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(INTRA)GENDER VARIATION IN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT OF EMPLOYED PARENTS IN CROATIA

ABSTRACT

This article explores variations in work–family conflict (WFC) among employed parents of minor children in Croatia (N=2414). It examines how sociodemographic characteristics, household organisation, and working conditions influence WFC, specifically looking at differences within each gender group. Women report higher WFC than men, particularly those aged 30–39 who often manage young children, and women with a university education, which is consistent with the high-status strain hypothesis. Men’s WFC is relatively unaffected by age and education, indicating differing gendered impacts of sociocultural factors. Working conditions strongly predict WFC for both genders, although more significantly for men. Unexpectedly, additional help with children in the household increases men’s WFC, suggesting complexities in gender role expectations. Recognising these intersecting influences can inform inclusive workplace policies tailored to diverse parental needs.

KEY WORDS: work–family conflict, working conditions, household organisation, parents, Croatia

(Med)spolne razlike v konfliktu med delom in družino pri zaposlenih starših na Hrvaškem

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava razlike v konfliktu med delom in družino (KDD) pri zaposlenih starših mladoletnih otrok na Hrvaškem (N=2414). Proučuje, kako sociodemografske značilnosti, organizacija gospodinjstva in delovni pogoji vplivajo na KDD, pri čemer posebej obravnava razlike znotraj posameznih spolnih skupin. Ženske poročajo o višji ravni KDD kot moški, zlasti tiste, stare

od 30 do 39 let, ki pogosto skrbijo za majhne otroke, in ženske z univerzitetno izobrazbo, kar je skladno s hipotezo o obremenjenosti zaradi visokega statusa. Starost in izobrazba pri moških ne vplivata bistveno na KDD, kar kaže na razlike v vplivu družbeno-kulturnih dejavnikov med spoloma. Delovni pogoji močno napovedujejo KDD pri obeh spolih, vendar bolj izrazito pri moških. V nasprotju s pričakovanji dodatna pomoč pri skrbi za otroke v gospodinjstvu poveča KDD pri moških, kar nakazuje na kompleksnost v pričakovanjih glede spolnih vlog. Prepoznavanje teh medsebojno prepletenih dejavnikov je lahko podlaga za oblikovanje vključujočih politik na delovnem mestu, ki bodo prilagojene različnim potrebam staršev.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: konflikt med delom in družino, delovni pogoji, organizacija gospodinjstva, starši, Hrvaška.

1 Introduction¹

Work and family life are deeply interconnected, with demands from paid work shaping private and family life, and family commitments, in turn, influencing work, often resulting in role conflicts (Greenhaus and Powell 2006). Conflicts between work and family domains negatively affect the individuals' social connections, well-being and quality of life, productivity, job satisfaction and work motivation, as well as impair health (Allen et al. 2015; Gregory 2016; Vieira et al. 2018). Although experienced individually, work-family conflict (WFC) reflects structural tensions between the organisation of paid work and the social organisation of care. Balancing these domains highlights power dynamics at both macro and micro levels, as parents today navigate the dual challenges of economic provision alongside caregiving. The increase in the scope and intensity of work in almost all occupations, along with the parents' higher demands in care work (Luhr et al. 2022) encourage the researchers' and policymakers' interest in the issue of WFC as an important aspect of quality of working life and gender equality policies (Gallie and Russell 2009).

Studies show that gender, age, class, race, disability, level of education, income, number of minor children in the household, and organisation of household and care influence the frequency of WFC, with women more often reporting family to work conflict and men more often work to family conflict (Becker and Moen 1999; Byron 2005; Michel et al. 2011; Tunlid 2020). Moreover, WFC is also mediated by welfare policies, macroeconomic and institutional predictors (Allen et al. 2015; Gallie and Russell 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al. 2013) which

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indicates that the reported frequency of WFC depends also on nation-states' differences (Allen et al. 2015; Gallie and Russell 2009).

However, recognizing that "gender remains a salient category in understanding work-life issues" (Özbilgin et al. 2011: 27), this study focuses primarily on gender as a key dimension in measuring WFC, using three groups of predictor variables – sociodemographic factors, household structure and organisation, and work conditions. The study starts from the assumption that the differing predictors of WFC among distinct subgroups of men and women must be understood within the gendered structures of the family and workplace, which shape and mediate the nature and intensity of conflict. Building on this framework, the next chapter introduces key theoretical and empirical insights into the nature and determinants of WFC.

2 Work-family conflict

As contemporary life demands increasingly complex navigation between professional and private spheres, understanding the sources of WFC has become crucial for analysing individual well-being and broader social structures. According to role theory, conflict between private and professional life arises from time pressures, behavioural demands, and tensions when one role limits the performance in another role (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Čudina-Obradović and Obradović 2001; Barnett and Gareis 2006).

