

Work-family conflict in social economy organisations. Individual differences in the employees' demographic profile

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ABSTRACT: The changes and diversity in the demographic profile of the Spanish workforce have sparked a great deal of interest, particularly in human resource management. Examining the intricate balance that individuals and organisations strike between family, gender, and work responsibilities becomes particularly crucial, especially in the context of families with children. The conflict between work and family may originate in either domain. Thus, the direction of the conflict becomes relevant at both a personal and organisational level, to understand whether work interferes with family (WFC), or family interferes with work (FWC). However, in social economy organisations these conflicts might be exhibited differently, given how these types of organisations tend to be more horizontal, social, feminine, and participative. This means that the conflict between family and work could be less harmful. With this in mind, our goal was to analyse whether children, based on their age, influence work-family conflict, and to assess any gender differences. Results revealed some differences regarding the age of children in the work-family and family-work conflict between women and men. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed throughout the paper.

KEYWORDS: Work-family conflict, gender, children, social economy.

ECONLIT DESCRIPTORS: M54, J12, L31.

Cómo citar este artículo/How to cite this article: VILLAJOS, E., PÉREZ-NEBRA, A., LEGARRA, M. & ELIO, E. (2024): "Work-family conflict in social economy organisations. Individual differences in the employees' demographic profile", *CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa*, 111, 305-327. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-E.111.28026>

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RESUMEN: Los cambios y la diversidad en el perfil demográfico de la población activa española han despertado un gran interés, especialmente en la gestión de recursos humanos. Examinar el intrincado equilibrio que los individuos y las organizaciones establecen entre las responsabilidades familiares, de género y laborales resulta especialmente crucial, sobre todo en el contexto de las familias con hijos. El conflicto entre trabajo y familia puede originarse en cualquiera de los dos ámbitos. Así pues, la dirección del conflicto adquiere relevancia tanto a nivel personal como organizativo, para entender si el trabajo interfiere con la familia (WFC), o la familia interfiere con el trabajo (FWC). Sin embargo, en las organizaciones de la economía social estos conflictos pueden manifestarse de forma diferente, dado que este tipo de organizaciones tienden a ser más horizontales, sociales, femeninas y participativas. Esto significa que el conflicto entre familia y trabajo podría ser menos perjudicial. Teniendo esto en cuenta, nuestro objetivo era analizar si los hijos, en función de su edad, influyen en el conflicto trabajo-familia, y evaluar las posibles diferencias de género. Los resultados revelaron algunas diferencias en cuanto a la edad de los hijos en el conflicto trabajo-familia y familia-trabajo entre mujeres y hombres. A lo largo del artículo se discuten las implicaciones prácticas y teóricas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Conflicto trabajo-familia, género, hijos, economía social.

Resumen ampliado

Conflicto trabajo-familia en las organizaciones de economía social. Diferencias individuales en el perfil demográfico de los empleados

Objetivos

Nuestro objetivo es analizar si los hijos, en función de su edad, influyen en el conflicto trabajo-familia, y evaluar las posibles diferencias de género

Los cambios y la diversidad en el perfil demográfico de la población activa española han despertado un gran interés, especialmente en la gestión de recursos humanos. Examinar el intrincado equilibrio que los individuos y las organizaciones establecen entre las responsabilidades familiares, de género y laborales resulta especialmente crucial, sobre todo en el contexto de las familias con hijos. El conflicto entre el trabajo y la familia puede originarse en cualquiera de los dos ámbitos. Es importante estudiar por separado el conflicto trabajo-familia y el conflicto familia-trabajo, ya que tienen sus propios antecedentes (Byron, 2005) y consecuencias (por ejemplo, Babic et al., 2020). Esto nos permite comprender mejor los retos y las dinámicas asociadas a cada tipo de conflicto. Así, la dirección del conflicto adquiere relevancia tanto a nivel personal como organizativo, para entender si el trabajo interfiere con la familia (WFC), o la familia interfiere con el trabajo (FWC). Sin embargo, en las organizaciones de la economía social estos conflictos pueden manifestarse de forma diferente, dado que este tipo de organizaciones tienden a ser más horizontales, sociales, femeninas y participativas. Esto significa que el conflicto entre familia y trabajo podría ser menos perjudicial.

Metodología

En primer lugar, contactamos varias organizaciones para explicarles el proyecto, sus objetivos y las responsabilidades que conllevaba. Después de que aceptaran participar, distribuimos un enlace a todos sus empleados para que pudieran rellenar el cuestionario en línea de forma anónima. Además, también contamos con la participación de una empresa especializada en distribución de cuestionarios online a través de un panel. Medimos el conflicto trabajo-familia con dos subescalas diferentes (Haslam et al., 2015). Respondieron al cuestionario 1589 empleados. En cuanto al género, la muestra fue muy equitativa, con un 49,8% de mujeres y un 49,7% de hombres, y solo una minoría (0,5%) que se identificó como no binaria.

