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Women's Work-Family Balance in Slovenia: Associations With Job Stress, Division of Labor Satisfaction, and Relational Well-Being

ELIZABETH DORRANCE-HALL[1]
KELSEY EARLE
MENGYAN MA
LORRAINE KUCH
YUE ZHANG
KATIE OSIKA
Michigan State University, USA

Slovenia has a unique culture because of its high gender equality index but traditional gender roles. As such, the Slovene population is of particular interest regarding communication between romantic partners, especially when interrole conflicts occur because of work-family (WF; when work responsibilities interfere with family) and family-work (FW; when family life interferes with work) conflict. This study explores the associations among job stress, division of labor (DoL), WF and FW conflict, and relational well-being. We surveyed 95 Slovene women in dual-earner couples (married or in lifelong commitments) about their work and family lives. DoL satisfaction was negatively associated with DoL proportion (the share of housework completed by each person) and positively associated with FW conflict. Job stress and WF conflict were positively associated. Only FW conflict was inversely associated with positive relational outcomes. This study provides insight into how Slovene women experience interrole conflict and the potential impact of FW conflict on relational well-being. Implications for relational, gender, and work-life scholars and practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: relational well-being, work-family conflict, role conflict, Slovenia, support

Elizabeth Dorrance-Hall: elizabeth.dorrance@gmail.com
Kelsey Earle: earlekel@msu.edu
Mengyan Ma: mengyan.ma17@gmail.com
Lorraine Kuch: kuchlorr@msu.edu
Yue Zhang: zhan1600@msu.edu
Katie Osika: osikakat@msu.edu
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Slovenia ranks relatively high in gender equality compared with other countries because of the near complete participation of women in the workforce and the promotion of gender equality in the public sphere (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2018). Slovenia has generous familial leave policies and public preprimary education and childcare (Humer & Kuhar, 2020; Stropnik, 2018). However, empowerment in one area (e.g., workforce participation) does not signify empowerment in all areas of life (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996). Despite Slovenia's gender equality ranking, women work similar hours for pay as their partners (DeRose et al., 2019) yet devote a larger proportion of their time to family life and household work than men (Švab, Rener, & Kuhar, 2012). Globally, engagement in paid work has not reduced gender discrepancies in the division of labor (DoL; Fuwa, 2004; Greenstein, 2009; Van der Lippe, Treas, & Norbutas, 2018). Women in full-time, dual-earner couples still take on most domestic labor (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015). In Slovenia, this standard has remained largely unchanged since the 1970s (Švab et al., 2012; Ule, Mežnaric, & Ferligoj, 1978). Indeed, Švab et al. (2012) note that "in 2005 in 75–80% of cases it was exclusively women who, in addition to bearing a full workload, did the majority of housework and childcare in Slovenia" (p. 427). This is problematic, as taking on unequal levels of domestic labor has been linked to reduced well-being (Shelton & John, 1996; Waddell, Overall, Chang, & Hammond, 2021). These negative effects are often amplified when DoL is unsatisfactory or causes conflict (Adelson, Nelson, & Hafiz, 2021).

The contradiction between traditional gender roles and high workforce participation for Slovene women may set the stage for frequent work-family (WF) and family-work (FW) conflicts. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined *work-family conflict* as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible" (p. 77). When the demands of *work* interfere with *family* life, this is considered WF conflict. *Family-work conflict* is "a form of interrole conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities" (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996, p. 401). When the demands of *family* life interfere with *work* responsibilities, this is considered FW conflict (Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981).

Across the globe, the inequalities between men and women in DoL are well documented. In Slovenia, the (a) near complete participation of women in the workforce, (b) tendency of men and women to both work full time, (c) promotion of gender equality in the public sphere, and (d) traditional gender roles provide a unique context for understanding communication between romantic partners, especially when work and family roles conflict. This study aims to understand the role of stressors, such as job stress and DoL (dis)satisfaction, on WF and FW conflict in reducing the quality of communication and relational well-being for Slovene women who are married or in long-term committed relationships. The findings of this study contribute to the relational, gender, and work-life literature and suggest ways Slovene couples can better manage role conflict to improve their communication and romantic relationships.

Below, we start by providing a brief historical background concerning women and work in Slovenia. Then, we define relational well-being and the important role of communication as a marker of relational health. Next, we discuss DoL in terms of how it is proportioned in the home and its relationship to satisfaction. Then, we identify potential antecedents of WF/FW conflict (e.g., job stress) and explore how WF/FW conflict might be associated with markers of relational well-being (i.e., relationship satisfaction, communication quality, and partner support availability) in Slovenia.

