families and businesses alike, forging gender identities, roles, and relations.

From this perspective, Cramton (1993) and Hamilton (2006) criticize the fact that studies into family firms that apply the theoretical approaches taken from the literature about entrepreneurship emphasize individualism and economic rationality, without contributing a framework to understand collaborative practices. Forms of leadership in the context of a family firm are multiple; they change constantly by means of ongoing bargaining and, therefore, as argued by Fernández and Hamilton (2007), family firms should be analyzed as fundamentally collaborative spheres that integrate different relationships and practices between family and business.

Following on from this starting point, the aim of this research, firstly, is to use the bargaining model set out by Sen (1990) and refined by authors such as Katz (1997) and Agarwal (1997). Family firms, just like households, can be analyzed as human groupings in which the members of a family cooperate to a certain extent, but in which the existence of conflicts is also recognized when it comes to establishing who makes decisions and how. This approach is used by feminist theory to analyze the functioning of household units and the factors that affect the bargaining power of their different members. It is not, however, the only approach, coexisting with neoclassical approaches based on an assumption of harmonious households in which decisions are made according to their utility, without distinguishing between the different members of the home (Becker, 1981), as well as more heterodox approaches based around the working class family (Humphries, 1977), the conflictive household (Hartmann, 1979, 1982) and exploitation in the home (Folbre, 1982).

The notion of household is examined as an area of ‘cooperative conflict’, understanding that within households there are gender and generational (age) inequalities that lie at the foundation of their functioning. But there are also other pillars that determine the bargaining power of their members: on the one hand, there are intra-household factors, in other words, the influence exercised over the rest and which, crucially, is determined by the material resources and external support available. On the other hand, there are social norms when it comes to shaping accepted notions with regard to the distribution of work and resources, and which define who deserves what. These norms pertain to social custom, perceptions about the contributions made by each member of the family, about their needs and capacities, and external perceptions (for example, the widely-held idea that women are secondary workers, or that their salary is a ‘complement’ to their husband’s, which diminishes their capacity to negotiate for improvements in their earnings). Social norms affect not only the differential bargaining power of women and men within the family, but also outside of it, and they even determine what can be negotiated (Agarwal, 1997).

Katz (1997) also made important contributions in this respect about the treatment of members of the family as agents in terms of their capacity to participate in the bargaining process (their voice) and their capacity to perceive and have access to viable alternatives for a cooperative solution (emergence). This treatment cannot be symmetrical since, with regard to gender, the voice and emergence of women and men is very different, owing to a variety of factors that range from the valuation of their earnings according to social norms and cultural practices, to gender-differentiated social sanctions (Benería, 2008). In short, family firms, just like households, function through cooperative conflict, with models of resources distribution and social norms in general acting against women, detracting from their bargaining power, decreasing their capacity to obtain, control, and decide over resources.

However, gender studies of family firms must be tackled from an evolutionist perspective (Fernández, 2003), acknowledging that gender relations and roles are changing, inserting family firms into their social and business context, and incorporating the variable of time into the study of continuous organizational and productive changes, and in the relationships that exist within these businesses.

3. Empiric evidence about the ‘invisible work’ of women in family firms

Women have always shared the responsibilities in family firms. This is very evident in rural areas and in family production units, now and in the past. In urban economies, their participation has always been more important in the services sector than in industry², where women were more visible in family firms from preindustrial ages, although capitalism did not expel women, but rather kept them on, adapting their work according to the life cycle of their families, taking up and leaving jobs as their children were born or grew up, or as their husbands died and they remarried (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001). And not always within the same period of their life cycle, as shown by Humphries (2010) since many women did not leave employment when their children were born but instead when they reached an age at which they were able to replace the mother’s earnings with those brought in by the children.