Resultados

Este estudio pretendía analizar si el género y la edad de los hijos repercuten en el conflicto entre trabajo y familia. De él se desprenden varios resultados que merece la pena destacar en relación con los roles de género, la edad del hijo menor y sus repercusiones. Los resultados revelaron algunas diferencias en cuanto a la edad de los hijos en el conflicto trabajo-familia y familia-trabajo entre mujeres y hombres. Los resultados mostraron que el género desempeña un papel importante; no en la interacción con el hecho de tener o no un hijo, sino en los efectos directos. El segundo paso del análisis consistió en examinar el punto de inflexión en relación con la edad del hijo, que se llevó a cabo en dos etapas. En primer lugar, el resultado de la interacción fue no significativo. Sin embargo, se observó que los hombres describían más conflictos entre la familia y el trabajo ($F=9,04$; $p<0,001$). Así pues, para los hombres, las exigencias familiares interfieren negativamente en su rendimiento y exigencias laborales. En segundo lugar, cuando analizamos la diferencia entre FWC y WFC con la edad de los hijos, obtuvimos resultados interesantes y significativos. Hay conflicto (de los dos) hasta los 17-18 años. Sin embargo, hay una edad crucial dentro de ésta, que es hasta los 4 (en FWC) y 5 años (en WFC), cuando el conflicto empieza a disminuir y luego se estabiliza. En tercer lugar, en el último paso de nuestros análisis, cuando combinamos la edad del hijo menor y el sexo, no encontramos diferencias significativas. Sin embargo, encontramos algunas tendencias interesantes que comentar. Mientras que las mujeres experimentan una disminución de ambos tipos de conflicto hasta que sus hijos son adolescentes y luego una estabilización, los hombres experimentan un conflicto relativamente constante hasta que su hijo llega a la adolescencia, tras lo cual disminuye. Es decir, las madres empiezan con más conflictos que los padres.

Implicaciones prácticas

Una implicación práctica de este trabajo es la comprensión de la edad de los hijos sobre el que aumenta y disminuye el conflicto trabajo-familia. Se ha observado, como se ha demostrado en investigaciones anteriores, que la edad a la que pueden surgir conflictos cuando se trata de la descendencia no está del todo clara, ya que se han encontrado diferentes edades (Allen y Finkelstein, 2014; Bennett et al., 2017; Schulz y Reimann, 2022). Además, se ha establecido que la edad de los hijos y el conflicto vida-trabajo no presentan necesariamente una relación lineal. De ahí que las organizaciones deban ser conscientes de las necesidades familiares que pueda tener una persona, especialmente las mujeres, para evitar cualquier repercusión negativa en su trabajo (y viceversa). Esto es válido tanto si las obligaciones familiares crean un conflicto como si, conscientes de los retos potenciales, las mujeres optan por asumir menos responsabilidades o incluso por pasar a trabajar a tiempo parcial.

Comprender que el conflicto disminuye a partir de que los niños tengan unos cinco años de edad, permite a la dirección de RRHH aplicar prácticas de apoyo dirigidas a este colectivo, especialmente en las organizaciones de economía social. En este sentido, el apoyo del supervisor desempeña un papel crucial para dificultar los posibles efectos negativos del conflicto trabajo-familia (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Hanson et al., 2006; Hammer et al., 2009). Sin embargo, no

es sólo el papel del supervisor, sino que las prácticas de recursos humanos también deben ser coherentes y contar con un conjunto de elementos que permitan a los empleados trabajar con eficacia. El siguiente paso sería describir el tipo de práctica que puede llegar a ser un predictor significativo del conflicto trabajo-familia.

Estos resultados afectan al departamento de recursos humanos y se extienden al ámbito de las políticas públicas. Los gobiernos deberían ser conscientes de que los mecanismos que subyacen al conflicto trabajo-familia funcionan de forma diferente para hombres y mujeres. Por lo tanto, deberían promover medidas para mejorar la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar, como ampliar los permisos de maternidad y paternidad o aplicar medidas de flexibilidad de hasta 4-5 años y garantizar que las empresas las apliquen por igual tanto para hombres como para mujeres.

Limitaciones

En primer lugar, todas nuestras medidas se basan en datos de autoinforme. Por lo tanto, la inclusión de medidas a otro nivel (como las medidas a nivel de supervisor que hemos mencionado) ayudaría a mitigar este problema. En segundo lugar, el uso de datos transversales limita las conclusiones. Los estudios longitudinales permiten comprobar si el conflicto varía a medida que los niños crecen. En tercer lugar, nuestras conclusiones están limitadas por la muestra de la que proceden. Sin embargo, se trata de un tipo de muestra poco frecuente y, además, con diferentes tipos de empresas dentro de la economía social, confiere una riqueza inherente.

Valor original

Hemos comprobado que el género y la edad de los niños pueden desempeñar un papel importante en los conflictos entre trabajo y familia y entre familia y trabajo, en última instancia hasta los 5 años. Aunque las organizaciones de la economía social tienden a ser más igualitarias, horizontales y participativas para ambos sexos, sigue habiendo situaciones en las que pueden surgir conflictos entre vida y trabajo. Por lo tanto, las organizaciones deben reconocer que el cuidado de los niños pequeños requiere tiempo, energía y atención, y deben abordarse las políticas y las prácticas al respecto.