Women and Work in Slovenia

A brief socio-economic primer sets the stage for understanding the work and family lives of women in Slovenia (for more historical details, see Kralj & Rener, 2015). At the start of World War II, around 18% of the industrial workers in Slovenia were women (Tomšič, 1980). During this time, women did not receive equal pay for equal work and were largely dependent on their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Women played an important role in many social movements in the 1900s, including the National Liberation Movement in the 1940s. Marxist and socialist movements in the 1970s led to significant political and economic empowerment for women (Kralj & Rener, 2015). However, issues such as reproductive rights and domestic violence were denied or unaddressed, and a "backlash against the social rights of women" occurred (Kralj & Rener, 2015, p. 3). By 1979, the number of women in the workforce had increased to 44%, but women were still paid considerably less than men (Rener, 1985). Women became increasingly frustrated with "state feminism" where women were "formally and legally equal," but equality was not realized in everyday life (Kralj & Rener, 2015, p. 5).

To support women's employment under socialism, the state provided generous parental leave and childcare. This was the case in many countries in Europe, but not all countries retained these policies and systems post-socialism (Formánková & Dobrotić, 2011). A notable example is the government subsidized high-quality public childcare available from the time a child is 11 months old. According to Formánková and Dobrotić (2011), "Slovenia has succeeded in keeping the solid basis of care policy developed during socialism, while implementing additional policies" (p. 418). In other European countries, policies with similar roots have been abandoned or had unintended effects, ultimately reinforcing gender inequality.

Policies like these are partially responsible for the success of keeping such a large share of women in the workforce, although their impacts are not uniformly positive. Policies that prioritize leave for mothers can also inadvertently uphold traditional gender roles. Generous parental leave policies can result in discrimination against young female job applicants who may require lengthy absences from work. Parental leave is actively being expanded (e.g., the 2022 Amended Parental Care Act) to increase the amount of time fathers take off work (Breznik, Duvnjak, & Lužar, 2023). In practice, mothers tend to take time that can be used by either parent.

The high value placed on family, and the mother's role in particular (Švab et al., 2012), coupled with policies that support the near complete participation of women in the workforce, creates an impossible bind where women are overburdened. This is especially true for those taking care of their children and/or their elderly parents (Švab et al., 2012). Although gains have been made in the 21st century, a 2007 Office for Equal Opportunities report concluded that the "social status of women in Slovenia is still deteriorating" (Kralj & Rener, 2015, p. 19), referencing a low glass ceiling and a high level of maternal mortality. Considering both paid and unpaid work, Slovene women work an average of 50 minutes more than men per day (Zannella, Hammer, Prskawetz, & Sambt, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a major disruption in work-life routines in Slovenia and across the world. Women faced a disproportionate impact from the increased burden of balancing family and work responsibilities (Štebe & Vovk, 2021). Slovenia engaged in a complete lockdown that involved

prohibiting residents from leaving their municipality and the closure of schools and childcare facilities in 2020 (Ružić Gorenjec et al., 2021). School closures and restricted mobility had implications for parents' ability to work (e.g., limiting access to extended family for childcare). This historical and sociocultural context shapes and constrains the way women make sense of their work-life balance and roles within society. With this in mind, we turn to linking these challenges with romantic partner communication quality and relational well-being.

Communication Quality and Relational Well-Being

Relational well-being contributes to overall mental, emotional, and social well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Understanding relationship dynamics helps to identify factors that foster fulfillment and resilience, leading to an improved quality of life. Here, relational well-being is conceptualized as high-quality communication—perceptions that one's partner is available for support if needed—and high relationship satisfaction. We were especially interested in these factors in the Slovene context, where most women work full time yet fulfill fairly traditional gender roles at home. Considering recent sociopolitical moves toward gender equality, including parental leave policy changes in Slovenia, tension may arise between romantic partners, especially when work and family roles conflict.

Partner communication quality is captured by the concept of confirming communication. All humans inherently need to be validated (or confirmed) by close others (Buber, Friedman, & Smith, 1965; Dailey, 2006). Confirming communication includes messages and nonverbal behaviors that express affection, warmth, and approval and may push partners to examine their goals, emotions, and potential. This type of high-quality communication is linked to positive outcomes, such as physical health, a strong identity, open discussion in the relationship, and relationship satisfaction (Cranmer, Brann, & Weber, 2018; Dailey, 2019; Zhong, Wang, & Dailey, 2022).

