

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY IN BULGARIA ON THE PERCEIVED STRESS AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

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Abstract

Objectives. The study aims to examine whether working mothers have a higher level of work and/or family conflict than the rest of the population.

Material and methods. The sample consisted of 199 participants out of which 67 were working mothers. The used materials include scales measuring the level of conflict between work and family, overall job satisfaction, general health of participants, perceived stress and family satisfaction. In order to verify the hypotheses, the sample was divided into two groups - group A, which was composed of mothers with children under 18 years old, and group B, composed of men, childless women, and women with children over 18 years old.

Results. There was no statistically significant difference between the sample collected from Group A ($M = 2.66$; $SD = 0.78$) and Group B ($M = 2.58$; $SD = 0.75$): $t(197) = 0.657$; $p > 0.05$. A Two-way ANOVA analysis was performed to further investigate whether there was any relationship between the level of conflict, gender and the presence of children. The results show that there was no statistically significant difference between the effect of gender and the presence of children on the scale of work-family conflict, $p > 0.05$. A moderately positive correlation was found, $r = 0.413$, $p < 0.000$, between the conflict level and a deteriorated general health, and a linear moderately positive correlation, $r = 0.332$, $p < 0.000$, between the conflict and the stress levels.

Conclusions. The development explores options for increasing the balance between the personal and the professional life.

Keywords: perceived stress, work-family conflict, Bulgaria.

Introduction

Work and family are two central aspects of most adults' lives. Almost inevitably, in the life cycle of a woman comes the moment when she acquires a completely new role, which demands a lot of time and effort, undivided attention and new knowledge. This period on its own brings huge amounts of stress to the woman. A lot is expected and required from her. Every year, a great number of seminars, trainings, books, and forums are organized for young mothers. The woman begins to prepare for her new role even before the actual birth of the child. In fact, each stage of the child's development brings new requirements and challenges for the new parents, which is the reason why they can often feel as if they are "drowning". The parent is expected to provide round-the-clock care for their child for years. The baby relies on the support and attention of the mother and the father in order to survive, and, at an older age (2-7 years) he needs a lot of attention in

order to learn the basic functions necessary to function in society. Unlike professional duties, motherhood does not allow for taking a leave or quitting. It is a commitment that a woman engages in until the child comes of age.

At the same time, the other responsibilities in the woman's life do not disappear. They continue to exist. Even if the woman prioritizes her family while also taking care of her child during this period of her life she still needs to perform her professional duties that sometimes even multiply. It is difficult to be successful in both roles, especially when they are just entering the career path or are excelling in their work environment, while also having to take care of the development and well-being of someone else.

The essential difference between Bulgaria and the world

The scientific literature examining the problem of the balance between personal and professional life of mothers comes mainly from Western Europe, the United States of America [USA], Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Brough, O'Driscoll & Kalliath, 2005; Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1980; Spector et al., 2007). Almost every scientific paper begins with the remark that in recent years, the percentage of women in the country's labor force has increased significantly, as has the number of families with two sources of income (men's wages and women's wages). This is a very typical observation for the above-mentioned countries, because, for a long-time women were only housewives and have only acquired a professional role in the recent years. However, in these countries, women still frequently choose not to return to work after the birth of their children.

Most studies on family issues have been conducted in predominantly English-speaking countries (Canada, the United Kingdom, and the USA) and other Western countries, which share a number of important characteristics that distinguish them from many other regions of the world. For example, these countries tend to be economically developed and people live in nuclear families (mother, father and children), often apart from more distant relatives such as parents and siblings. In other areas, such as China and Latin America, people are more likely to live close to their extended family, probably due to a combination of their lower level of economic development and higher level of attachment to the family (which can be considered an aspect of collectivism). English-speaking countries also share the key cultural characteristic of individualism, as opposed to collectivism. In individualistic countries, people's main concern may lie in their own goals and preferences, as well as those of their own families. In collectivist countries such as in Asia and Latin America, people are seen as a part of a larger social network that may include extended families and workgroups, which may also be actively involved in the raising children (Spector et al., 2007).

Countries differ in their general view regarding working women. Norms and attitudes will influence how women structure their lifelong employment patterns by deciding whether to work when children are young and, if so, whether or not to work full-time. Similarly, economic factors such as the cost of living and the level of income of men (e.g. the ability of a household to maintain the desired standard of living with only one salary) can influence women's job choices.