1. Introduction

It is well known that women are now waiting longer to have babies and that they have fewer children in general (Esping-Andersen, 2013). There are many reasons why this is happening, and one of them refers to the challenge of balancing work and family. Although paternity leave has been gradually extended and more types of parental leave are available to balance work and life (Meil et al., 2017), the statistics are devastating. According to the INE (National Statistical Institute in Spain), 51.2% of men have not taken any paternity leave with any of their children. This means that women become the main caregivers, setting aside their work. In fact, if we look at the reasons behind individuals voluntarily choosing part-time work, we see that 19.800 men (4.7% of men between 25 and 49 years old) chose to care for their children or older adults in 2022, compared to 225.400 women (24.1% of women between 25 and 49 years old). This trend is similar in Europe. By 2022, 28% of women worked part-time compared to 8% of men. This gap is even greater at lower levels of education (according to Eurostat). Additionally, previous research has shown that women take on the role of caregivers when they have young children. This role is especially important in the early years of life, until children grow older and the distribution of care between men and women starts to become more balanced (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009).

In the last decades, the pressure at work has increased and types of families have changed. However, it is unclear whether gender roles have followed this trend in social economy organisations. Tremblay (2012) indicates that it is easier to balance work and family in the social economy sector compared to other sectors. This is possible because these organisations are more horizontal, democratic, and equal, and tend to promote gender equality. Although these intrinsic characteristics of social economy entities may suggest that the balance between work-life, having children, and gender issues may be more present, the available literature is not entirely clear (Kim, 2023). Considering the consequences for public policies, organisations, workers, and their families, it is vital to identify whether children are key variables when it comes to the work-family balance of women and men in this particular environment: social economy organisations.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse how gender and children's age impact the work-family conflict.

2. Theory development

2.1. Work-family conflict

One of the greatest human motivators is the feeling of belonging to a group. Throughout their lives, human beings are tied to their families (or equivalent) and work (Greenhaus & Powell, 2016). Balancing these social roles is a challenge and their imbalance leads to conflict.

Work-family conflict is a prevalent issue for both men and women in today's society (Reimann, et al. 2022). This conflict arises when the demands and responsibilities of one's work and family roles compete and interfere with each other, leading to stress and negative outcomes (Thomas & Ganter, 1995). It is important to study work-family conflict and family-work conflict separately as they have their own antecedents (Byron, 2005) and consequents (e.g., Babic et al., 2020). This allows us to better understand the challenges and dynamics associated with each type of conflict.

The relationship between work and family (or personal life) can be explained through several mechanisms that fit into six categories (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000): spillover, compensation, segmentation, resource drain, congruence, and work-family conflict. Spillover can be defined as the impact that work and family have on each other, which creates resemblances between the two domains and is not necessarily negative (e.g., Hanson et al., 2006). Compensation is the attempt to alleviate dissatisfaction in one area by striving for satisfaction in another. Segmentation involves dividing work and family in such a way that there is no interplay between the two domains. Segmentation was initially seen as a logical separation of work and family due to their separation in time and space and their distinct purposes. However, recent research has demonstrated that they are two very related variables. Resource drain refers to the movement of limited personal resources (e.g., time, attention, or energy), from one domain to another. Congruence refers to the resemblance between work and family, which can be attributed to a third variable that serves as a shared cause, which includes personal characteristics, social and cultural influences, etc. Finally, work-family conflict occurs when demands from the work and family roles are incompatible with each other, resulting in inter-role conflict. This means that meeting the demands of one domain makes it challenging to meet the demands of the other domain.

In the work-family conflict domain, there are different sources and directions. Conflict could be (a) time-based, which occurs when one domain makes it challenging to address the demands of the other; (b) strain-based, which means that one domain drains the resources of the other; (c) behaviour-based, in which one role is incompatible with the other; or a mix between all these sources (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1986). The latter is the most difficult to operationalise, and many times instruments mix time- and behaviour-based conflict for practical reasons as the phenomenon is naturally mixed. In addition to these sources, there is the direction of the conflict. Work-family conflict could have family-to-work and/or work-to-family direction. It means that the source of stress is because the person has family demands that interfere with their work or the other way around, when work demands interfere with their family role (Kelloway et al., 1999).

As we have seen, the study of work-family conflict reveals the complexity of the interactions between these two fundamental life domains. This analysis highlights the need for personalised approaches and tailored solutions to address work-family tensions effectively, both by public authorities and by organisations.

Examining how gender roles shape the experiences and demands of work and family will provide a more complete picture of the challenges different population segments face. Pre-

vious research has shown that since the pandemic, this conflict and the gap between men and women have increased (Yucel & Laß, 2024). For families with children, the family-work and work-family conflict became unsustainable. Some of the latest studies (Collins et al. 2020; Hertz et al., 2020; Long, 2021; Martucci, 2021; Meyer et al., 2021; Pérez-Nebra et al., 2022, among other evidence), even found that this situation was worse for mothers (or mothers with young children).

2.2. Demographic characteristics in work-family conflict

Far from disappearing, the existence of gender inequalities in the labour market can be viewed as structural and influenced by determining factors which are changing (Torns & Recio, 2012). Women still suffer from occupational segregation, lower wages, low representation in managerial positions, and greater partiality and temporary employment (e.g., Ishizuka, 2021). Moreover, they are the ones who make the most significant efforts to balance work and personal life, especially after becoming mothers. This translates into a greater partiality that affects the development of their professional life and their salary (Dang & Nguyen, 2021).