Perceived partner support refers to the perception that a partner will be available to help if needed (Uchino, 2009; Wills & Shinar, 2000). Confirming communication and perceptions of partner support availability are considered positive for relational well-being and stability (Zhong et al., 2022). Partner support is particularly important for women in cultures where there are traditional gender roles (Emmons, Biernat, Tiedje, Lang, & Wortman, 1990). Gender is one of the most reliable factors in determining the amount of housework that people do, with women taking on most of the work (Kroska, 2004). Since women complete a greater share of the housework than their partners, their need for partner support is often high but not fulfilled (Adams & Golsch, 2021).

Relationship satisfaction is the subjective meaning that partners assign to their relationship, including perceptions of how well the relationship meets one's needs and expectations and how it compares to other relationships (Hendrick, 1988). Stress is negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction for couples in North and South America (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). When people feel overwhelmed by family and work responsibilities, their relationships can suffer. Relationship satisfaction is lower for partners who believe that the household DoL is unfair, which has been linked to an increased likelihood of divorce for dual-earner couples in the United States (Frisco & Williams, 2003). High quality partner communication

(i.e., confirmation), perceptions of support availability, and relational well-being are likely linked with how partners perceive equality in the relationship and the balance they strike in their relationship and work lives.

DoL Proportion and Satisfaction

The DoL proportion refers to the share of household chores (e.g., unpaid work done to care for family and/or home; Shelton & John, 1996) completed by each person. Slovenia is unique in that both men and women tend to work full-time. Despite this, traditional gender roles make it likely that women perform most household chores. It is also likely that in Slovenia, like many other European countries (Greenstein, 2009), the proportion of chores completed (DoL proportion) by an individual is inversely related to DoL satisfaction (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988). DoL satisfaction is likely to be higher when one person feels that their partner does their "fair share" of housework (Waddell et al., 2021). In this study, DoL proportion refers to the share of household duties performed, and DoL satisfaction refers to whether partners are happy with the way they divide housework with others in their home. Although we expect Slovene women to respond similarly to women in other countries, we cannot unequivocally predict how DoL will operate. Traditional gender roles may normalize a higher proportion of household work and thereby reduce dissatisfaction compared with other countries. Švab et al. (2012) note that although women in Slovenia have "internalised or at least come to accept their unequal workload" (p. 428), asymmetrical DoL may be partially responsible for the declining birth rate in Slovenia, indicating dissatisfaction with unequal DoL (Ule & Kuhar, 2008). As such, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: How, if at all, is DoL proportion associated with DoL satisfaction for Slovene women?

Women may find it difficult to navigate and balance both their home and work duties. When working full-time, conflicts between work and family domains are inevitable, especially when these roles are incompatible (Galovan et al., 2010). The next section examines the conflicting demands of work and family roles.

Interrole Conflict: WF and FW Conflict

When stress from one domain influences the functioning of the other or the pressures of one role are incompatible or inconsistent with another role, people experience interrole conflict. The demands of work and family can often cause such interrole conflict (Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981). However, the direction of the interrole conflict matters. A parent who takes phone calls at the dinner table after work instead of engaging in family conversation likely experiences *WF conflict* (i.e., when work demands interfere with family life). A parent who leaves work to pick up a child is facing *FW conflict* (i.e., when family demands interfere with work), as their parenting role interferes with their ability to work.

Gender and cultural factors likely impact WF and FW conflicts. Women face many burdens of role conflict in their work and home lives. Women who navigate roles such as elder caregivers, mothers, and wives experience role stress related to caregiving (Stephens, Franks, & Townsend, 1994). A 2009 study found that nearly 70% of Slovene survey respondents felt that women struggled more with work-life balance than men because of their unequal share of housework and care responsibilities (Jogan, Kajzer,

& Božović, 2012). Role overload can occur when there are too many tasks to complete, insufficient time, or insufficient resources to complete certain tasks (Aryee, Luk, Leung, & Lo, 1999). Family and work-related overload can influence the amount of WF or FW conflict experienced. Intercultural differences, such as traditional gender roles and policies that reflect cultural ideals (e.g., parental leave policies), may also vary the expression of role conflict (Aryee et al., 1999). However, in a meta-analysis, Allen, French, Dumani, and Shockley (2015) found no differences in reports of WF conflict between countries from around the world. Non-U.S. collectivist countries with a higher pay gap reported higher levels of FW conflict (compared with the United States, individualistic countries, and countries with a low pay gap). As such, the individual, cultural, and contextual factors within a given space may be examined to understand the dynamics of these relationships.