Wonder Woman Syndrome

In the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, this is not even on the agenda of the woman who is about to give birth. There is a very good explanation for this. During socialism, women were encouraged to work outside the house. The role of a "housewife" was condemned and considered as bourgeois. Subsequently, Bulgarian women largely joined the labor force of the

country. As a result, whole generations have become accustomed to the image of the working mother. Most people have mothers, grandmothers, and sometimes great-grandmothers who have worked. However, this reality does not solve the problem of gender equality or at least the equal distribution of responsibilities between men and women. In her article from 2013, Pavlova (Pavlova, 2013) called Bulgarian women "wonder women", and the phenomenon - the wonder woman syndrome. It turns out that despite the public services designed to alleviate the workload of women such as ovens, laundries, kindergartens, women's leisure time had not increased. Regardless of the political party's efforts for equality in public life, they have failed to achieve equality between men and women at home. Domestic duties remain primarily a woman's responsibility. After the end of the working day, work at home begins again.

This ideology of gender equality is carried over into the post-socialist life. Women continue to work mostly full-time, receive higher education and build careers. Nowadays, it is still rare for a woman to be only a housewife, which is partly due to the already imposed trend and norm for a woman to participate in the labor force, but also due to the economic impossibility of most families to survive based on only one source of income. At the same time, public expectations for raising children are still largely directed onto women. This means that while fathers are at work, they are not expected to worry about family problems. In the meanwhile, when mothers are at work, they are required to deal not only with their official duties, but also with all the other issues affecting the family (of course, without compromising their work results). Based on the interviews conducted in 2013 by Pavlova, it becomes clear that the problems that women face in combining their personal and professional lives are mainly due to the insufficient support from their partners. The patriarchal definition of duties and responsibilities, and the associated gender-based roles, is still strong. Raising children and doing household chores are considered women's responsibilities. The father performs rather a representative role, or is of sporadic help, whereas the day-to-day duties and responsibilities are taken care of by the women. Nevertheless, they cannot be just mothers and housewives, because, on the one hand, they are already expected to work and support the family budget, and on the other hand, the economic situation forces them to work. There are few families that can afford a woman to only be a mother and a housewife.

It is essential to keep this feature of the Bulgarian sample in mind, because otherwise it would draw fundamentally wrong conclusions. In Bulgaria, the question of whether the woman should return to work after her maternity leave is not discussed. Unlike Western European countries, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (where most of the research was conducted) (Allen et al., 2000; Brough, O'Driscoll & Kalliath, 2005; Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1980; Spector et al., 2007), for the Bulgarian woman motherhood is an addition to her role as a working woman. In the listed countries, it is exactly the opposite - the main role of the woman is that of a mother and a housewife, and the professional tasks are complementary.

Returning from motherhood: challenges and opportunities

The transition to parenthood marks a period of reorganization in the life cycle of the family, associated with significant changes in the relationships, responsibilities and activities of the couple. The change is greater for the woman, due to the fact that, for a certain period of time, she inevitably breaks away from her professional life, her daily rhythm changes drastically, and she subsequently tries to return to the previous way of life, but usually faces new challenges and problems. The mother's adaptation to return to work carries a number of risk factors: parental well-being, marital relationships, subjective assessment of giving birth, attitudes toward work and family, investment in parenting, and the child's attitudes and temperament. In addition to these

factors, the successful return of the mother to work is highly dependent on the availability of adequate and affordable childcare, workplace support and home support (Millward, 2006).

Apart from the financial factor, a woman's decision regarding her return to work from maternity leave may be influenced by a number of other factors. There are studies (Millward, 2006) according to which the more a woman has invested in gaining experience, education and reputation before the birth of her child, the less likely she is to use all her maternity leave. Short breaks at the beginning of a woman's career may not be as costly in the long run, because women are not out of the workforce long enough for skills to break down (Kahn, García-Manglano, & Bianchi, 2014). On the one hand, the more children a woman has, the more difficult it can be for her to leave the workforce for a short period of time, complete additional training or spend large amounts of time volunteering. On the other hand, more children create more pressure to return to work and the need for a second income later in life as these children reach adolescence, graduate from high school and attend university.

The conflict between career and family

The conflict between work and family is "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressure from work and family is mutually incompatible in some respects. That is, participation in the work role is hampered by participation in the family role and vice versa" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). In general, the requirements of each role may include responsibilities, requirements, obligations, commitments, and expectations that are associated with effective performance in an area (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). The physical and psychological resources required to meet such role requirements are limited. When those resources are in a state of imbalance, feelings of inter-role conflict arise. Prolonged exposure to this conflict can lead to excessive worry, fatigue, or burnout and further limit the worker's ability to adequately perform role functions in the other area (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There are three main forms of conflict between work and family: (a) time-based conflict, (b) tension-based conflict, and (c) behavioral conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

The time-based conflict

Many roles can compete for a person's time. The time allocated to activities within one role cannot normally be allocated to activities within another one. Time-based conflict can take two forms: (1) the time pressure associated with membership in one role can make it physically impossible to meet expectations arising from another role, and (2) the pressure can also lead to occupation with one role, even when one physically tries to meet the requirements of another role (Bartolomé & Evans, 1979). The conflict between work and family is positively related to the number of hours worked per week, as well as the time spent traveling per week. The conflict between work and family is also related to the size and frequency of overtime and shift work when it is "scattered". In addition to the huge number of hours worked per week, the lack of flexibility in the work schedule can lead to a conflict between work and family. Herman and Gyllstrom (1977) found that married people experience more conflict between work and family than unmarried people. Similarly, parents can be expected to experience more conflict related to work and family than people without children do. Studies have found that parents of younger children (who are particularly demanding of their parents' time) are prone to more conflict than parents of older children. Large families, which are likely to require more time than small families, are also associated with high levels of conflict between work and family (Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981).