Research has shown that women tend to experience higher levels of work-family conflict than men, as they often have to balance their professional responsibilities with traditional gender roles and expectations, such as caregiving and household duties (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). This can result in a greater strain on their physical and emotional well-being (Bian et al., 2024; Cavagnis et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2022; Obrenovic et al., 2020), potentially decreasing their work productivity and career advancement opportunities (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Purang et al., 2024), and also is negatively associated with both job and life satisfactions (Kunkcu et al., 2024). Addressing work-family conflict is important for both men and women to achieve a healthy work-life balance, promote gender equality in the workplace, and prevent mental health issues (Carvalho et al., 2018).

Research presents mixed evidence regarding gender differences in the work-family conflict. Whereas some evidence with Japanese, US, UK, and Brazilian employees shows gender differences (US, Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Martins et al., 2002; UK, Chandola et al., 2004; Japan, Chandola et al., 2004; Brazilian, Pérez-Nebra et al., 2022), other studies from Europe show none (e.g., Portugal, Carvalho et al., 2018; Finland, Chandola et al., 2004; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). It is important to highlight that some works suggest that the relationship between gender and work-family conflict depends on the direction of the conflict and the age of the youngest child (e.g., Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Huffman et al., 2013).

Children's age plays a role in determining whether mothers choose to exit the workforce. For example, Chun-Hoon (2021) found that during the pandemic, mothers with preschool-aged children were slightly more likely to stop paid employment (9%) compared to those with older children (Belwal & Belwal, 2023). However, this is something that does not only happen in specific situation such as a pandemic or lockdown but is perpetuated over time. Previous studies

have found that the conflict between life and work increases when children need more care and attention, either because they have special needs or are still young (as in preschool-aged children) (Martucci, 2023; Stevens et al., 2007).

In this sense, work-family conflict could have a linear or non-linear relationship with the age of the youngest child. For example, it could be linear if it is higher in the early stages of childhood due to child demand and falls as the child gains autonomy (e.g., Huffman et al., 2013) or increases because the child needs help with school activities (Schieman et al., 2021). However, it could rise again with adolescence and follow a quadratic relationship (e.g., Allen & Finkelstein, 2014). The type of curve and whether it will change is an open question. In other words, the specific child's age associated with high work-family conflict is still unknown, as well as how this relationship changes over time.

Again, there are mixed results regarding the age of the youngest child and work-family conflict. Authors describe different cutoff points for children's ages and when the relationship changes. For example, Allen and Finkelstein (2014) described the highest work-family conflict for fathers happens when children are under 3 years old and that this conflict linearly declines up to adolescence when it increases again (inverted U-shape). However, for mothers, it is higher when the child is 3- to 5-years-old and then declines (it is a U-shape). Similar results are described by Bennett and colleagues (2017). Other researchers followed different approaches to examine the cutoff point for children's age. For instance, Nnubia and colleagues (2022) describe one cutoff point (in this case, 12 years old) and others have suggested several cutoff points (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Bennett et al., 2017; Schulz & Reimann, 2022). Even though there is still no clarity as to when there is a change of pattern in the relationship between the age of the youngest child and the work-family conflict, it does seem to be clear that this relationship is not linear.

2.3. Social Economy Organisations

Work-family or family-work conflict can be very different in social economy organisations. First, because these organisations have an overriding concern for work-life balance (Tremblay, 2012). In fact, previous research comparing social economy organisations to other types and sectors showed that the specificities of this type of enterprise (e.g., mission or horizontal management) made them work harder to avoid work conflict among employees (Tremblay, 2012). However, the gender equality situation still has a long way to go, and it is necessary to see whether social economy enterprises function as the same as the rest or not.

Second, workers are usually the shareholders and equally participate in the decision-making process, which empowers workers (Kroon, 2021). This means that they could improve or modify the implemented HR practices regarding work-family balance for their own sake. Martínez and colleagues (2013) also point out that the values and principles of social economy organisations are reflected in more equitable and egalitarian working conditions from a gender perspective. The authors analyse various dimensions, including the degree of feminisation of employment, diversity in managerial and highly qualified positions, gender differences in

the labour trajectories of their workers, or leave of absence to care for children, among others. In general, it is widely accepted that while women's participation in the labour market has improved, their working conditions continue to be inferior to those of men.

Equal opportunities between men and women underlie the very idiosyncrasy of social economy organisations through the values of equality, equity, democracy, and social justice (Elio, 2006), facts that make the social economy sector more supportive than other sectors (Tremblay, 2012). Therefore, the issue of work-life balance could be different in these organisations. In fact, previous studies (e.g., Castro et al., 2020) have shown that social economy organisations have higher female participation, more stability, and a lower glass-ceiling effect than for-profit organisations. This is in line with studies arguing that labour conditions can be better in social economy organisations than in more traditional organisations (Santero & Castro, 2016). These authors found that women in social economy organisations were more likely to work full-time than in for-profit enterprises (where a higher percentage of women work part-time), contrasting the statistics we mentioned in the introduction. The same results are shown if we compare the data for the 2018-2020 period of the MONDRAGON group and the global data of the organisations in Spain. In MONDRAGON, 15% of workers (including 12% women) experienced some level of work-family balance, whereas at a national level in Spain, it was 30% (23% women). However, the same data shows inequality in terms of gender, with the percentage of women who decide to adopt certain measures for a more work-family balance being much higher in both cases. Therefore, the current debate remains somehow ambiguous.