Predictors of WF and FW Conflicts

Job stress is the experience of mental or emotional strain caused by one's work and career (Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986). Job-related stressors may include a lack of autonomy, schedule inflexibility, work-role overload, work-role ambiguity, and job tension (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Job stress and WF conflict are related; when job stress interferes with one's functioning at home, WF conflict occurs. Family tends to be more central to the identity of women than men (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991), such that when women have more work responsibilities, they are likely to experience greater WF conflict. Indeed, a meta-analysis of 25 independent samples (N = 9,079) found that job stressors were positively and consistently correlated with WF conflict (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). A second meta-analysis based on 178 samples found that work-role stressors, such as job stress, role overload, and role conflict, preceded WF conflicts (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). The link between job stress and WF conflict has been established among a wide variety of professions, marital statuses, and countries; therefore, we propose the following hypothesis to confirm this link for Slovene women in dual-earner relationships.

H1: Job stress will be positively associated with reports of WF conflict for Slovene women.

Higher involvement in housework (e.g., a higher proportion of DoL) can contribute to greater role conflict, such as FW conflict, because of time and energy demands created by having multiple demanding roles (i.e., partner/parent, and employee; Rosenfield, 1989). Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran's (2005) meta-analysis suggests that time spent on household chores and caretaking is consistently and positively associated with FW conflict in 25 samples. A study of Chinese parents found a relationship between parental overload and FW conflict (Aryee et al., 1999; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). Michel et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis also supported the link between household labor (e.g., family stressors, role overload, time, and role conflict) and FW conflict.

There is much less empirical evidence for a link between DoL *satisfaction* and FW conflict. However, role theory provides a starting point for understanding why the two may be inversely related. If an individual is satisfied with the amount of work they do at home, has a low proportion of DoL, or both, then it is less likely they experience role conflict with their work duties. If household duties are not burdensome, people may not have as many household stressors to interfere with work, thereby reducing interrole conflict. DoL

proportion and satisfaction are likely related to perceptions of FW conflict. When individuals are satisfied with DoL or have a low proportion of household labor, we expect they will report *less* FW conflict, while individuals who are not satisfied with their DoL or who take on a large proportion of household duties will report *more* FW conflict. We propose a series of hypotheses to test these associations.

H2a: DoL proportion will be positively associated with FW conflict.

H2b: DoL satisfaction will be negatively associated with FW conflict.

The next section explores the associations between WF and FW conflict and markers of relational well-being (i.e., satisfaction, quality communication, and partner support).

WF/FW Conflict and Relational Well-Being Outcomes

People have finite resources available, so when the demands of one role are incompatible with the demands of the other, the resulting interrole conflict can cause various negative outcomes for individuals and families (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). WF/FW conflict is likely to erode relational well-being, including satisfaction with the marital relationship, quality of communication between partners, and perceptions of partner support availability (Yoo, 2022). Stryker (1980) notes that when the work or family role salience of both partners is high, they allocate personal resources to that role, resulting in depletion of resources available for other roles (e.g., support provider), which results in high WF or FW conflict. WF/FW conflict was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction for men and women in a South Korean sample, but the effect was found to be stronger for women (Yoo, 2022). Associations between WF conflict and negative relational outcomes likely exist because spending a lot of time at work or facing "heavy" work stressors compromises a person's cognitive ability to be present and attentive at home, thereby eroding family relationships (Barling & MacEwan, 1992). Meta-analyses have shown that WF conflict is associated with reduced relational and physical well-being (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Fellows, Chiu, Hill, & Hawkins, 2016), including reduced family satisfaction and less investment in romantic relationships (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005).

FW conflict has also been associated with reduced relational well-being (Yoo, 2022). The role scarcity hypothesis (Marks, 1977) explains that people who strongly identify with their family roles may struggle to fulfill their work roles, thereby increasing FW conflict. Working parents, especially women, may see FW conflict spillover into their romantic relationships (Carlson & Frone, 2003). In Slovenia, tolerance for home responsibilities interfering with work responsibilities is unclear. On one hand, social policies are supportive of parents; on the other hand, many have help from extended family members; therefore, they may be expected to better juggle home demands, as the extended family can step in and help with care (Švab et al., 2012).