In spite of all the work carried out by women in family firms, it has not been until recent decades that the gender approach has been incorporated as an important research issue, resulting from the combination of feminist theories, and social, business, and cultural history (Kwolek-Folland, 2001; Gálvez, 2004). Currently, there are four major areas of research related with the

² See the special issue about women’s work in services companies of the *Business History Review* edited by Kwolek-Folland and Walsh (2007).

role of women in family firms: the barriers faced by women in terms of entering or collaborating in this sphere; the lack of recognition of their work and, therefore the low remuneration it receives; gender roles in these businesses; and the different results presented by family firms with women managing them (Cappuyns, 2007).

Whereas early studies about the empiric evidence of female participation in family firms highlighted the success stories (Frishkoff and Brown, 1993), more recent approaches, by expanding documentary sources to include legal archives, private documents, and interviews, are revealing the existence of major discrimination. Yet still the vast majority of analysis conducted by the literature on family firms concentrates on the role of women in processes of inheritance (Dumas, 1992; Vera and Dean, 2005; Haberman and Danes, 2007; Overbeke et al., 2013) and on interpersonal family dynamics, emphasizing particularly three spheres associated with the reproductive role of women: the creation of the next generation, the education of the future business leaders, and the transmission of values (Ceja, 2008; Dugan et al., 2011), or the link between their previous working experience restricted to a few sectors and their business capacity (Gálvez and Fernández, 2007).

And yet, women have historically played a crucial role in founding, managing, and expanding family firms, as the research is revealing, often within the fields of economic and business history, either visibly or chiefly hidden (Mulholland, 1996; Dumas, 1998; Colli et al., 2003; Vera and Dean, 2005; Hamilton, 2006, Colli and Rose, 2008). But although women have been involved very directly in daily management, historically they have not received any recognition for their contribution, in the form of a formal position in the business or a salary (Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Cole, 1997; Nelton, 1998). The study conducted by Colli et al. (2003) about family firms in Spain, Italy, and Great Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries, shows, for example, that women constituted an important hidden resource, although their participation was not formally recorded. Women contributed vital capital resources and access to trusted business and family networks. In 19th Century Great Britain, for example, women were under the protection of their spouses and could not inherit until the second half of the 19th Century, so that many were de facto partners in a business, but lacked the legal right to the business capital or other properties. This pattern was also fairly common in Europe in the 20th Century. However, business interests and the family were fully interlinked and the phantom tasks performed by women extended even to finance.

As indicated also by Gálvez and Fernández (2007), the majority of women's work in family firms has been carried out without a contract, salary, or social benefits, and if women have received some kind of remuneration, it has always been lower than their male colleagues,

although this gap cannot be attributed to differences in productivity. In the 19th Century, women frequently provided services and helped out family firms in agriculture, manufacturing and commerce without a contract, wages, or public recognition. Women appear in some historical records as auxiliary service providers who served customers and workers, assisted in public relations, and helped to manage family firms. Many managed the businesses for years, between one male relative and another, but in spite of their numerous responsibilities, women never appeared as owners or employees. In large mercantile cities, women managed the business while the men were away travelling (Fernández, 1996). Although their help was vital for family firms, particularly during crucial moments of transition, their participation depended entirely on the wishes of their male relatives.

All of these contributions by women to family firms have remained in the shadows for several reasons. First, because in the division of labor between the business and family subsystems, women are usually situated within the family system (Frishkoff and Brown, 1993) or they are assigned informal support functions as assistants, advisers, or mediators between the members of the family (Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Bradt, 1990) or even, a role of emotional leadership (Lyman, 1988; Salganicoff, 1990). Second, because the legal and cultural restrictions that existed in all countries blocking the incorporation of women into the labor market in general and particularly into the management and ownership of business, until well into the 20th Century, have impeded the ‘formal recognition’ and ‘official recording’ of the role of women in family firms, even in favor of their husbands in the event that women inherited the family firm (Gálvez and Fernández, 2007; Fernández and Hamilton, 2007). Hence, information about the work of women and their role in the business sphere is not only diffuse but buried, and even intentionally distorted (Wiesner-Hanks, 2001) and we are only just beginning to discover its existence through new sources, such as private correspondence and the archives of family firms.