COCETA (2004:60) affirms that social economy organisations such as associated work cooperatives "are suitable environments for the professional development of women, not so much because of the adoption of specific measures in favour of working women, but because of the development over time of a company culture that makes equal opportunities, respect for diversity, the search for balance and the promotion of human relations between workers basic values of its operation as a company". The truth is that participatory management can be favourable for women in the company, given that it is possible to incorporate points of view, interests or needs of the female party into the decisions adopted by a board of directors, which in most cases is male (Elio, 2006). A study carried out by the Confederation of Associated Work Cooperatives of Spain in 2004 (COCETA, 2004-a: 58) provides evidence to the fact that participatory and democratic management can favour female participation by concluding that the mode of access to the main management positions held by women is participation in decision-making (43.2%), ahead of internal promotion (22.2%), training (21.5%) and positive discrimination (5%).

However, for social economies to favour women and for equality to become a reality, it is essential that men and women both become active participants in the life of social economy organisations. Not only at the base, as workers in the organisation, but in all areas and levels, including government and executive positions. The point is that in light of the statistical data on the employment of men and women in the social economy, it is evident that gender equality continues to be an objective to be achieved rather than a reality.

Therefore, although we may think that in social economy organisations there are more egalitarian practices that favour working conditions for men and women, the reality of work-life conflict may be different when we add young children to the equation.

Therefore, with all that we have analysed in this theoretical part, our aim is to analyse whether gender and children's age impact work-family conflict.

3. Method

3.1. Procedure and sample

Several organisations from Spain's social economy sector were contacted to participate in the study. Initially, we contacted the CEO or HR manager to provide them with an overview of the project, its goals, and the responsibilities involved. After they agreed to participate, we distributed a link to all their employees, enabling them to complete the online questionnaire anonymously. In addition, a part of the sample was also drawn from a panel of employees in social economy organisations who responded in the same way to the questionnaire. The data collection took place at the end of the year 2022.

In total, 1589 employees responded to the questionnaire. Employees worked in different social economy organisations such as worker-owned companies, social enterprises, worker cooperatives, work integration social enterprises or other social economy organisations such as capitalist entities controlled by a social economy company, associations and foundations with economic activity, mutual insurance companies, etc.

Regarding gender, the sample was very equitable, with 49.8% being women and 49.7% men, and only a minority (0.5%) who identified themselves as non-binary. As for the age of the workers who participated, we divided them into three age groups: 16 to 34 years old (40.6%), 35 to 50 years old (42.6%), and over 51 (16.8%). Eight hundred fifty-eight employees had children (57.2%), and those who had children reported a median of two children currently living at home with a mean age of 10.23 years ($SD=7.86$ years).

Regarding academic training, most of the participants had a university degree or bachelor's degree (37.2%), followed by a vocational training degree (25.5%), and those who had completed a master's degree (15.1%). In terms of sector, most worked in the service sector (60.9%), followed by the secondary sector (31.6%), and finally the primary sector (7.6%). The sample represents all the provinces of Spain and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Madrid (16.9%) and Barcelona (10%) contributed the most participants, followed by Valencia (7.7%) and Seville (4.5%). Ceuta and Melilla (0.1%) and Huesca (0.2%) contributed the least (Villajos et al., 2023).

3.2. Measures

We measured work-family conflict with two different subscales (Haslam et al., 2015): WFC (5 items, $\alpha=.91$) and FWC (5 items, $\alpha=.92$). An example of an item is: “There is no time left at the end of the day to do the things I’d like at home (e.g., chores and leisure activities)” for work-to-family conflict; and “My work performance suffers because of my personal and family commitments” for family-to-work conflict. The psychometric properties of the scale are adequate: $\chi^2 = 1045$; $DF = 34$; $CFI = 0,92$; $TLI = 0,89$, $NFI = 0,91$; $GFI = 0,85$; $RMSEA = 0,13$ [Lower 0,13, Upper 0,15], $SRMR = 0,08$.

Gender was measured as male, female, and non-binary gender, although due to low participation, we had to remove non-binary individuals, so we only analyzed the difference between men and women.

3.3. Data analysis

First of all, Cronbach’s alphas were calculated to analyze the good reliability of the measures used. Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the work-life conflict measure. Then, the analysis required to steps: The first step of the analysis was to assess gender and child interaction in the work-family conflict. To achieve it, we conducted a general linear model (GLM) analysis. As seen in the sample section, we had 6 employees reporting a non-binary gender. However, for statistical purposes, they were not enough to be included in a separate group.

For the second step of the analysis, we examined the changes in conflict according to the age of the children. In other words, we examined the breaking point and if there were different dynamics of work-family conflict depending on the child’s age. To achieve this, we estimated the breaking point using a two-lines test and the Robin Hood algorithm as suggested by Simonsohn (2018).

4. Results

Average work-family conflict (both work to family conflict and family to work conflict) scores were calculated to better understand the conflict profile of the sample. Due to the relatively limited research conducted on this sample, we performed confirmatory factor analysis to verify their factor structure and reliabilities. The scale fits well, as seen in the previous section.