Beyond relational satisfaction, research has seldom examined how WF/FW conflict is linked to other markers of relational well-being such as the use of high quality, *confirming communication* (i.e., communication marked by warmth and validation; Dailey, 2006) and perceptions of *partner support*

availability. This study examines all three relational well-being outcomes for a more robust link between WF/FW conflict and markers of a successful relationship.

Considering that being validated by others is a universal human need (Buber et al., 1965), we expect theorizing about confirming messages to also apply in Slovene culture. We also expect the link between WF/FW conflict and romantic *partner communication quality* to be similar to WF/FW conflict and relationship satisfaction. WF conflict has been associated with increased negative mood, aggression, and withdrawal from partner interaction (Schulz, Cowan, Pape Cowan, & Brennan, 2004; Song, Foo, & Uy, 2008); therefore, we expect that people experiencing WF/FW conflict are less able to exchange quality communication with their partners.

Those whose work stress negatively affects their family life may not feel that they have the support they need from their partners. Social support tends to be reciprocal, and stressed individuals may not have the resources to invest in supporting their partners. We predict that WF conflict will be negatively linked to *perceived partner support* availability. One study examined full-time workers in the Midwestern United States and found that WF conflict was negatively related to perceived support availability from families (Adams, King, & King, 1996). Many studies on dual-earner couples have investigated the negative relationship between WF conflict and *received* (instead of perceived) partner support (e.g., Patel, Beekhan, Paruk, & Ramgoon, 2008). However, past research has demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between perceived and received support (e.g., Melrose, Brown, & Wood, 2015).

Similarly, experiencing FW conflict is likely to be negatively associated with perceived support, since the high allocation of personal resources to work results in the depletion of resources available to fulfill family responsibilities (Stets, 2006). It may also be the case that someone experiencing FW conflict is doing more household labor and requires more help from their partner to keep family life from affecting their worker role. To explore the links between WF/FW conflict and relational well-being outcomes, including relationship satisfaction, quality communication, and perceived partner support in Slovenia, we propose the following research question:

RQ2: How will reported WF/FW conflict be associated with (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) confirmation (e.g., communication quality), and (c) partner support availability?

Method

Procedures

The survey and recruitment materials were offered in English and Slovene (professionally translated). After receiving institutional review board approval , participants were recruited using a snowball sample of individuals in the first author's network. Recruitment materials were forwarded to eligible contacts. In addition, Facebook advertising was used to target adults in a relationship living in Slovenia. Participants completed a short enrollment survey to assess eligibility.

Eligibility requirements were culturally informed. For example, many Slovene couples choose to be part of a committed romantic relationship without getting married. The Slovene term for this type of relationship is "zunajzakonska zveza," which directly translates into extramarital union (similar to a common-law marriage in the United States but easier to establish). Extramarital unions are granted the same legal standing as marriages in Slovenia (Švab et al., 2012). Participants were eligible for participation if they were married or in an extramarital union.[2] Participants also had to live in Slovenia and be part of a dual-earner couple where both partners worked full-time (at least 35 hours per week).

If eligible, participants were sent a link to informed consent information and the full 30-minute survey hosted on Qualtrics. The surveys were completed in November and December 2021. Although COVID-19 protocols (e.g., wearing masks) were still in effect, most Slovene adults had returned to work. Every 20th participant was compensated with an e-gift card.

Participants

The participants included 95 Slovene women. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 72, with an average age of 38.17 (*SD* = 6.67). Participants reported their ethnicity as Slovene (*n* = 66), Serb (*n* = 3), other (*n* = 2), or no response (*n* = 24). Most participants reported being heterosexual (*n* = 68), one person reported being bisexual, and the remaining participants did not respond to the question (*n* = 26). Participants reported being married (*n* = 58; 61.1%) or in a long-term partnership (*n* = 37; 38.9%). The average relationship length for all participants was 13.97 years (*SD* = 7.01, range = 4–37 years). Additional demographic information was collected at the end of the online survey, and several individuals did not complete this section. Of the participants who completed the demographic items, a majority reported having at least one child (67/71, 94.4%) many of whom still had one or more children living at home (76/95, 80%).