Work-related characteristics are found to intensify or mitigate WFC levels (Byron 2005; Gallie and Russell 2009; McGinnity and Calvert 2009; Michel et al. 2011). Workplace flexibility is particularly crucial for employees with significant family responsibilities, such as caring for preschool-aged children, being a single parent, or supporting elderly or frail family members (Laklija et al. 2021). Its role, however, is two-sided. When flexibility is primarily designed to reduce labour costs – such as through temporary or fixed-term contracts, overtime, shift work, or weekend schedules – it can exacerbate WFC. These cost-driven approaches often lead to unpredictable or inconsistent work hours, making it more challenging for employees to effectively manage their family obligations (Klindžić and Marić 2019). In contrast, flexibility that supports work-life balance focuses on employee-centred practices. These include part-time or flexitime arrangements, remote work, self-scheduled shifts, and paid parental leave, all of which provide employees with greater control over their schedules and improve their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (Klindžić and Marić 2019).

The gendered distribution of housework results in employed parents dedicating unequal amounts of time and energy to housework and childcare. Since women

typically spend more time than men on these activities, they experience WFC more frequently than men (Gershuny 2000; Hochschild and Machung 2012/1989; Tomić-Koludrović 2015; White et al. 2003). Women, especially those with preschool children and elderly parents, are more likely than men to deviate from linear career paths and interrupt their work activity to provide family care (Bianchi et al. 2012; Ehrlich et al. 2020). At the EU level, the European Labor Force Survey (2019) indicates that among the 17% of (previously) employed parents who interrupted their employment for childcare, approximately one-third are women, compared to only 1.3% of men (Eurostat LFS 2019).

WFC is strongly shaped by gender attitudes: women adhering to traditional, fixed gender roles report greater conflict between professional and domestic demands, while women who believe these roles are changeable experience less strain (Townsend et al. 2024). Under the breadwinner norm, men as expected to be fully committed to their work, which includes high job performance, constant availability, and a willingness to adjust their private lives to work demands (Perry-Jenkins and Wadsworth 2017; Kelly et al. 2010). This significantly influences how work conditions are experienced, with work schedules and intense job demands directly affecting the WFC. Men also often internalise the expectations associated with “ideal worker” norm, which further increases stress and guilt when work disrupts family life, making their identities and social value tied to professional success and work achievements (Hill 2005). Huffman et al. (2014) investigate the relationship between traditional gender role beliefs and WFC among fathers. Their research demonstrates that work hours mediate the link between traditional gender attitudes and WFC, suggesting that adherence to the breadwinner role leads men to invest more time in paid labour while reducing time spent on caregiving, thereby intensifying WFC. Results of research conducted among employed fathers in Slovenia state that father’s “job significantly reduces participation in household chores” and “working in a management position makes active participation in household chores more difficult” (Kozjek et al. 2021: 61). These results align with prior meta-analyses (Byron 2005), which establish that work-related demands (e.g., overtime, inflexible schedules) disproportionately drive WFC for men, whereas women’s conflict tends to stem from domestic responsibilities.

In most EU countries,² unpaid care for children and elderly family members is provided through family networks (Eurostat LFS 2019), which are perceived as a fundamental source of support (Saraceno et al. as cited in Kotowska et al. 2010). Research shows that in multigenerational households FWC is higher than WFC (Matthew 2021) because, while young parents receive help with childcare and

2. EU-LFS includes EU-27, the UK, three EFTA countries and Turkey.

housework from extended family members, these living arrangements can also create additional caregiving and managerial responsibilities. Parents may face increased emotional and cognitive demands from managing both childcare and the care of elderly relatives, which can strain their ability to balance work and family obligations effectively (Frone et al. 1992). As a result, the dual caregiving and managerial roles in such households may be an additional source of conflict(s) which are more frequently reported by women with children under 6 years of age, single parents, and men living with their or their partner's parents (Kotowska et al. 2010; Matthew 2021).

The following paragraphs situate WFC within the Croatian national context. First, they present how gender structures the family domain, including availability of formal and informal childcare support, followed by a review of previous research on WFC within the family domain. Second, they examine employment and work conditions in Croatia as key factors shaping the experience of WFC, followed by research focused specifically on WFC.

3 Work and family in Croatia

3.1 Housework, familial obligations and WFC

Housework and family-related obligations are still divided between heterosexual parents in a way that "wives juggle between three spheres – jobs, children and household chores, and husbands between two – jobs and children" (Topolčić, as cited in Laklija and Dobrotić 2009: 49; Tomić-Koludrović et al. 2018). Even though men perform some housework and childcare more often than before, the most repetitive daily chores remain predominantly "women's work" (Eurofond-ETF 2022; Klasnić 2017; Leinert Novosel 2018; Tomić-Koludrović et al. 2018). When compared to other EU-27 countries, gender differences in time spent doing repetitive chores such as food preparation and cleaning are the largest in Croatia, with 10 hours for each chore (Eurofond-ETF 2022).