A general linear model approach (GLM) was conducted to test whether the gender and having a child (or children) interaction showed differences between profiles. According to Table 1 the interaction between gender and children was not significant.

Table 1. GLM interaction between having a child and gender and work-family conflict

Source	Type of conflict (VD)	df	mean Square	F
Corrected model	WFC	3	2.58	1.08
	FWC	3	8.57	3.24
Intercept	WFC	1	22745.33	9523.63
	FWC	1	14382.83	5433.48
Gender	WFC	1	2.17	.91
	FWC	1	23.89	9.04
Have at least 1 child	WFC	1	3.58	1.50
	FWC	1	.85	.32
Gender*Child	WFC	1	1.32	.55
	FWC	1	.09	.03
Error	WFC	1488	2.39	
	FWC	1488	2.65	

Source: Own elaboration.

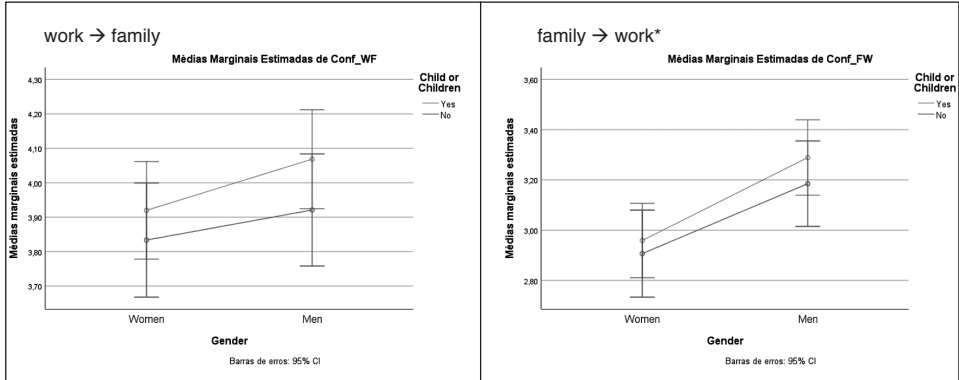
Notes: WFC= work to family conflict; FWC= family to work conflict.

However, what is possible to notice is that gender plays a role, not in the interaction with having or not having a child, but in the direct effects. We found that men described more conflict from family to work ($F=9.04$; $p<.001$). We can also see this information in the following graph (Figure 1).

The second step of the analysis was to examine the turning point in terms of the child's age. Thus, we conducted a sequence of analyses to understand this phenomenon. The first part of the sequence was to test if work-family conflict declines (or increases) in the whole sample after a certain age. In the second part, we compare this by gender.

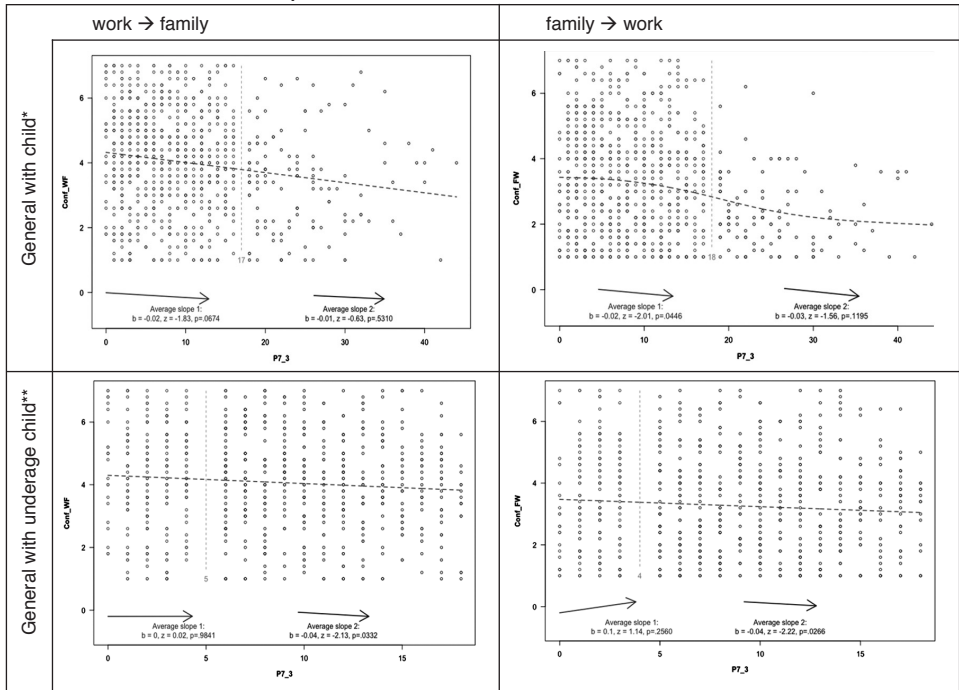
We found some differences in the whole sample. For WFC, we found that the WFC steadily declines until the child turns 17 and FWC until the child turns 18. This suggests that, in the entire sample (both genders), the work-family conflict decreases until the age of 17-18, and then it stabilizes at a low level (see Figure 2-general with child). So, the following step in the sequence was to cut the sample up to 18 years old.