Measures

Job Stress

Job stress was measured with four items (Motowidlo et al., 1986) on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items (e.g., "my job is extremely stressful") were averaged to create a composite variable where higher scores indicated more job stress (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = 1.12, α = 0.87).

DoL Proportion

DoL proportion was measured by asking participants a single item, "What proportion of the household chores (e.g., cleaning, cooking) do you do for your family?" The response options ranged from 0 (my partner/family does it all), 5 (equal contribution), to 10 (I do it all). Higher scores indicate that the

[2] There were no differences in study variables between those in extramarital unions and marriages except for DoL proportion. Those in an extramarital union reported a higher DoL proportion than those who were married (t (81) = −2.57, $p < .05$, d = 0.61; extramarital union M = 7.58, SD = 1.26; married M = 6.63, SD = 1.79).

participant does a higher proportion of labor (*M* = 6.99, *SD* = 1.67). The mean score of just under seven indicates that on average, participants do more of the household chores than their partners/family.

DoL Satisfaction

To assess DoL satisfaction, participants were asked one item: "Are you satisfied with the current way you and your partner/family divide the housework and chores in your home?" Responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). A higher score indicates more satisfaction with DoL (*M* = 4.54, *SD* = 2.07).

WF/FW Conflict

To assess WF and FW conflict, participants rated 12 items on a 5-point Likert scale (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). WF and FW items were respectively averaged together to create two composite scores where higher scores indicate more 1) WF and 2) FW conflict. Six items measured WF conflict (*M* = 2.58, *SD* = 1.05, α = 0.87), and six items measured FW conflict (*M* = 1.93, *SD* =0.82, α = 0.817). An example item of WF conflict is: "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like." An example item of FW conflict is: "Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work."

Relationship Satisfaction

To measure relationship satisfaction, the participants were asked to rate their agreement with seven items from the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). For example, "My partner meets my needs." Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were averaged, and higher scores indicated more relationship satisfaction (*M* = 3.93, *SD* = 0.95, α = 0.945).

Partner Communication Quality (Confirmation)

Communication quality was measured using 12 items adapted from Ellis's (2002) Parent Confirmation Behavior Indicator (PCBI). "Father/mother" was replaced with "partner" in the scale instructions. Participants were asked to "indicate how frequently your partner engages in each of the behaviors." For example: "Makes statements that communicate to me that I am a unique, valuable human being." Responses ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Items were averaged so that higher scores indicated better partner communication quality (*M* = 4.81, *SD* = 1.46, α = 0.952).

Perceived Availability of Partner Support

Four partner support availability items were adapted from Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988; α =.928). "Special person" used in the original scale was replaced with "partner." For example, "My partner is around when I am in need." Responses ranged from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Items were averaged together to create a composite variable where higher scores indicated more perceived availability of partner support (*M* = 5.74, *SD* = 1.44).

Results

Length of relationship, age, and relationship status were significantly associated with the study variables (see Table 1 for correlations) and were therefore included as covariates in the analyses reported below.

Table 1. Correlations.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Job Satisfaction	–										
2. DoL Proportion	−0.26*	–									
3. DoL Satisfaction	0.19	−0.40**	–								
4. WF Conflict	−0.40**	0.34	−0.24*	–							
5. FW Conflict	−0.10	0.05	−0.24*	0.30**	–						
6. Relationship Satisfaction	0.21	−0.36**	0.68**	−0.10	−0.35**	–					
7. Confirmation	0.18	−0.27*	0.64**	−0.09	−0.29**	0.84**	–				
8. Partner Support	0.17	−0.32**	0.66**	−0.01	−0.24*	0.88**	0.89**	–			
9. Length of Relationship	−0.06	0.10	−0.15	0.06	−0.05	−0.11	−0.21	−0.21	–		
10. Age	0.06	−0.02	−0.22*	0.004	−0.09	−0.04	−0.19	−0.23*	0.73**	–	
11.Relationship Status	−0.06	0.28*	−0.01	0.14	0.19	−0.08	0.10	0.04	0.001	0.02	–

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. WF = work-family, FW = family-work, DoL = division of labor.

Main Analysis

Research question one was posed to examine the association between the proportion of and satisfaction with DoL for Slovene women. To answer RQ1, hierarchical regression was conducted. DoL proportion was entered in block 1, and control variables (age, length of relationship, and relationship status) were entered in block 2. DoL satisfaction was included as the dependent variable. DoL proportion was negatively associated with reported DoL satisfaction ($b = -0.55$, $\beta = -0.45$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$). As DoL proportion increased, DoL satisfaction decreased.