The recent evolution in the number of women business owners and heads of family firms presents a considerable increase, which has reduced the gender gap in the business sphere, where the increased formal recognition of women’s work and the institutional and social advances made towards greater gender equality, as well as women’s access to formal and higher education, have allowed family firms to train them as future managers and employees thereof. However, the proportion of businesses managed by women is stuck at around 30% of the total in the majority of OECD countries, and in 2010, three out of every four salaried business persons were men, and there were 1.5 times more male sole traders than female. In Spain, male employees double female employees, and there are 1.59 male sole traders for every female sole trader (OECD, 2012, 2013). The starting point taken here is that the number of women performing management and

leadership functions in businesses is still higher than recorded by the statistics, and that the important participation of women in family firms is still undervalued, since it is a participation that does not occur necessarily as owners or managers, but still very often as collaborators, unpaid workers, and informal leaders. The study performed here ties in with other recent research that shows how women are still under-recorded as business people in the formal statistics of companies, and are pigeonholed into reproductive or secondary and informal roles (Fitzgerald and Muske, 2002; Sharma, 2004; Vadnjal and Zupan, 2009). Hence, official statistics continue to undervalue the role of women in family firms.

4. Context and Methodology

As indicated in the introduction, the aim of this research is to examine the still considerable volume of informal work carried out by women in family firms, its causes and consequences. The geographical sphere selected for the study is Andalusia, a region in the south of Spain, where family firms and/or farms still play a fundamental role in the economy. According to data from the Institute of Family Firms, it is estimated that in Spain there are over 2.9 million family firms (85% of the business sector), providing employment to close to 14 million people, and representing approximately 75% of private employment. In Spain, the owner of a business must register with the Special Regime of Self-Employed Workers, and can take on relatives as salaried employees as of the second degree of kinship. Spouses, children, and parents have to register under the regime of family assistance/collaboration. However, this registration process is not always followed, and in small businesses there is still a large amount of unreported work, either regular or occasional, which is carried out mostly by women in the family.

With regard to Andalusia, the characteristics of the region's business sector coincide with the basic traits at a national level: small average staff size (predominance of SMEs) and high contribution of the services sector, which has a very important weighting in the region's economy (CEA, 2012). Andalusia's labor market is characterized by dual segregation that leads to a concentration of women only in specific sectors, as well as in unregulated, seasonal and variable jobs over the year. Hence, in spite of the increase in female labor force participation in recent years (52.3% in 2015), it is still at lower levels than male activity (65.6%).

These basic traits are clearly represented in the results of this study, although the aim is not merely to provide a characterization but rather to go deeper, from a gender perspective, into what is happening inside family firms, how decisions are made, what aspects they influence and how working conditions affect this, focusing fundamentally on female workers within the family.

To this end, a total of 551 interviews were carried out with women who work in family-run SMEs throughout Andalusia, dividing the target study population between those who are registered as self-employed (28%) or under the regime of family assistance (14%), and those who are not registered with the Social Security but who admit they work regularly (33%) or occasionally (25%) in the family firm.

Classification into regular or occasional workers was carried out once information was collected, based on data about the frequency of their work in the company. Family firm owners who did not work in it were excluded from the study, as were owners or workers on a farm that is not the main activity of the family, and employees (salaried workers) in the family firm.

Information was compiled through a questionnaire featuring structured questions. The questionnaire was administered through person-to-person interviews over the course of 2011 by qualified staff from Women's Employment Units (UNEM) in Andalusia³. It was essential to gain the trust and establish a close relationship with the interviewees owing to the complexity and fiscal sensitivity of the information required.