A 2002 study (Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002) surveyed employees of the Fortune 500 company and found that long working hours were associated with an increased conflict between work and family and, at least indirectly, with psychological stress. People work more hours when they have a strong career identity, have too much work and too little time, think that their managers expect them to work extra hours if necessary, have less responsibilities outside of work and believe that they have relatively large financial needs.

The tension-based conflict

The second form of conflict between work and family involves tension created by roles. There is considerable evidence that work stressors can cause symptoms of stress such as anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, depression, apathy and irritability. Tension-based conflict, according to the fatigue/ irritability dimension, exists when tension in one role affects a person's performance in another role. Roles are incompatible in the sense that the tension created by one role makes it difficult to meet the requirements of another role. The requirements of both physical and psychological work are positively related to several types of conflict between work and family. In addition, Burke and his colleagues (1980) found that the following work stressors are related to the conflict between work and family: speed of change in the work environment, participation in various activities, communication stress and mental concentration required in the workplace. Referring to the "negative emotional spillover" from work to non-working hours, Bartolomé and Evans (1979) suggest that certain stressful events in the workplace (especially coping with a new job, an inappropriate combination between personality and work environment and frustration due to unreasonable expectations) lead to fatigue, tension, anxiety or frustration that make it difficult to have a satisfying life outside of work.

The behavior-based conflict

Behavioral conflict suggests that specific patterns of behavior in one role may be incompatible with expectations regarding behavior in another role. For example, the stereotype of the male management style of work is assumed to emphasize independence, emotional stability, aggression and objectivity. Family members, on the other hand, can expect a man to be warm, caring, emotional, and vulnerable in his interactions with them. If a person is not able to adjust their behavior to meet the expectations of different roles, they are likely to experience a conflict between the roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

According to the model of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), the conflict between work and personal life is two-way - work interferes with family, and family interferes with work. For example, long working hours can prevent a parent from helping their child with their school assignments by increasing the work interfering with family (WIF). Illustration of family-interference-with-work → FIW is a child's illness that prevents a parent from going to work. These two types of interventions are similar but different in essence, and people are more likely to report work interference with family (WIF) than the other way around (FIW). Regardless of the direction, the conflict between work and family demonstrates a lack of correspondence between work and family roles, which causes stress, a major source of psychological and physiological tension.

Time-based pressure arises when a person is physically present or mentally busy with either work or family, which makes it difficult for them to perform duties in other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In the workplace, long working hours are associated with WIF, while scheduling factors such as flexibility, shift work requirements and overtime or evening work responsibilities can also create a conflict between work and family roles. Participation in work, the degree to which people identify with their work positions and the degree to which their interests are centered around

work are also key predictors of family work interference. Domestic responsibilities such as housework and childcare responsibilities are factors from the family sphere that can create time-based pressure.

Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992a) suggest that job satisfaction and family satisfaction are influenced by resources and stressors from other roles. Stressors and requirements within one role create a conflict with other roles, which in turn reduces the overall satisfaction with these other roles. According to this framework, this is a proximal predictor of job satisfaction, while family stressors and support are distal predictors whose effects are mediated by role conflicts. Similarly, WIF is a proximal predictor of family satisfaction and distress, while work stressors and support are relatively distal factors influencing family satisfaction. Another study from the same year (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992b) identified WIF as a mediating factor through which work-related variables negatively affect job satisfaction. Similarly, FIW is a mediating factor through which family stressors influence job satisfaction. Consistent with this model is the idea that stress and dissatisfaction within one role may be due to internal pressures in that role and stressors that interfere with other roles. Conflict between work and family has been investigated in a number of studies as a factor influencing work results, family and overall life satisfaction. It can be reasonably expected that as work interference with family and the family interference with work increase, job and family satisfaction will decrease. This expectation is supported by various samples demonstrating a negative relationship between work-family conflict and job and life satisfaction (Allen et al., 2000).

The model proposed by Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992a) identifies work interference with family (WIF) as a mediator factor through which work-related variables have a negative impact on job satisfaction. Similarly, family interference with work (FIW) is a mediator factor through which family stressors influence job satisfaction. This model suggests that when considering the conflict between work and family, there is no direct link between family stressors and job satisfaction or between work stressors and family satisfaction. Only through the interference between work and family roles do stressors from one area affect another.