The domain of childcare also remains asymmetrical between parents. Although men discipline, play and learn with children more often, as well as taking part in activities such as driving children to kindergarten or school, women take care of all other children's needs, with playing, school-related activities, feeding, and taking sick leave when children are ill, among others (Dobrotić 2017; Klasnić 2017; Tomić-Koludrović 2015). Based on a nationally representative sample of 600 women aged 18–65 employed outside of the household and living with their partners, Klasnić (2017) also reports that regardless of the type of job they work, women estimate that they spend around 24 hours per week on childcare, while they estimate that men spend around 10 hours.

Research on WFC in Croatia shows that age, marital status, childcare and housework differently influence WFC of women and men. For women, both age and the frequency of childcare responsibilities are correlated with more frequent WFC. Older women tend to experience WFC more often than younger women (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). Klasnić (2017) similarly found that women up to 40 years of age are more likely to receive childcare support from extended family members more often than women over 40. The lack of social infrastructure in Croatia, particularly insufficient access to kindergartens and preschools, is reported by parents as a top priority for work-family balance policies (Kamenov and Galić 2011). In response, extended family networks often serve as critical support systems in emergencies (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). This reliance on family assistance is best exemplified by the widely known practice of "baka-servis" ("grandma-service"), where grandmothers take on childcare responsibilities as an alternative to kindergartens or babysitters (Massey et al. 1995).

Men's WFC was more pronounced when they are more frequently involved in housework, but it lowers for those not living with their spouse or partner (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). This suggests that living arrangements may play a significant role in WFC. In comparison to other EU-27 countries, Croatia has the highest incidence of multigenerational households, with 12.4% of households fitting this category (Eurostat 2020). Additionally, Dobrotić and Laklija (2012) found that 72.7% of respondents maintain frequent contact with their parents outside of the household, indicating strong family ties. However, the role of multigenerational households in affecting WFC remains underexplored.

3.2 Employment, work conditions and WFC

Fixed-term contracts and seasonal work became the dominant employment types in Croatia in the post-2008 crisis era, both characterised by uncertainty about contract prolongation (Butković et al. 2016; Jaklin and Matković 2022). In comparison to the EU, Croatia is the leading country with regards to precarious employment with 8.4%, followed by France with an almost halved percentage of 4.8% and the European Union (EU-28) average at 2.3% (Eurostat 2018).

Gender and age are found to be the main factors shaping differences in market position and opportunities in Croatia (Galić 2011; Matković 2008; Matković and Ostojić 2019). The horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the labour market remains prevalent. In 2020, the employment rate was 41.3% for women and 53.6% for men, and gendered labour market segregation was especially evident, with men dominating the business enterprise sector (66.5% men and 33.5% women) while women were more prominent in the government

and private non-profit sector (40.5% men and 59.5% women), as well as higher education (45.1% men and 54.9% women) (DZS 2022).

While most employed women prefer the dual-earner family model (Akrap and Čipin 2011)³, having children remains the main reason for women to forgo their career opportunities (Tomić-Koludrović 2015). Women's employment rates are most negatively impacted between the ages of 30 and 34 due to intense obligations connected with motherhood (OECD 2014; Dobrotić 2015; Eurostat, as cited in Bertek and Dobrotić 2016). However, employment rates of women with higher education are similar to those of fathers in comparison to women with lower education who are likely to be unemployed at this stage of parenthood (Keck and Saraceno; Eurostat 2014, as cited in Dobrotić 2015).

When women continue working, higher education has been found to be a predictor of family-to-work interference (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). Klasnić (2017) found that familial obligations hinder women's job prospects, with 30% of women having to forgo training or business trips, 20% missing out on career advancement opportunities, and 13% experiencing reduced salaries due to work-family conflict. Mothers are more likely than fathers to limit their career advancement, avoid taking on extra work responsibilities, or work part-time, which in turn negatively impacts their career progression, income, and professional growth (Adamović 2011; Čop 2024; Klasnić 2017).

Research that focuses specifically on the work and family interface shows that interference is stronger in the direction from work to family (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). A study by Bertek and Dobrotić (2016), based on a representative sample of 1 260 households, found that 21.2% of women always prioritise family, while 17.9% of men always prioritise work. When faced with conflict between these two domains, women tend to prioritise family (Klasnić 2017), regardless of their partner's involvement in childcare. Albeit small-scale, research by Laklija et al. (2021)⁴ determined that employed parents identify more with their family roles than with their work roles. The research also found that employer flexibility such as being able to leave work to do family-related errands significantly mitigates WFC (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009; Klindžić and Marić 2019).

3. There are two main dual-earner submodels due to different arrangement of unpaid work in the household: 1) dual-earner dual-carer model in which partners roughly equally share family and household obligations, and 2) the female double-burden model in which women are expected to care for the children, elderly and household (Akrap and Čipin 2011).
4. This research on work-family boundary flexibility was conducted with a convenient sample of 187 participants.