The questionnaire gathered data related to occupation, type of tasks and specialization thereof, and one of the most relevant variables of the study: the frequency and time devoted to work in the family firm. Informal workers were also asked about the temporary or indefinite duration of this work and the reasons behind it. Enquiries were also made into their relationship with the owner of the business, their reasons for working in it, the type of compensation received, as well as the interviewees' perception about their working conditions and the main reason they believe they do not have a formal contract in the business and the consequences thereof.⁴ Finally, reference was made to the dual presence of women in the family and in the business, and the life strategies used to cope with this situation.

5. Results of the analysis of women's work in family firms

The first aspect evidenced by the results of the analysis is the presence of a significant amount of unreported labor that, although often considered sporadic, reaches similar volumes to that of formal work. Indeed, the majority of women go to the business on a daily basis, with the

³ The UNEM programme is developed by the Andalusian Women's Institute in collaboration with Local Governments, co-funded by the European Social Fund integrated within the Strategic Regional Framework for Andalusia (MER-AN) 2007-2013. It offers a network of professional guidance services for women, through personalized labor integration pathways, which include the gender perspective and help them to improve their employability.

⁴ For further details of all the working conditions analyzed, see the publication of Gálvez et al. (2013).

exception of 'occasional informal collaborators' who state that they go several times a week (52%) and with a temporary nature, indicating that it depends on circumstances of production. 60% of women who work informally defined by themselves as 'regular collaborators', are in the business indefinitely and dedicate 30 hours on average a week to the business. 83% of occasional collaborators affirm that they carry out work on a temporary basis in the business and work on average 17 hours a week. The average time spent working in the company by self-employed women is 41.6 hours a week (43.5 for business owners and 39 for women registered under the family assistance regime).

The second main finding is that the informal or formal nature of women's work in family firms cannot be explained totally by the socio-demographic characteristics of the workforce, or by the type of business activity, but rather by the gendered division of labor and the predominant vision of women's work as a supplementary flexible contribution, always available for the wellbeing of the family, which are important explanatory variables. Hence, these findings corroborate the idea that the separate spaces between family and business must be analyzed as permeable spaces in which negotiations are reproduced based on cooperative conflict on the basis of gendered identities that assign differentiated roles to women and men, as examined in the theoretical section of this paper.

The majority of the interviewees are women aged 30 to 49 years of age, married, and living in a household with 3 or 4 members (their partner in addition to one or two younger or older members). There are, however, some variables that vary slightly: age, relationship with the business owner, and prior activity. The highest percentages of informal workers are found at either extreme of the age range: women aged over 50 and young women aged between 16 and 24 years of age. 29% of regular collaborators and 22% of occasional collaborators are aged over 50, but the informal work of women is not only characteristic of older generations, since close to 17% of occasional collaborators in the family firm are aged between 16 and 24. In the majority of cases, the business owner is the partner or spouse; this is the case of 43% of self-employed women registered under the family collaboration regime, 49% of regular collaborators, and 36% of occasional collaborators (Table 1). However, it is often the case with collaborators, especially occasional collaborators, that the business owner is one of their parents, which is in line with their younger average age.

The level of education of self-employed women is slightly higher, although the majority of women, working formally or informally, have secondary education. In relation to the last occupation held by the interviewees before working in the family firm, 27% of the women registered under the family assistance regime were previously 'economically inactive', working

only in the home. However, 33% of self-employed women, 27% of regular workers and 31% of occasional workers held full time salaried jobs.

Table 1. Relationship with the owner of the family business

	Family assistance	Regular collaborator	Occasional collaborator
Partner	42.9	48.9	35.6
Parents	20.8	16.9	29.7
Children	13	13.5	7.4
Siblings	7.8	8.2	11.9
Others	9.1	9.8	14.8
N/A	6.5	2.7	0.7
Total	100	100	100

Source: Own elaborations.