The interaction between work and family can also be seen as four different dimensions of family-work spillover: negative spillover from work to family, positive spillover from work to family, negative spillover from family to work, and positive spillover from family to work (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Resources that facilitate the development at work or in the family (e.g. more freedom to make decisions in the workplace, support in the workplace from colleagues and managers, emotionally close spouses and family relationships) are associated with less negative and more positive spillovers between work and family. In contrast, barriers arising from the human - workplace and family interaction (e.g., greater workplace pressures, marital misunderstandings and perceived family burdens) are associated with more negative spillovers and less positive spillovers between work and family.

The most pronounced and empirically supported view is the spillover hypothesis, which assumes that a person's attitudes and experiences in one area (e.g. work) will be positively correlated with their attitudes and experiences in the other (e. g. family). Although these spillover effects can be both positive and negative, research about negative spillovers or what is commonly referred to as work-family conflict (Frone, 2003) or interference (Carlson & Frone, 2003) predominates. Findings from this line of study consistently illustrate the potentially serious dysfunctional outcomes of this form of inter-role conflict, including reduced job and family satisfaction, decreased frequency of positive mood, decreased family and work-related well-being, and even psychological burnout. The high level of conflict or interference between work and

family commitments can be disadvantageous for both individuals and their work organizations (Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005).

When it comes to positive spillover, there are studies (Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006) that show that the more skills employees report to transfer from work to family, the better their mental health and the higher their job satisfaction.

Negative effects

By not promoting a more balanced dynamic between the professional and the family life of the employees, organizations contribute to tensions in employees' personal lives, the consequences of which affect their ability to concentrate and be productive and creative at work. The potential of the negative effects of the conflict between work and family stimulates research in this area. Researchers (Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Britt & Dawson, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Brough, O'Driscoll & Kalliath, 2005) have found that workers facing high levels of conflict are exposed to increased risk for their physical and mental health and experience lower levels of satisfaction with work, life, marriage and family. However, researches shows that parental requirements exacerbate this conflict. Busy parents tend to have less flexibility in using their time and energy (Boyar, Maertz, & Pearson, 2005; Fu & Shaffer, 2001). For example, Behson (2002) found that the conflict between work and personal life was higher among respondents who had children at home. Also, both the number and age of children are positively related to the conflict. Many studies (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002; Fu & Shaffer, 2001; Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999; Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981) show that working parents express the conflict between work and family in the form of absences, delays, energy deficits, preoccupation with family issues and unwillingness to accept responsibilities related to work that run counter to family time and activities. These findings provide an empirical basis for linking parental requirements to the conflict between work and family.

Allen et al. (2000) describe the existence of three groups of consequences of work-life conflict - (1) work-related outcomes (e.g. reduced job satisfaction, leaving intentions, absences and reduced outcomes), (2) non-work-related outcomes (e. g. marital satisfaction, family and life satisfaction) and (3) stress-related outcomes (e. g. psychological stress, burnout and substance abuse). Work-life imbalance has a strong positive relationship with the psychological distress. Increased conflict is associated with increased psychological distress. For example, Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham (1999) demonstrate that the experienced stress predicts subsequent levels of conflict in the professional life. Research also demonstrates that the relationship between the work-life balance and the intention to leave is usually stronger than the relationship between the job satisfaction and the balance (Allen et al., 2000).

The conflict between the different roles resulting from the increased blurring of work and non-working life is negatively related to the individual's well-being, overall life satisfaction and work results (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007). There are many reasons for this apparent increase in conflicts or interference between work and family life, including the development of more sophisticated and universal technologies and the increasing competitiveness of the global market, which puts pressure on employees to strive for higher positions, and work longer hours. Obviously, the increased conflict (or interference) between work and family life can lead to reduced job and family satisfaction, lower levels of organizational engagement, and a decline in psychological health and well-being (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005). Considerable attention has also been paid to strategies and mechanisms to strengthen the "balance" between work requirements and family commitments (Frone, 2003; Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). From a psycho-social,

economic and wider social perspective, this is becoming an increasingly important and contemporary topic.

Employed parents represent a certain group of people who are likely to feel the weight of multiple work demands and non-work commitments (including family life). Work-family balance is a particularly topical issue for this group. Because of their commitments in both areas, employed parents are more likely than others to experience conflicting requirements and responsibilities and to feel the negative effects of these stressors. There is now strong evidence that having dependent children provides many benefits, but also creates additional burdens as people seek to dissipate the pressures and demands on their time and energy (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007; Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007).

People who are married or have children have more household chores than single people and people who live alone. Therefore, when an organization requires its employees to spend more time at work, those who are married or have children are more likely to see this contradicting family expectations than people without family responsibilities. Workplace stress, which spreads in the family environment, is also more likely to hamper family functioning for people with spouses and/ or children, as there are more interpersonal interactions. In addition, people with children, especially young ones, have the responsibilities to raise them, unlike people without children. Therefore, for these childless people, time and stress at work may have less of an impact on the personal lives (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007).