Figure 1. GLM interaction



Source: Own elaboration. Notes: *significant only for gender, not for the interaction $p < .01$.

Figure 2. Test for type of relationship between age of the youngest child and work-family conflict

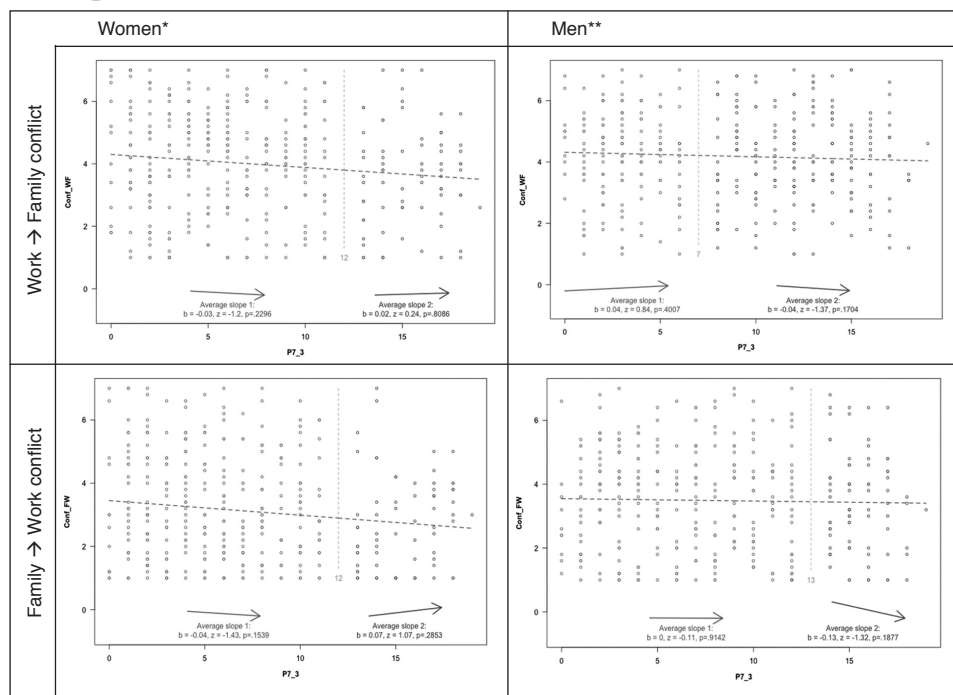


Source: Own elaboration. Note: graph generated by Simonsohn R script, accessed in: <http://webstimate.org/twolines/>. *N=903; **N=776.

This result (see Figure 2-general with underage child) suggests that up to the age of 4 or 5 years, the work-family conflict is stable at a high level, and after that, it decreases significantly. More concretely, WFC is stable until 5-years-old, and after that, it declines. Similarly, FWC is stable up to 4-years-old and drops after.

As reported in our first test (Table 1 and Figure 1), gender plays a role. Thus, we split the previous analysis by gender and, again, had a cutoff of up to 18-years-old. However, as seen in Figure 3, we could not find significant differences between men and women, although FWC for men was slightly higher than for women (the same result was found in Table 1 and Figure 1).

Figure 3. Test for type of relationship between age of the youngest child, gender and work-family conflict



Source: Own elaboration. Note: graph generated by Simonsohn R script, accessed in: <http://webstimate.org/twolines/>. *N=399; **N=375

Although there was no significant value for the analysis (i.e., $p < .05$), the tendencies of the samples are interesting. For mothers, work-family conflict decreased in both directions until the teenage years, and then remained relatively flat. Fathers showed the opposite curve pattern in both conflict directions, flat until the teenage years and then decreasing.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to analyse whether gender and children's age impact the work-family conflict. Several results emerge from this article that are worth highlighting regarding gender roles, the age of the youngest child, and their repercussions.

First, the interaction result was insignificant. However, we found that men experienced significantly more family to work conflict than women. Thus, for men, family demands interfere negatively with their work performance and demands (Mufidah et al., 2024).

Second, when we analysed the difference between FWC and WFC with the age of the children, we obtained interesting and significant results. There is conflict (of the two) until the age of 17-18, late adolescence. Nevertheless, there is a crucial age within this, which is up to 4 (in FWC) and 5 years (in WFC), when the conflict starts to decrease and then stabilises.

Third, in the last step of our analysis, when we combined the age of the youngest child and gender, we found no significant differences. However, we found some interesting trends to comment on. While women see a decrease in both types of conflict until their children are teenagers and then a stabilization, men experience relatively constant conflict until their child reaches adolescence, after which it decreases. That is, mothers start off with more conflict than fathers.

5.1. Theoretical implications

These results are consistent with prior research which would fit with the different types of work-life relationships proposed by Edwards and Rothbard (2000). In fact, according to these authors, congruence can be attributed to a third variable that serves as a shared cause. These could be social and cultural influences that suggest women as the main caregivers of children in their early years. It is possible to interpret that the work-life regulatory mechanism between men and women is different. While women might try to achieve congruence between the two spheres, men might use a more compensatory mechanism. This would make it even more difficult to balance the two domains for both men and women (Reimann, et al. 2022) and could also perpetuate gender roles.