The most common tasks carried out by all the interviewees are customer service related. 83% of self-employed business owners and 67% of women registered under the family assistance regime carry out these kinds of tasks, along with 58% of regular collaborators and 47% of occasional informal collaborators. The next most common task is customer and supplier management for the case of self-employed women who are business owners or registered under the family assistance regime (76% and 52%, respectively), and cleaning for the case of regular and occasional informal collaborators (48% and 35%). As for the specialization of these tasks, indicated by the minimum level of education required to carry them out, in the case of self-employed women who are business owners or registered under the family assistance regime, the majority require university or advanced technical studies (30% and 29%, respectively), whereas the tasks carried out by regular or occasional informal collaborators require less than primary education (34% and 36%, respectively). Comparing this with their real level of education, self-employed women are underqualified for the tasks they are performing, whereas informal collaborators are overqualified.

Since no major differences are detected with regard to the different characteristics of these women, certain dimensions were analyzed in the businesses that might explain the decision regarding the formal or informal nature of their contributions to the business. However, similarly, no major differences were found according to size or sector. The majority of women work in microbusinesses with up to five employees: this is the case for 88% of self-employed women who are business owners, 79% of self-employed women registered under the family assistance regime, and 77% and 78% of regular and occasional informal workers, respectively. Looking at the type of activity, 31% of self-employed collaborators carry out retail activities, followed by hostelry (22%). In the case of business owners, the percentage dedicated to retail is higher (37%), with ‘other services’ being the next biggest activity, with 21%. Regular informal collaborators are

fundamentally dedicated to hostelry (29%), other services (18%) and agriculture (17%), whereas the majority of occasional collaborators work in retail activities (24%), and a considerable percentage in agriculture, livestock and fishing activities (21%) as well as hostelry (15%). The survey also examined whether there is still a high level of informal work carried out by women in the countryside (Camarero and Oliva, 2004; Aznar et al., 2009; Gálvez and Matus, 2010), a sphere in which, in addition to the usual problems faced by women owing to the major effort required in their job, normally combining it with all their unpaid care work, their situation becomes even worse when working conditions are precarious and their work is not recognized, often giving rise to feelings of low self-esteem and low responsiveness (Martínez et al., 2009).

Since no significant differences are observed in terms of the characteristics of the family firm or the women, the participants were asked directly about their main reason for working in the business (Table 2). Informal collaborators indicate that they provide exceptional help in a specific type of activity (51% of regular and 47% of occasional collaborators), an argument used by occasional collaborators to justify the informality of their situation, which they do not see in a negative light because they are helping out their family. Almost a third of informal workers work in the family firm because they cannot find another job or because they are interested in gaining experience, but without a contract. One out of every four self-employed women who are registered under the family assistance regime state that they work to help their family and that, in fact, they left their previous job, as did 12% of regular collaborators and self-employed business owners, and 9% of occasional collaborators.

Table 2. Reasons for working at the family firm

	Self-employed	Family assistance	Regular collaborator	Occasional collaborator
I studied to work in the family firm	48.4	37.7	8.2	5.2
I provide exceptional help in specific tasks	15.5	33.8	51.1	46.7
I do not have studies but I have a job at the family firm	13.5	2.6	0.5	0.0
I quitted my last job because my family needed my help	12.3	26.0	12.5	8.9
I am educated in this field but I cannot find a job besides the family firm	11.0	16.9	12.5	8.9
I am educated in another field but I am interested in getting work experience	9.7	10.4	15.2	15.6
I am educated in another field but I cannot find a job besides the family firm	3.2	0.0	2.7	4.4
Others	0.6	3.9	7.1	34.1

Source: Own elaborations.

As for the significance for them of the work they do, for self-employed business owners, their work in the company is the way of earning a living (65%) or for self-fulfillment (53%), but for the rest it is above all a “means to serve the welfare of the family”. This was the motivation given by 73% of regular collaborators, 77% of occasional collaborators, and 57% of workers

registered under the family assistance regime, as shown in Table 3. This emphasizes the idea of blurred boundaries between family and business, and the reproduction of gendered stereotypes in this interaction.