Material and methods

The aim of the present study was to investigate the existence and the extent there of a conflict between work and family, by using a sample of 199 respondents in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment and whether or not this conflict is higher for working mothers. The study also aims to examine whether there is a link between the levels of conflict between work and family and the levels of overall job satisfaction, health, stress and satisfaction with the family life. Based on these results, the study also aims to propose conflict reduction strategies.

On the grounds of the presented literature, the hypotheses are the following:

H1: Conflict between personal and professional life is higher among working mothers compared to the rest of the respondents

H2: Higher conflict between personal and professional life correlates with lower job satisfaction

H3: Higher conflict between personal and professional life correlates with lower satisfaction with family life

H4: Higher conflict between personal and professional life correlates with lower general health

H5: Higher conflict between personal and professional life correlates with higher levels of stress.

In addition to the questions related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, marital status, whether they have children, how many and at what age, professional field and level in the organization), they were asked to fill in several other scales.

The first instrument was developed in 2000 (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000) and measures the level of conflict between work and family. It represents a scale with 18 Likert-type items with 5 answer options (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree), grouped into 6 factors. These 6 factors are:

1. Time-based work interference with family
2. Time-based family interference with work
3. Stress-based work interference with family
4. Stress-based family interference with work

5. Behavior-based work interference with family
6. Behavior-based family interference with work.

The reliability and validity of the scale have been repeatedly confirmed, and the scale itself has been used in 2642 other studies. The subjects were instructed to read the statements and for each of them choose the option that best suits your attitudes.

The second scale examines overall job satisfaction (Macdonald & MacIntyre, 1997). It is composed of a scale with 10 Likert-type items with 5 possible answers (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Strongly Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree). According to the creators of the scale, it works best for employees between 25 and 60 years old. People under the age of 25 tend to show lower job satisfaction, and people over the age of 60 have a higher level of job satisfaction. The tool equally accurately measures the satisfaction of men and women in all professional fields. Respondents were instructed to select the extent to which they agreed with any statement related to their life at work.

The third scale measures the overall health of the study participants. A scale with 12 items (del Pilar Sánchez-López, & Dresch, 2008) of Likert type with 5 answer options (1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always) was used. Respondents were asked to share how often in the recent weeks they have felt in the ways listed. Some of the items consist of positive emotions and attitudes, while others consist of negative ones. Accordingly, when coding the data, some of the items are reversible, thus, a higher result means poorer general health.

The fourth instrument is an abbreviated scale for perceived stress by Sheldon Cohen, which was translated by Vihra Naydenova, PhD and Snezhana Ilieva, Prof. (Naidenova & Ilieva, 2006). Originally, the scale had 14 items, however, according to the authors of the Bulgarian translation of the 4-item short version of the scale also shows high reliability and validity. (Naydenova & Ilieva, 2006), which is why in the present study an abbreviated version of the scale with 4 items (items 2, 6, 7 and 14) of Likert type with 5 answer options was used (1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Very often). The following instructions were given to the subjects: "The following questions refer to your feelings and thoughts during the last 4 weeks. Answer each question individually and independently, even when some areas are similar. Answer spontaneously, marking the value on the scale that is closest to your judgment. "

The last instrument used is a scale measuring family satisfaction (Zabriskie & Ward, 2013). It is a scale with 5 items of Likert type with 5 possible answers (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Cannot say; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree). Originally, the scale has 7 possible answers, but for the aims of present study 2 of the grades were removed (Somewhat disagree and Somewhat agree). The instructions given to the participants in the study were to indicate their agreement with each statement presented, and to be as honest as possible.

In addition to these standardized scales, 6 other questions have been added to the study. Two of them are related to the traditional gender roles of men and women ("Both men and women should contribute equally to household chores"; "A man's job is to make money, and a woman's job is to take care of the house and the family").

The study involved 202 Bulgarian citizens aged between 19 and 59 years old. All but three participants said they were working. The other three shared that when completing the study, they were not employed, but only studying, so they were removed from the final sample and all subsequent analyzes were made without their participation. After this correction, the number of the subjects was reduced to 199, out of which, 160 were women (80.4%), the other 39 were men (19.6%).

Results

Independent-Samples T Test

For the purpose of testing the first hypothesis: H1: Conflict between personal and professional life is higher for working mothers compared to the rest of the population, a t-test was performed for independent samples. As it can be seen in Table 1, there is no statistically significant difference between the arithmetic means for Group A (M = 2.66; SD = 0.78) and Group B (M = 2.58; SD = 0.75): $t(197) = 0.657$; $p > 0.05$.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is rejected. In the current sample, there is no statistically significant difference between the levels of conflict experienced by working mothers compared to the rest of the population.