4 Research aim and hypotheses

This research explores the effect of select characteristics on the private and professional life of parents with minor children in the specific context of post-socialist Croatia, that has a long history of multigenerational families, and where gender inequality dominates in the household and in the increasingly liberalised labour market. The study examines the extent to which sociodemographic factors, household organisation, and working conditions predict experiences of WFC among women and men, and explores how living in multigenerational households intersects with these social categories and work conditions to shape and potentially intensify gender inequalities in WFC.

Research hypotheses are as follows:

- H1) Sociodemographic characteristics, household organisation, and working conditions are significant predictors of WFC among women and among men.
- H2) The patterns and strengths of associations between sociodemographic characteristics, household organisation, and working conditions and WFC vary between women and men, such that household-related factors are expected to show stronger associations with WFC among women, whereas work-related conditions are expected to show stronger associations with WFC among men.
- H3) Living in a multigenerational household moderates the relationship between age and WFC among women and men, with the magnitude of these effects differing between genders.

5 Methodology

5.1 Sample

The results are based on a nationally representative survey of parents with minor children (N=2414), using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI-method), conducted in 2022 within the research project „Impact of public policies on the quality of family and working life and the demographics of Croatia – spaces of change“ (2020-2023).⁵ Two-dimensional sample stratification was used, according to counties and according to the size of the settlement. The data were weighted by gender, age, geographical region, and educational level, making it representative of the Croatian national population in these dimensions for parents with minor children. This article refers to employed parents with minor children (women N=1263, men N=1151).

5. Ethics board approval was not required for this research; however, it adhered to the standard ethical guidelines of the Croatian Sociological Association and the Agency responsible for the fieldwork.

5.2 Variables

Variables on sociodemographic characteristics, household structure and organisation, and working conditions are included and presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, which display a frequency distribution of answers on the original variables included in the linear regression analysis, performed separately for women and men.

WFC was measured using five items seen in Table 1 which asked the respondents to indicate the frequency of each situation occurring in their life for the past 3 months on a 5-point rating scale: 1="never," 2="rarely," 3="sometimes," 4="often, 5="almost always". The first three items, as seen in Table 1, measure work-to-family direction of WFC and the last two measure the frequency of work-to-family direction of WFC. The scale was taken over from the questionnaire of the 6th European Working Conditions Survey from 2015 (EWCS 2015) translated and localised by into Croatian by Eurofond (Eurofond 2015).

Table 1: Work-family conflict: mean and standard deviation for men and women.

	Men (N=1151)		Women (N=1263)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Kept worrying about work when you were not working	2.71	1.265	2.88	1.282
Felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done	2.69	1.145	3.07	1.172
Found that your job prevented you from giving the time you wanted to your family	2.49	1.192	2.58	1.224
Found it difficult to concentrate on your job because of your family responsibilities	2.01	2.01	2.23	1.041
Found that your family responsibilities prevented you from giving the time you should to your job	1.93	1.93	2.04	1.065
WFC scale	2.36	0.825	2.56	0.79

1= "never", 5="almost always"

Table 2: Sociodemographic characteristics and household organisation (%).

		Men	Women	Total
Age	18-29	10.90	9.90	10.40
	30-39	50.50	47.30	48.80
	40-49	35.20	38.70	37.00
	50+	3.40	4.00	3.70
Education	Elementary school	3.10	2.20	2.70
What is the last education level you finished?	Secondary school 3y	22.00	13.20	17.40
	Secondary school 4y	45.30	45.00	45.10
	University degree BA	9.70	11.00	10.40
	University degree MA	19.90	28.60	24.50
Number of children in household	Less than 3	87.70	89.40	88.60
	3+	12.30	10.60	11.40
Children 0-7y	No	38.20	52.40	45.70
	Yes	61.80	47.60	54.30
Do your parents or partner's parents live in the same household as you?	No	67.10	70.00	68.60
	Yes	32.90	30.00	31.40
Do you or your partner have families, relatives' or friends' help in taking care of children?	No	32.40	36.50	34.50
	Yes	67.60	63.50	65.50
Who is planning everyday meals?	Me	6.30	73.30	41.30
	Equal	31.60	22.20	26.70
	Partner	60.40	2.60	30.20
	Others	1.70	1.80	1.80
Who is planning everyday activities of children?	Me	3.10	56.80	31.20
	Equal	52.00	38.30	44.80
	Partner	42.40	1.90	21.20
	Others	2.50	3.00	2.80

Table 3: Characteristics of work conditions (%).