H1 predicted that job stress would be positively associated with reports of WF conflict. To answer H1, hierarchical regression was conducted with control variables entered in block 1 and job stress in block 2. Job stress was positively associated with WF conflict ($b = 0.69$, $\beta = 0.74$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$). As job stress increased, so did reports of WF conflict. H1 was supported.

H2a predicted that DoL proportion would be positively associated with FW conflict. H2b predicted that DoL satisfaction would be negatively associated with FW conflict. To answer H2a-b, linear regression was conducted with control variables entered in block 1, and DoL proportion and DoL satisfaction entered in block 2. FW conflict was entered as the dependent variable. DoL proportion was not significantly associated with FW conflict ($b = -0.08$, $\beta = -0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.21$). DoL satisfaction was negatively associated with FW conflict ($b = -0.13$, $\beta = -0.33$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .05$) so that as DoL satisfaction increased, FW conflict decreased and vice versa. H2b was supported.

RQ2 asked how WF/FW conflict would be associated with (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) confirmation (e.g., communication quality), and (c) partner support. To answer RQ2, three regressions were conducted, one for each dependent variable (a–c). Control variables were included in block 1, and WF and FW conflicts were included in block 2.

Relationship Satisfaction

Controlling for FW conflict, length of relationship, age, and relationship status, WF conflict was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($b = 0.001$, $\beta = 0.001$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.99$). FW conflict was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.43$, $\beta = -0.37$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$).

Partner Communication Quality

WF conflict was not significantly associated with confirmation ($b = -0.03$, $\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.84$). FW conflict was negatively associated with confirmation ($b = -0.61$, $\beta = -0.35$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .01$).

Perceived Partner Support

WF conflict was not significantly associated with partner support availability ($b = 0.06$, $\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.73$). FW conflict was negatively associated with partner support availability ($b = -0.53$, $\beta = -0.30$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .05$).

In all three models, an increase in FW conflict was associated with a significant decrease in relationship well-being (e.g., satisfaction, confirmation, and perceived support).

Discussion

Slovenia has a unique culture in terms of the (a) near complete participation of women in the workforce, (b) tendency for men and women to work full time, (c) promotion of gender equality in the public sphere, and (d) traditional gender roles (Švab et al., 2012). This set of characteristics provides a distinctive context for understanding communication between romantic partners, especially when work and family roles conflict. This study aimed to understand the role of DoL and WF/FW conflict in romantic partner communication quality and relational well-being. Most notably, the results reveal that for Slovene women, FW conflict (but not WF conflict) was associated with reduced relational well-being (i.e., poorer relationship satisfaction, partner communication quality, and perceptions of partner support availability). These findings contribute to relational, gender, and work-life literature and theorizing. In a practical sense, these findings suggest the potential of managing role conflict to improve the quality of communication and romantic relationships. Below, we discuss the implications of our findings for relational, gender, and work-life scholars and practitioners and present ideas for future research.

The implications of this study center on the most interesting set of findings: the negative associations between FW conflict and relational outcomes—including partner support availability, partner communication quality, and relationship satisfaction—and the lack of an association between WF conflict and relational outcomes. Based on role theory and previous empirical evidence, we expected both types of conflict to be associated with reduced relational well-being. Instead, we found that only FW conflict was associated with lower satisfaction, reduced perceived partner support availability, and lower quality communication. We propose two implications: first, the need for work-life scholars to account for the unique features of the culture they are studying in their research. Second, we emphasize the importance of FW conflict for understanding the link between interrole conflict and relational well-being.

Culturally sensitive theorizing is needed to understand why some of the theory-based predictions were supported and others were not. In many ways, the Slovene women in this study experienced DoL and FW/WF conflict similarly to women elsewhere in the world. Additionally, the findings support burgeoning evidence that FW conflict is associated with reduced relational functioning (Yoo, 2022). However, some interesting differences were not expected. The findings do not support the link between WF conflict and relational satisfaction, which *is* typically found across cultures (Allen et al., 2015; Fellows et al., 2016).