Two-way analysis of variance (Two-way ANOVA)

In order to investigate in more detail whether there are any correlations between the level of conflict, gender and the presence of children, a two-way analysis of variance (Two-way ANOVA) was performed (Table 2). The two independent variables are gender and the presence of children. The variable has two levels, respectively man and woman, similarly, the variable "presence of children" has two levels – with children and without children. The latter also includes the respondents who have children but are older than 18, as they are assumed not to require as much attention and care as children under 18 years old. The dependent variable is the level of conflict between work and family.

Table 1

Independent Samples t-test Results

Group A - Women with kids under 18 years old

Groups	N	M	SD
Group A	67	2,66	0,78
Group B	132	2,58	0,75

Group B - Men, childfree women and women with kids over 18 years old

The independent variables gender and children were analyzed. The results showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the effect of gender and the presence of children on the scale of conflict between work and family, $p > 0.05$, although the values for men and women with children are higher. With a larger sample, these differences may be significant. The number of working mothers is only 67, and the number of other respondents is 132. In addition, in the modern Bulgarian society, men with children also have a lot of household chores and take care of them. After checking whether the two independent variables had a simultaneous effect, analyzes of each of the variables were performed separately. There were no statistically significant differences between the conflict between work and family and gender and the presence of children ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2

Sample means and standard deviations of the levels of work-life conflict in the samples

Gender	Kids	M	SD	N
Man	With kids	2,75	0,65	16
	Without kids	2,65	0,74	23
	Total	2,69	0,70	39
Woman	With kids	2,65	0,78	67
	Without kids	2,53	0,77	93
	Total	2,58	0,76	160
Total	With kids	2,67	0,76	83
	Without kids	2,55	0,76	116
	Total	2,60	0,76	199

Correlation analysis

In order to test the hypotheses 2, 3, 4 and 5 (H2, H3, H4 and H5), four correlation analysis were performed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Its results can be seen in Table 3. The relationship between the level of conflict between work and family and the level of job satisfaction have a very weak, even insignificant negative correlation. The same results were observed in the relationship between the level of conflict within work and family, and the level of satisfaction with the family life - a very weak (insignificant) negative correlation. This means that Hypothesis 2 (H2) and Hypothesis 3 (H3) can be rejected. For the current sample, the level of conflict between work and family has no significant negative impact on the levels of job satisfaction and family life.

Regarding Hypothesis 4, the analysis conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient showed a moderately positive linear correlation between the two variables, $r = 0.413$, $p < 0.000$, applied to a sample of 199 subjects. These results show that an increased level of conflict between work and family leads to health problems (in the used scale, a higher score means poorer general

health). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is confirmed. Hypothesis 5 (H5) is also confirmed. In the correlation analysis performed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and, applied on a sample of to 199 subjects, it was found that the linear correlation between the two variables was moderately positive, $r = 0.332$, $p < 0.000$. This means that a higher level of conflict between work and family also negatively affects the health.

Orientation towards traditional gender roles

The rejection of Hypothesis 1 (H1) contradicts the rest of the scientific literature on the subject. One explanation is the relatively small sample and the small number of respondents who are working mothers. Another possible explanation for this result may lie in the subjects' attitudes towards traditional gender roles. According to the traditional distribution of gender roles, the main role of the woman is to take care of the household and the raising of the children, and of the man - to earn money. Consequently, when a woman has traditional attitudes towards gender roles, her level of conflict is low, due to the fact that home and the raising of children are of utmost importance to her, whereas work is not assessed as something substantial to her.

Table 3

Pearson correlation coefficient and p-value of the correlations between the variables

Variables	Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	p-value (p)	N
WFC * Job Satisfaction	-,148*	,037	199
WFC * Family Life Satisfaction	-,158*	,026	199
WFC * General Health	,413**	,000	199
WFC * Stress	,332**	,000	199

* $p \leq 0,05$

** $p \leq 0,000$

Among the statements that participants were asked to rate, there are two statements that aim to investigate the following:

- Both men and women should contribute equally to household chores.
 - The man's job is to make money, and the woman's job is to take care of the home and the family.
- The scale for evaluating the two statements is the following: 1 = I completely disagree; 2 = I disagree; 3 = Cannot say; 4 = I agree; 5 = I completely agree.

Agreeing with the first statement points to a low orientation towards traditional gender roles, and agreeing with the second statement points to a high orientation towards traditional gender roles. After the analysis were conducted, it was found that 181 (90.9%) respondents agreed or completely agreed with the first statement ($M = 4.28$; $SD = 0.91$). Regarding the second statement, only 20 of the respondents (10%) agreed or completely agreed with it ($M = 1.90$; $SD = 1$).