		Men	Women	Total
What is your occupation?	Expert	18.30	15.40	16.80
	Clerks	28.10	33.60	31.00
	Service sector	16.40	23.30	20.00
	Industrial workers	17.20	7.80	12.30
	Farmers	2.40	1.10	1.70
	Other	17.60	18.80	18.20
Are you employed full-time, part-time, seasonally, or occasionally?	Part-time (seasonally, occasionally)	8.30	16.40	12.50
	Full-time	91.70	83.60	87.50
What is your regular work schedule on your main job?	Morning shift	59.90	52.70	56.10
	Work shift (2nd/3rd)	2.30	3.00	2.70
	Changing shift	21.90	31.80	27.10
	Flexible shift: controlled by employer	5.00	5.20	5.10
	Flexible shift: controlled by employee	10.90	7.20	9.00
In the last month, have you been contacted outside of work hours by your employer?	Never	38.40	51.30	45.10
	One time	11.50	9.70	10.60
	Several times	30.60	24.60	27.50
	Many times/often	19.40	14.30	16.80
Within the last month, did you have to work from home outside of work hours?	Never	67.70	71.70	69.80
	One time	5.00	4.70	4.80
	Several times	17.70	13.90	15.70
	Many times/often	9.70	9.70	9.70
Within the last month, were you asked to work overtime?	Never	46.00	60.60	53.60
	One time	12.30	8.90	10.50
	Several times	29.30	22.90	25.90
	Many times/often	12.30	7.70	9.90
I can arrange free days and holidays in accordance with my and my family's needs.	Yes	82.00	71.90	76.70
	No	18.00	28.10	23.30

		Men	Women	Total
Would it be difficult for you to take an hour or two during work hours to deal with personal or family errands?	1 – never	7.50	18.40	13.20
	2	14.20	15.60	15.00
	3	37.80	36.90	37.30
	4 – almost always	40.50	29.10	34.50
I missed an opportunity to advance or get a better job because of family obligations.	Yes	12.10	21.00	16.70
	No	87.90	79.00	83.30
How many times per month do you work on Sundays?	Never	63.30	69.00	66.30
	At least once	36.70	31.00	33.70

The scale's dimensionality was analysed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), a statistical technique that examines the underlying structure of a given set of variables, which revealed that the scale measures the single-construct nature of the WFC. The decision to retain one factor is based on the Guttman-Kaiser (GK) criterion, which suggests retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The analysis assessed the internal consistency reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ($\alpha=0.754$) indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency (Hair et al. 2010). To calculate an overall score for WFC, the respondents' answers were summarised across all five items. Higher values indicate a greater level of experienced WFC as measure of WFC.

5.3 Data analysis

Linear regression analysis was used to explore the relationship between WFC and a set of predictors - sociodemographic factors, household organisation, and working conditions. The variables draw upon findings from prior studies in Croatia, which reveal gender segregation in the labour market and disparities in household responsibilities and childcare. Initial bivariate analysis revealed greater WFC among women than among men, which prompted a detailed gender study by employing separate regression analyses for each gender.

6 Results

First, the broad pattern of WFC is examined, and then the determinants for women and men separately. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on items included in the WFC scale separately for women and men. This data shows greater conflict in the direction of work-to-family than from family-to-work. When comparing women and men, there is a gender gap, with the level of WFC significantly greater for women than for men ($t=-6.255$, $df=2761$, $p<0.01$).

6.1 Sociodemographic characteristics, household organisation and care obligations as predictors of WFC

This article argues that different predictors affect WFC among men and women. To interpret the results, the standardised regression coefficients provided in Table 4 for both genders were analysed. In the upcoming sections, attention is directed towards the comprehensive data from Model 3.

Table 4: Work-family conflict: multiple linear regression analysis for women (N=1263) and for men (N=1153) – standardised regression coefficients.

	Women			Men		
	MODEL 1 Soc- -dem.+ House- hold organisa- tion	MODEL 2 Work conditions	MODEL 3 Full model	MODEL 1 Soc- -dem.+ House- hold organisa- tion	MODEL 2 Work conditions	MODEL 3 Full model
AGE (ref. 30-39 y)						
Age 18-29 y	-0.06*		-0.079**	0.064*		0.029
Age 40-49 y	-0.023		-0.01	0.066		0.048
Age 50+ y	-0.037		-0.036	0.011		0.019
EDUCATION (ref. tertiary)						
Secondary school 3y	-0.012		-0.007	-0.104**		-0.049
Secondary school 4y	-0.117**		-0.084*	-0.036		-0.019
HOUSEHOLD						
Children 0-7y (yes)	-0.052		-0.033	-0.003		-0.003
No. children (3+)	-0.018		-0.026	0.056		0.027
Multigenerational household (yes)	0.031		0.033	0.027		-0.009
Help with children (yes)	0.021		0.012	0.068*		0.066*
Planning meals (me)	0.01		0.016	0.026		0.031
Planning children's activities (me)	0.055*		0.032	0.004		-0.003