WF conflict was not associated with any relational well-being variables. This suggests that other factors (including FW conflict) drive relational well-being. Here, we explore potential explanations for the lack of association. First, we examined mean reports of WF and FW conflict and found that Slovene women in this sample reported more WF than FW conflict (both were low),[3] yet WF conflict was not associated with relational well-being. It is possible that WF conflict is more normative and expected in the Slovene culture

[3] T-test results confirm that there is a significant difference (t (82) = 5.36, $p < .001$; WF conflict M = 2.59, SD = 1.05; FW conflict M = 1.93, SD = 0.82).

because so many women are in the workforce and thereby does not have the same link to reduced relational well-being as it does in other cultures. Alternatively, this link may be nonsignificant because of a lower emphasis on work as central to one's identity in Slovenia compared with other countries (e.g., 70% of employees report they are unengaged in work; Žnidaršič & Bernik, 2021). Work-life scholars should consider cultural features that may result in different interrole conflict outcomes. In addition, scholars should examine the potential benefits of participation in the workforce (beyond WF conflict) for relational health; for example, empowerment, confidence in one's abilities, and being promoted at work may have positive spillover effects.

Second, the findings highlight the important role of FW conflict in understanding relational well-being, but more research is needed to understand the direction of this link. All three types of relational well-being were negatively associated with experiences of FW conflict. When women fail to meet cultural standards for balancing work and family, their relationships may suffer. Given Slovene women's traditional gender roles and higher proportions of housework, it is likely that women are expected to allow family needs to interrupt their work. Despite this expectation, gender equality is lauded in government and workplace policies. Women's frustration with this duality may be taken out on their partner, with consequences for their romantic relationship well-being. These findings suggest that FW/WF conflict scholars should consider what is normative in each culture to understand the gravity of FW/WF conflict and its potential ramifications for romantic relationship health.

It is important to note that our cross-sectional data do not allow us to make definitive claims about whether FW conflict drives reduced relational well-being or vice versa. In fact, it is likely a cyclical relationship where conflict contributes to poor relational well-being, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of experiencing family interference at work. For example, if a woman perceives that her partner is unable to provide support, she may not ask for help when a child is sick. Instead, she leaves work early—thereby creating FW conflict. Experiencing FW conflict puts stress on individuals whose roles are overtaxed, compromising their cognitive capacity to invest in and maintain romantic relationships. Couples with poor relational health may see a rise in FW conflict. If women are not getting the support they need and struggle to communicate, their family lives may be more likely to conflict with work.

WF/FW conflict research has not traditionally considered the effects of WF/FW interrole conflict on partner communication quality and perceptions of support availability. Our study provides evidence that these are important considerations in addition to relationship satisfaction. The strongest links were between FW conflict and (a) relationship satisfaction and (b) romantic partner communication quality. These links are worrisome, as high-quality communication and perceived partner support provide buffering for the link between stress and negative health outcomes (MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005).

Practical Implications

Our findings indicate that FW conflict plays a role in relational health and should be mitigated where possible. When family issues interfere with a woman's work, couples should be encouraged to have constructive conversations about their expectations of who handles family issues when they arise during the workday, how to reduce the stress of worrying about and planning for family while at work, and creative

ways the partner or other support network members could take on some of the workload. Slovene adults tend to have extended family support available to them (Švab et al., 2012). These social network members should be leveraged during times of high FW conflict. Counselors should be aware of the strong link between FW conflict and reduced relational well-being and encourage partners to invest in their relationships, as FW conflict is inevitable but more manageable when the romantic relationship is strong.

Limitations

Our study investigated one person within a partnership. Dyadic data would be beneficial in future research as members in a dyad are interdependent yet may perceive DoL and role conflicts differently. Our study focuses on women in Slovenia. Findings cannot be generalized beyond this population. Data were collected at the end of 2021, when families were still navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most Slovenes had returned to in-person work, other precautions were still in place. Finally, our data are cross-sectional. As such, causal links between variables cannot be drawn. Relational well-being may be cyclically linked to WF/FW conflict. Future research should aim to follow couples over time to assess how work and family stressors may contribute to role conflict and eventually to relational outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the associations between job stress, DoL proportion and satisfaction, WF/FW conflict, and relational well-being in Slovenia. Slovenia has a high gender equality index yet traditional gender roles. We found that many of the associations found in other countries held true in Slovenia (e.g., the link between job stress and WF conflict), but others were unique (e.g., the link between FW conflict and relational well-being). This study explored two additional ways of assessing relational well-being focused on partner communication quality and support availability. The results provide researchers avenues to examine the mechanisms linking work and family stressors to relational well-being for women in Slovenia and beyond.

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