According to these results, the orientation towards the traditional gender roles of the sample is low. In order to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in this attitude between Group A and Group B, a t-test was performed for independent samples. Again, no statistically significant differences were observed for either the first or the second statement. Respectively $t(197) = -0.307$; $p > 0.05$ and $t(197) = 0.957$; $p > 0.05$.

Discussions

Only Hypothesis 4 (H4) and Hypothesis 5 (H5) are confirmed. According to them, a higher conflict between the personal and the professional life correlates with lower general health (H4). A higher level of conflict between the personal and the professional life correlates with higher levels of stress (H5). The other hypotheses were not confirmed due to the small number of participants. The number of working women is not large enough to draw definite conclusions. Based on the additional analysis, it is also clear that the sample used for the present study has a non-traditional view of gender roles. This means that the prevailing attitude is that household chores, family care and financial security are both partners' tasks in the couple.

This is not a big surprise, as Bulgarian women joined the workforce at least three generations ago, so it is not a new and unknown role to which they have to adapt. It is clear from the literature that in previous studies, men have not been accustomed to the role as an active participant in the household and the family activities. Probably until now, the participation of men of the population in otherwise traditionally female tasks is more common, which enables women to balance more easily between work and extracurricular activities. Another reason why the hypotheses were not confirmed may be that participants gave socially desirable answers. As there is no way to examine the extent to which the respondents were completely honest in their answers, we could not categorically discuss this probability. However, it is possible that some participants were afraid of coming across as "bad parents" and therefore have responded in a socially desirable way. In addition, the study was conducted during a particularly unusual period of time - the global pandemic of COVID-19. On the one hand, many people work from home for long periods of time, which to some extent can reduce the conflict between work and family, and on the other hand, it is a source of stress due to the great insecurity brought by social distance and danger of serious health and economic consequences.

Probably, the most important result is the confirmation that working parents in general (women and men) have higher levels of conflict between work and family than people without children do. It is important as employers, colleagues and friends to help reduce this conflict. Extended work-life balance policies would significantly improve the nation's economic and social well-being. A classic solution is for the government to offer social child allowances and tax relief for parents. It is a very good policy for parents to have the opportunity to choose how to distribute their parental leave. This is a great option because, in the first place, parents have a real choice, and both can be a part of their child's life and care without interrupting their work duties for a long period of time and without being completely detached from work. In addition to the already mentioned social allowances and tax reliefs, the government could finance personal helpers for

families who, for some reason, cannot include their child in a kindergarten or after-school care centers. In addition to personal tax reliefs, the state could offer tax reliefs for organizations that build playgrounds and playrooms on their territory or help parents enroll their children in kindergartens or schools.

Proposals for organizational policies

A very thoughtful option would be for the organization to offer young parents the opportunity to work part-time, which would allow them to gradually re-enter the work environment. This option could be applied to mothers of children under two years old who do not want to be completely detached from work, but also want to spend quality time with their children. Whether it is part-time work before or after the child's second birthday, a gradual return to the working life would spare both parents and children who would otherwise experience the abrupt change.

From an organizational perspective, the active participation of the manager in the planning of the woman's career path in the months before she goes on maternity leave is extremely important. There is a risk that the woman preparing for this new period of her life could feel excluded from the office and the organizational life, worry about her future in the organization and her involvement in future projects. It is a good idea to invite employees who are currently on parental leave to team meetings, team parties or team building initiatives. This way they can still feel a part of the team and the organization. During their time on parental leave, employees miss organizational changes, new colleagues, sometimes return from their leave and discover that their immediate supervisor is another person. In order not to feel like they are joining a new organization, employees on extended leave can participate in general meetings and events to be informed about the relevant changes together with other colleagues.

After returning from leave, in addition to the possibility of working part-time, if work allows it, the parent could benefit from additional assistance in case he would need to take advantage of a more flexible schedule. Parents should take into account the working hours of children's institutions such as kindergartens, schools and after school care centers. In addition, very regularly children attend various courses, sports training or other activities that are separate from kindergartens or schools. This creates additional commitments for parents, who must take care of bringing and taking their children back home from such activities. In this situation, strict working hours can be an additional source of stress, especially if the work tasks do not require such restrictions. The consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be the greater possibility of remote work, which will no longer be limited to work from home, but work from the place that is best suited to one's needs. In the last year (2020), a large number of organizations at a global level had to reorganize their work processes within days and adapt to work outside the office for a long period of time. As a result, it became clear that the work process and productivity do not suffer and that this type of organization could exist.

Therefore, it is not impossible for the working day to be flexible in order for working parents to have greater control over their daily lives and to be able to combine the different requirements of the individual roles. This flexibility would reduce the level of conflict between personal and professional life for people without children, too. One of the characteristics of modern work is that it is possible to do it from different places. Of course, this cannot be applied to every type of work, but it is very typical of the so-called "white collar" type of work - usually office employees who work mainly on a computer. To a large extent, many employers were against long-term work outside the office, and even some organizations did not have the necessary infrastructure

for this purpose. Crises usually act as a catalyst for change within the society. For example, the current crisis has given a huge boost to digitalization and created a greater flexibility to develop daily tasks. Many people are reluctant to return to the office permanently after the end of the pandemic, so, it is believed that this work organization will not only remain, but will be improved.