	Women			Men		
	MODEL 1 Soc- -dem.+ House- hold organisa- tion	MODEL 2 Work conditions	MODEL 3 Full model	MODEL 1 Soc- -dem.+ House- hold organisa- tion	MODEL 2 Work conditions	MODEL 3 Full model
OCCUPATION (ref. experts)						
Clerks		-0.032	-0.006		-0.023	-0.011
Service sector		-0.026	-0.002		0.015	0.029
Industrial workers		-0.015	-0.012		-0.032	-0.002
Farmers		0.036	0.042		0.004	0.001
Other		-0.035	-0.005		-0.02	-0.005
CONTRACT (ref. full-time)		0.005	-0.01		-0.03	-0.042
WORK SHIFT (ref. morning shift)						
Work shift (2nd/3rd)		0.04	0.048		-0.062*	-0.068*
Flexible shift: controlled by employer		0.013*	0.01		0.05	0.055*
Flexible shift: controlled by employee		0.057*	0.043		0.053	0.075*
Contact outside working hours		0.06**	0.06		0.108**	0.091**
Work from home		0.092**	0.07*		0.093**	0.105**
Overtime		0.094*	0.088**		0.194**	0.201**
Free days/Holidays		0.106**	0.091**		0.114**	0.111**
Running personal or family errands during work hours		-0.064*	-0.049		-0.092**	-0.104**
Missed career opportunities (yes/no)		0.104**	0.113**		0.09**	0.081**
Work on Sundays		0.024	0.047		-0.06	-0.12
Adjusted R²	0.024	0.095	0.107	0.023	0.172	0.194

Table presents standardised regression coefficients ** $p<0.001$; * $p < 0.05$

The linear regression model for women was statistically significant ($F=10.789$, $p<0.05$). The results, reported in Table 4, Model 3, show that age significantly predicts WFC for women. The youngest group of women, aged from 18 to 29 years old, perceive work-family roles as less conflicted than women aged 30 to 39. Women in other age categories do not significantly differ in WFC compared to the 30–39 age group. While younger women report less WFC than their middle-aged counterparts, age does not significantly affect WFC for men (Model 3).

Similarly, education affects the perception of WFC among women but not among men. Results show that having a degree diploma correlates with greater WFC for women when compared to women with a 4-year secondary school who perceive the conflict of these roles as less stressful ($\beta=-0.084$). Education is not a significant predictor of WFC among men as the effect loses its significance after adding working condition variables in Model 3. This finding suggests that work conditions are a stronger predictor of WFC than sociodemographic factors for men.

For women, the significant effects of age and education on WFC in the Croatian context correspond to previous research that noted some sociodemographic characteristics of respondents as significant predictors of women's notion of work-family stress (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009). Although previous research shows that WFC also depends on the household structure (Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Gallie and Russell 2009; Laklija and Dobrotić 2009), in this particular research, contrary to expectations, having children under seven years of age in the household, living in a multigenerational household, or having additional childcare help in the household are all predictors that are not significant for women's perception of WFC. Also, doing housework or having childcare support from family members (usually grandmothers) is not significant for women's WFC. Model 1 shows that only the everyday planning of children's activities ($\beta=0.055$) correlates with WFC, but this effect disappears after adding work conditions to the Model 3.

When analysing the same data for men, comparable results are found. The linear regression model was statistically significant ($F=15.799$, $p<0.05$). Household characteristics (housework, children under seven years in a household, multigenerational household) are not significant predictors of men's perception of WFC. Interestingly, having additional help with children in the household is correlated with greater WFC for men. Additional household help in this study refers to grandmothers who help with children when needed. This may sometimes lead to greater WFC due to the perception that the available support systems do not align with the individuals' actual needs and expectations. Previous results regarding housework and perceived conflict among men in the Croatian context

show a negative correlation – indicating greater WFC when they are engaged in household work (Laklija and Dobrotić 2009).

6.2 Working conditions as predictors of WFC

Regression analysis (Model 3) confirms the effect of various working conditions on women's and men's perceptions of WFC. Working from home and working overtime contribute to perceived tension in work-family dynamics ($\beta=0.07$, $\beta=0.088$). The highest predictor of WFC for women is a missed opportunity to advance their careers due to family obligations ($\beta=0.113$). Flexibility and ability to plan vacations or run personal or family errands during work hours relates to lower WFC among women ($\beta=-0.091$, $\beta=-0.064$).

The same model was constructed to answer the question about the effect of working conditions on WFC among men, with results confirming the effect of various working conditions on men's perception of WFC. Work schedule is a significant predictor of perceived WFC. When comparing with the morning shift work, flexible working time (controlled by the employer or employee) correlates with higher WFC ($\beta=0.055$, $\beta=0.075$). Interestingly, working in unstandardised shifts is perceived as less conflicting for work-family roles ($\beta=-0.068$). Similar results can be found in other research reporting that lower-skill workers, usually working the second or third shift, experience WFC less frequently (Gallie and Russell 2009). Previous research by McGinnity and Calvert (2009) connects frequent conflict among the highly skilled professionals in West European countries working longer hours and experiencing more work pressure than other occupational groups.