Table 3. Significance of women’s work in the family firm

	Self-employed	Family assistance	Regular collaborator	Occasional collaborator
Way of earning a living	65.2	51.9	27.2	20.0
Self-fulfillment	53.5	36.4	10.9	12.6
Way to do what I love	46.5	29.9	11.4	13.3
Means to serve the welfare of the family	43.9	57.1	73.4	77.0
It is my duty	20.0	22.1	23.9	17.0
Contribution to society	7.7	2.6	1.1	0.0
Means of social upgrading	7.1	3.9	2.2	1.5
N/A	0.6	3.9	3.3	1.5

Source: Own elaborations.

When asked specifically about the informality of their situation and the reasons that lead them to work under these circumstances (Table 4), the majority of regular collaborators (52%) and 29% of occasional collaborators indicate that “cash flow problems prevent the business from covering the cost of employing them”. Only 34% of occasional collaborators state that “they do not work regularly at the business and it isn’t worth it”. 11% of regular workers and 7% of occasional workers indicate that “the business owner doesn’t think it’s necessary”.

Table 4. Main reason for not being formally employed in the family firm

	Regular collaborator	Occasional collaborator
Cash flow problems prevent the firm from hiring me	52.2	28.9
I only work occasionally	12.0	34.1
Owner does not want	11.4	7.4
I do not want to be employed	8.2	7.4
I have another paid job	7.1	14.8
Others	5.4	6.7
N/A	3.8	0.7
Total	100	100

Source: Own elaborations.

Furthermore, the informal workers themselves are aware that their situation of informality has negative consequences for them: 69% of regular collaborators and 47% of occasional collaborators. The damage most often pointed out by both groups is the fact that they are not paying social security contributions and therefore they have no right to receive welfare payments, according to 92% of regular and 91% of occasional collaborators. The next most frequently indicated negative consequence is the fact that this work “takes away from their leisure time”, followed by the fact that it takes away from their time to carry out domestic and care work, or have a paid job.

Among the workers who feel that not having a contract has a negative impact on them, 67% of regular workers and 55% of occasional workers justify their response with the motivation of “helping out the family because that is their priority”. The next reason given, in the case of regular collaborators, is because they receive monetary compensation (19%), whereas occasional collaborators point to “other reasons” (19%), such as: because it is something they do occasionally whilst they are studying, they are looking for another job or gaining experience before taking over the family firm permanently; or because they have a job in another company.

As for the type of compensation they receive for their work (Table 5), just under half of self-employed women who are registered under the family assistance regime receive fixed monetary compensation (45%). Half of informal collaborators, on the other hand, receive no type of compensation (48% of regular and 51% of occasional collaborators), and if they do receive monetary compensation it is not fixed (23% and 27%, respectively).

Table 5. Type of compensation for working in the family firm

	Family assistance	Regular collaborator	Occasional collaborator
None	13.0	48.4	51.1
Non-fixed remuneration in cash	29.9	23.4	26.7
Fixed remuneration in cash	45.5	14.7	5.9
Remuneration in kind	2.6	4.3	9.6
Emotional compensation	6.5	7.6	5.9
N/A	2.6	1.6	0.7
Total	100	100	100

Source: Own elaborations.

In fact, when they are asked about their working conditions, the most negative score is given in the section on remuneration, since few informal workers receive monetary compensation. The majority receives less than 500 euros (34% of regular and 31% of occasional collaborators) or between 500 and 1,000 euros (47% and 27%, respectively).