A relatively inexpensive solution for the organization to support parents of school-age children is to adapt an office space where children could study, write homework, or socialize while their parents finish work. Another slightly more expensive initiative for the organization would be to provide childcare in or near the office. This alternative could help parents avoid heavy morning and evening traffic to kindergarten, as well as worrying about being late. The costs for the organization would be higher, as in addition to the one-time investment in the facility itself, a certain number of staff would have to be hired to take care of the children. A monthly fee from the parents could cover the monthly expenses for food, drinks and other necessary things, which is a standard fee at the state kindergartens as well.

This requires financial costs for the company, but provides comfort to the parents and would reduce their level of stress and conflict between work and family. In this way, the parent does not commit to additional travel, would experience a higher attachment to the company and involvement in the work. In addition to possibly lower turnover, an organization offering childcare in or near the office would attract more professionals, strengthen its employer brand and gain public respect. For more financially stable companies, the list of possible ways to support working parents is long.

Conclusions

This article is the first ever study in Bulgaria concerning the topic of work-life balance for the working mothers. Up until now, the majority of the publications are on data from cultures and socio-economical contexts that are dramatically different from the situation in Bulgaria.

The tendency of punishing parents for taking care of their kids is a detrimental for society because raising children creates broad social benefits. Each type of work provides benefits to those who consume the product. A job that produces physical goods or a business service often has few beneficiaries. In contrast, caring for another's well-being and upbringing is beneficial for the whole society. Good parenting, for example, increases the likelihood that a child will grow into a caring, educated, and productive adult. This reduces crime, increases the level of care for the next generation and contributes to economic productivity. Most of those who benefit - future employers, neighbors, spouses, friends and children of a well-behaved person - do not pay anything to the parent. Thus, mothers pay a penalty through reduced wages for raising children (Budig & England, 2001).

Pregnancy and motherhood are challenging periods not only in the lifecycle of women, but also of their whole family. This brings a lot of stress, a lot of new experiences, excitement and worries. The purpose of the parental leave is for recovery of the mother, for the care of her child during its first months in the world, to build a stable relationship of trust and warmth between her and the baby. This improves the health of both women and children. It is critical that children receive good care and build secure relationships with their mothers. It should not be forgotten that the father also has a crucial role during that time. He, on one hand, is there to support his partner in her time of physical and emotional recovery and, on other hand, creating a bond with his kid. It is often discussed the restructuring of the life style of women through this time. Still, men's new roles in life (or better yet – extended father and housekeeper roles) change the narrative. Fathers and husbands are no longer only the breadwinner with representative role – they are actively

involved in the lives and upbringing of their child. More and more men are participating in the house chores. Whether this is a result of societal pressure or internal drive to be more involved, it is a fact that it changes the family dynamics and organizational expectations in terms of work-life balance.

In addition to raising her kids, a woman has other roles, and her identity should not be limited to that of a mother. Therefore, a balance must be ensured between the various roles and maintaining a social circle after the birth of a child. Many women, for one reason or another, after accepting this new role in life, forget about other aspects of their lives and reduce their essence only to the image of "mother". This imbalance is not healthy for the woman, because she loses social ties, loses the overall socialization of the individual and limits its potential. Inevitably, the moment will come when children will no longer have such a need for their mother and will gradually want to separate themselves from her protection and become self-functioning individuals. Then a woman who has identified only with her role as a mother for a long time may have difficulty returning to her previous life and may have an identity crisis.

To avoid this, it is recommended that even during motherhood, the woman takes care of herself so as not to lose her identity. This includes aspects of work-life balance, as occupation and labor are fundamental to the individual.

Unfortunately, due to the small sample, the data is not representative for the Bulgarian society. It suggests that the work-life balance is harder to be achieved for both mothers, and fathers. Probably the traditional point of view that the household chores and childcare is a woman's tasks is becoming more and more archaic. This would explain why some of the hypothesis proposed in the study, are not confirmed. Due to the relatively unusual attitudes towards female participation in the work force held by the Bulgarian citizens, the future findings on the topic would substantially improve the quality of life of the working parents and their work performance. The high gender equality in terms of education and career opportunities in Bulgaria gives us a chance to explore the topic of work-life balance and conflict in depth. As a recommendation for future works on the topic, we strongly suggest that the working parents are grouped together, and not separated by gender.

Nevertheless, this article is the first ever study in Bulgaria concerning the topic of work-life balance for the working mothers and brings new light into the researched topic.

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