Working from home and working overtime contribute to a higher tension in work-family dynamics ($\beta=0.105$, $\beta=0.201$). The highest predictor of WFC for men is the feeling of having missed career opportunity because of family obligations ($\beta=0.081$). Having the opportunity to plan vacations and taking some time during work hours for personal errands, however, are correlated with lower levels of perceived conflict ($\beta=-0.111$, $\beta=-0.104$).

Model 3 confirms that work demands like long, unsocial, and unpredictable working hours influence the level of WFC and have a negative impact on balancing work and family demands, although in different arrangements for women and men. The regression model predicts WFC more accurately for men ($R^2=19.4\%$) compared to women ($R^2=10.7\%$). This suggests that various facets of work conditions and professional life significantly influence WFC for men, highlighting the pivotal role of employment for men's work-life balance. Reflecting on the hypotheses, we can conclude that H1 is supported: sociodemographic, household, and work-related factors all predict WFC, with work conditions

emerging as the stronger predictors. H2 is partially supported: work conditions are stronger predictors for men, whereas household factors show limited but slightly stronger associations for women.

6.3 Interaction effect of social categories and working conditions, multigenerational households on WFC

Multigenerational households' impact is considered as a potential factor in either exacerbating or alleviating WFC, particularly given the inadequate level of social services for preschool children in Croatia. After adding interactions between living in multigenerational families and age categories and perception of missed career opportunities in the model, the analysis shows that the model did not change significantly (see Table 5). The overall model explains 11.2% of the variance in WFC among women and 19.4% among men. The analysis revealed a significant interaction between age and living in a multigenerational household related to WFC for women ($\beta=-0.077$). Living in a multigenerational household reduces conflicts for younger women compared to those aged 30-39 years, but this effect is not observed among men. Other interactions between living in a multigenerational household and household management variables are insignificant. Additionally, there is no significant interaction between family support and help with children and career opportunities. Multigenerational households have a limited, age-specific protective effect for young women, but they do not broadly moderate WFC or explain gender differences. H3 is therefore partially confirmed but only in a very narrow context (young women).

Table 5: Work-family conflict: multiple linear regression analysis with interaction effects for women (N=1263) and for men (N=1153) – standardised regression coefficients (β).

	Women	Men
	MODEL 1 Full model	MODEL 1 Full model
AGE (ref. 30-39 y)		
Age 18-29 y	-0.033	0.029
Age 40-49 y	0.013	0.049
Age 50+ y	-0.048	0.018
EDUCATION (ref. tertiary)		
Secondary school 3y	-0.007	-0.049
Secondary school 4y	0.080*	-0.019

HOUSEHOLD		
Children 0-7y (yes)	-0.033	-0.003
No. children (3+)	-0.026	0.027
Multigenerational household (yes)	0.048	-0.006
Help with children (yes)	0.004	0.065*
Planning meals (me)	0.019	0.031
Planning children's activities (me)	0.018	0.002
OCCUPATION (ref. experts)	-0.13	
Clerks	-0.012	-0.011
Service sector	-0.008	0.029
Industrial workers	-0.014	-0.003
Farmers	0.040	0.001
Other	-0.007	-0.005
CONTRACT (ref. full-time)		-0.042
WORK SHIFT (ref. morning shift)	0.047	-0.069
Work shift (2nd/3rd)	0.012	0.055*
Flexible shift: controlled by employer	0.044	0.075
Flexible shift: controlled by employee	0.058	0.091*
Contact outside working hours	0.067*	0.104*
Work from home	0.090*	0.201*
Overtime	-0.087*	-0.111*
Free days/Holidays (yes)	-0.087*	-0.104*
Running personal or family errands during work hours	-0.049	0.080*
Missed career opportunities (yes)	0.087	-0.069*
Work on Sundays	0.047	0.055*
Multigenerational household*age 18-29	-0.077*	-0.013
Multigenerational household*age 4049	-0.057	-0.001
Multigenerational household*age 50+	0.028	-0.004
Multigenerational household*help with children	-0.041	0.003
Missed career opportunities*help with children	-0.005	-0.009
Adjusted R ²	0.112	0.194

Table presents standardised regression coefficients **p<0.001; *p <0.05

7 Discussion and conclusion

This article began by examining contrasting explanations for the sources of WFC, focusing on pressures stemming from both the workplace and the family structure and obligations. The analysed model incorporated both theoretically driven and contextually relevant factors on an individual level, household and employment levels, including working conditions. By integrating gender as a key variable, the analysis first examined gender differences between men and women and identifies key predictors that contribute to inequalities and variations in the frequency of WFC, examining these patterns within gender groups for both women and men.