Since many of them receive no remuneration, the economic value of women’s informal work was calculated on the basis of the average annual number of hours worked by the women interviewed and the average hourly wage in the sector of activity in which they are working, applying the cost of replacement and using for this purpose data about average annual salaries in gross terms and at current prices from the National Classification of Economic Activities for that year. The average value of the annual labor provided by these women was 12,707 euros for a regular informal worker, and 6,774 euros for an occasional informal worker in a family firm. Work that is not registered and not paid, or not at this price at any rate, is not included in the official statistics.

Finally, for the vast majority of women, regardless of whether they work formally or not, they are still primarily responsible for unpaid care work, a response that corroborates the

perpetuation of family norms through which women take on the daily maintenance and satisfaction of household requirements and also those of the family firms. Self-employed women and collaborators dedicate around 36 hours on average to this work. This obligation of maintaining a dual presence in the working and domestic sphere simultaneously generates an intensification in their working time and exponentially complicates the everyday management of their lives in terms of work, family, and on a personal level, particularly when they are not responsible for the business and, therefore, do not have autonomy or total control over their work or working time.

6. Conclusions

This article presents new research into the still considerable volume of hidden work carried out by women in family firms. The reasons for this invisibility are grounded in the limitations presented by conventional concepts and instruments of measurement when analyzing the blurred boundary between the market and the home, between paid and unpaid work, between formality and informality, etc. What has been made clear in this research is that in family firms, women's work undergoes a dual process of invisibilization: first, due to the neutrality/naturalness assigned to their contributions in the family sphere motivated by the role imposed upon them historically – in other words, through their socialization as altruistic caregivers for the home and the people who live therein, and the also historic sense of guilt attributed to those who do not abide by this norm; and second, due to the informal nature that usually characterizes family assistance or collaboration in businesses as a mechanism for outsourcing costs, replacing salaried work with *informal* family work. These processes become particularly important at times of crisis such as the current economic recession when analyzing how family firms cope with recessive periods by adapting to circumstances through the buffer and flexibility of family labor, especially that of women.

As this study has revealed, in the majority of cases, the business owner is the partner or spouse of the woman interviewed. This fact offers important information about the influences of the nuclear family in the construction of women's identities not for themselves, but for others. This social norm is the very foundation of the patriarchal system and is the reason why, for example, when asked about the significance of the work they provide to the business in their opinion, the majority of informal workers see it as a “means to serve the welfare of the family”. In fact, the majority of them do not receive any type of compensation, and if they do it tends to be little and not fixed. As for the main motivations that lead them to work in the family firm, informal workers see it as providing exceptional assistance with a specific type of activity, an

argument they use to justify the informality of their situation, which they do not consider to be negative because they are helping their family, in spite of the fact that many of them work 30 hours a week. This response expresses the way in which the social and familial lack of consideration regarding their work becomes internalized, which they do not see as an occupation in itself, but rather as domestic and private work, in other words, it is not visible; it is opaque and, therefore, it is as if it does not exist at all.

The informal nature that usually characterizes the assistance or collaboration provided in family firms as a mechanism to outsource costs, replacing salaried work with *informal* family work, means that the work carried out by women becomes precarious and low grade, irregular and unpaid, with no access to social protection or organizational capacity to defend their rights, with no access to decision-making or social or family status as a company employee. In fact, they themselves are fully aware of the negative consequences this situation has on them, but possibly not how to reverse this situation.

Finally, this research helps to demonstrate the centrality of the family, not only historically but also today, as a business unit in which women play an active role, albeit often hidden. The existence of this informal work is not a situational issue caused by the economic crisis, but it is becoming increasingly clear that informality is a precondition and integral part of the very process of 'growth' in the context of deflationist economic policies implemented in recent decades (Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2011, 2013, 2015), which bears a close relationship with the process of labor feminization in recent years, and which makes reference to the fact that the conditions and the content of market labor increasingly resemble the work carried out in the domestic sphere: polyvalence, precariousness, changing paces, flexibility of working hours and space, decline in social security conditions, etc., within a context of 'privatization' that shifts ultimate responsibility onto the worker (Gálvez, 2013).

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