Another explanation for the results draws on the current Spanish trend in changes in maternity leave, which is gradually extending to fathers as well (Meil et al., 2017), so fathers could be experiencing more conflict from family to work as they were not used to taking leave. In other words, the conflict in this direction is more accessible in their memory.

However, women may show less work-life conflict for various reasons. One may be because they take on the role of primary caregiver and feel that it is part of their life and work, normalising the situation (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). Another may be that they take on less responsibility at work because they know that they cannot manage everything if they do and, therefore, experience less conflict than men (Pérez-Nebra et al., 2022). This fits in with the fact that women represent a higher percentage of employees who work part-time voluntarily for childcare (Denia & Guilló, 2019; Santero & Castro, 2016).

When people start having children, traditional gender roles are perpetuated again, with women remaining the primary caregivers. This happens until the children are old enough for the caregiving role to be more evenly distributed between men and women (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). This fits perfectly with our results, as it is not until children are around 4 or 5 years old that the work-life conflict differs for men and women.

These results were found in a very particular context: social economy organisations. Employees in these organisations are more empowered and feel more comfortable negotiating their work practices, including work-life balance (Castro et al., 2020). These organisations share values that could explain the actual results. Social economy organisations prioritise social values, emphasising quality of life, care for family, and interpersonal relationships (Ferreira et al., 2015). It is, therefore, possible that we did not find so much work-life conflict, and that the interaction between gender and age of children was not significant.

Also, the results of Kossek (2024) indicate that informal organisational support (from supervisors and colleagues) is at least as important as formal measures. Indeed, in social economy companies, this support is more prominent, as the objective of work-family balance is much more supported in social economy organisations. However, we have also found some practical implications for this type of company which are worth mentioning.

5.2. Practical implications

A practical implication of this work is understanding the age at which work-family conflict increases and decreases. It has been observed, as demonstrated in previous research, that the age at which conflicts may arise when it comes to offspring is not entirely clear, as different ages have been found (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Bennett et al., 2017; Schulz & Reimann, 2022). Furthermore, it has been established that the age of the children and the work-life conflict do not necessarily exhibit a linear relationship. Hence, organisations must be aware of the family' needs that an individual, especially women, may have, to prevent any negative impact on their work (and vice-versa). This holds true whether family obligations create conflict or if, aware of the potential challenges, women opt for assuming fewer responsibilities or even transitioning to part-time work.

Understanding that conflict decreases after children are about five years old allows HR management to implement support practices targeted at this age group, particularly in social economy organisations. In this sense, supervisor support plays a crucial role in hindering the possible negative effects of work-family conflict (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Hanson et al., 2006; Hammer et al., 2009). However, it is not only the role of the supervisor, but human resource practices also need to be coherent and have a set of practices that allow employees to work effectively. The next step would be to describe the type of practice that is a significant predictor of work-family conflict.

These results impact the human resources department and extend to the realm of public policies. Governments should be aware that the mechanisms that underly the work-life conflict work differently for men and women. Therefore, they should promote measures to enhance

work-life balance, such as extending maternal and paternal leave or implementing flexibility measures up to 4-5 years and ensuring that companies implement them equally.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Several potential limitations should be considered when evaluating the results of our research. First, all of our measures are based on self-report data. Therefore, including measures at another level (such as the supervisor-level measures we have mentioned) would help mitigate this issue. Second, the use of cross-sectional data limits the conclusions. Longitudinal studies allow testing whether the conflict varies as the children grow. Third, our findings are limited by the sample from which they were derived. However, it is a rare sample type, and furthermore, with different types of companies within the social economy, it confers an inherent richness. Additional research in more occupationally diverse samples constructed to adequately represent the population is required to validate the results found. Finally, the lack of control variables, such as family support in the case of children, or in the case of immigrants, also hinders the generalizability of the results. However, adding these variables may open the door to future and intriguing studies. Future lines of research should also include the gender of the supervisor, as depending on whether they are male or female, the results might be different. Alternatively, it would be interesting to examine if supervisors' more ethical and supportive types of leadership could facilitate work-life balance or not. Men and women's potentially different perceptions could also be analysed, for example, if they complain more or less about how much the family might negatively influence work (or vice versa). To be able to analyse in more detail why conflict decreases when children reach the age of majority, variables could be included that ask whether children leave home to study abroad or for any other reason that helps to mitigate conflict. Finally, Batt and Valcour (2003) described that work design practices and supportive supervision protect work-family conflict and open the door to testing other types of human resource practices as predictors of work-family conflict to mitigate the problem.

5.4. Conclusions

We have found that gender and children's age can play an important role in work to family and family to work conflict, ultimately up to 5 years old. Although organisations in the social economy tend to be more egalitarian, horizontal, and participative for both genders, there are still situations in which conflicts between life and work can arise. Therefore, employers and managers should acknowledge that caring for small children requires time, energy, and attention and policies and practices should be addressed.

Contribución de cada autor/a: EV: adquisición financiación, administración proyecto, conceptualización, metodología, escritura artículo original, revisión; APN: conceptualización, metodología, análisis, escritura artículo original, revisión; ML: conceptualización, escritura artículo original, revisión; EE: escritura artículo original, revisión.

Financiación: Estudio financiado por la Conselleria d'Educació, Universitats i Ocupació, Generalitat Valenciana Project CIGE/2021/171.

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