Reported conflict among employed parents in Croatia moves in the direction of work-to-family but not from family-to-work. Women overall experience greater WFC than men, which is consistent with another research done in Croatia (Laklja and Dobrotić 2009) and internationally (Crompton and Lyonette 2006). The predictors of WFC are found in age, level of education, nature of household obligations and selective working conditions, however, the determined predictors show different arrangements for women and men.

Women with university education report greater WFC than women with 4-year secondary high school. This is consistent with other research done internationally that names this phenomenon a high-status strain, which occurs due to the tendency of highly educated persons to be employed at jobs where working conditions blur the boundaries between work and home (Schieman and Glavin 2011; Tunlid 2020). However, differences between the perception of WFC of women with university education and 3-year secondary school education (vocational education and crafts) is not found. This may indicate that the current job market opportunities and access to childcare social services align more with women whose work organisation and job characteristics relate to a 4-year secondary school education. Job characteristics and work conditions associated with 3-year high school education and tertiary education do not provide enough support to mitigate effects of WFC.

While education consistently predicts work-family conflict (WFC) for women, this effect vanishes for men once working conditions are considered in the model. Work-related characteristics and job demands may explain why more educated working mothers experience greater WFC (Tunlid 2020). Tunlid (2020) also explores the role of childcare in perceived WFC, arguing that childcare services reduce conflict for less educated mothers but increase conflict for more educated mothers with very young children. She argues that childcare services need to adequately respond to higher-educated mothers' work demands and schedules.

The group of women from 30 to 39 years of age exhibit greater WFC which may result from being the primary carers of very young children, especially in the context of insufficient access to kindergartens for children under the age of 3. The gendered differentiation of WFC predictors imply that WFC depends on the parents' changing obligations in the household and the primacy of work in different stages of the life cycle. The nature of housework to be done, whether doing versus organising housework and family activities, places different pressure on women and men. While women may assign their usual house chores to other persons within or outside of the household (e.g., fathers or grandparents), the organisational aspects of housework and childcare are almost solely under the women's purview which creates strain in their work and family roles. Employed women were previously shown to give priority to family and motherhood over work (Klasnić 2017). Modernisation attitudes and values on gender equality have in Croatia only been partially adopted, and patriarchal relations and practices continue to dominate the family sphere (Tomić Koludrović et al. 2018) which compels women to maintain work activity and find different strategies for harmonizing private and work life.

While working conditions predict WFC for both men and women, they play the most significant role in predicting WFC for men. Research conducted by Gallie and Russell (2009) showed that extended working hours are likely to present a significant pressure for family life because of the level of physical exhaustion experienced by employees. They concluded that aspects of working conditions that create WFC are overtime work and work from home, flexible working hours and employer inflexibility to do errands during work hours when necessary. Similarly, Čop (2024) found flexible working arrangements which allow doing family tasks during the workday do reduce WFC among self-employed women. Nonetheless, flexibility often translates into less clear boundaries between work and family life, including working from home and being available at any time, which increases the experience of WFC (Schieman and Glavin 2008).

When the influence of working conditions on WFC is compared to the influence of household organisation and care demands, the analysis confirmed that the latter have much weaker influence on WFC. Furthermore, the regression model strongly predicts WFC among men ($R^2=19.4\%$) than among women ($R^2=10.7\%$), indicating that wider working conditions are related to WFC. The used scale is more sensitive to the spillover from work to family life, an issue that previous research already addressed (see Byron 2005; Gallie and Russell 2009).

Further analysis was done (Table 5) to examine the influence the unequal experiences of multigenerational households on WFC due to their high incidence in the Croatian context. The results suggest that the impact of living in a

multigenerational household on WFC varies by age for women. Younger women benefit more from living in such households and experience lower WFC than women aged 30-39. Younger women may receive more help with childcare and housework or other material and emotional support from live-in family members which can alleviate the pressure of work and family responsibilities.

Based on the findings and scope of this research, future studies of WFC should examine the relationships between working conditions and unpaid household work, both physical, mental and emotional labour. Furthermore, a closer examination of working conditions across different employment sectors should be considered in connection to education but also because men in the service sector exhibit greater WFC. Finally, an in-depth qualitative study of the reasons why persons with higher education report greater WFC, as well as expectations they have from parenthood and careers, which may enrich the high-strain thesis.

This study offers important conceptual and practical contributions by showing that the causes of WFC differ significantly for women and men across different stages of life. By examining how factors such as age, education, household responsibilities, and working conditions interact in shaping WFC, the analysis provides a more nuanced understanding that enriches existing theoretical frameworks. A key contribution lies in the observation that certain forms of household support can have contrasting effects on women's and men's experiences of WFC, underscoring the importance of understanding household dynamics and gender expectations. These findings hold value for the development or evaluation of work-balance policies that consider the intersection of gender, age, education, employment status and family responsibilities, helping individuals balance contemporary work and family demands.

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