



Work-family balance: Gender differences and Social support

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Abstract The suggested paper considers the gender differences and the role of social support in encouraging the female economic activity. The main interest here is focused on the question how social support could counteract the exclusion pressure and affects the achievement of a balance in a framework of work-family conflict /WFC/. The paper also argues that a low degree (or even a loss) of social support from the family – narrow or extended – may have a negative effect on female economic involvement, which strongly relates to the individualistic character of most Balkan societies. The paper suggests some empirical evidence for the main findings based on secondary analysis of data from a questionnaire survey conducted in Bulgaria among 286 individuals of which 99 women. Gender differences with respect to the relationship between social support, WFC and the risk of economic exclusion are examined as well.

Keywords: social support, work-family conflict, exclusion risk, Bulgaria.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last 30 years considerable interest has emerged regarding the impediments of the execution of the family and work roles of the individuals, which has been explored in the framework of the so called “work-family conflict” /WFC/. A range of theoretical viewpoints regarding WFC developed as a result of numerous studies carried out predominantly in the developed and some newly industrialized countries (Frone et al., 1997; Hammer et al., 2005). The fundamental ideas focus on the main sources of WFC according to which the duration of employment time and the overload at workplace are considered as important assumptions for and factors of WFC. This conflict emerges when the simultaneous participation in a family role and in a socio-economic role is considerably hindered (even reaching a point of impossibility). As a result, the execution of one of the roles is obstructed (or even blocked) by the commitment to the other role.

Some theoretical views treat WFC as a single construct whereas other distinguish between “work interfered by family” /WIF/ and “family interfered by work” /FIW/. Other direction of the theories development relates to the so called “component approach” differentiating the “time-based” and “strain-based” types of WFC (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2004, 2005). For example, WFC of the type “time-based WIF conflict” treats the time as a scarce resource postulating that “more time devoted to work leaves less time for the family”. A lot of evidence is found in support of the statement that work overload is acting for the formation or escalation of WFC (Voydanoff, 2004, 2005; Spector et al., 2004). Generally, the sources and consequences of WFC are presented in fig.1.

The differences by gender related to the professional realization and family responsibilities appear as one of the key topic of the research in WFC. The main hypothesis in this respect is that women are involved in WFC in much greater extent than men due to their typically stronger sense of commitment to family duties, and thus putting more emphasis on their family role (Lewis & Cooper, 1999). Such connections have been revealed in studies conducted in North American Anglo countries as well as in Northern Europe; besides, other comparative studies have tried to find whether similar relationships in a WIF conflict framework develop in culturally dissimilar environments elsewhere (e.g. Spector et al., 2004).

In this respect, one theory suggests that the work demands influence on WFC varies by culture proposing that the value of “individualism-collectivism” cultural dimension determines partially how individuals perceive the extent of WFC, especially in the individualistic environments in the world (Yang et al., 2000). Some latest empirical research has tested various theoretical stances in respect of WFC origins and effects in a twenty-country study conducted in 4 sets of countries (Anglo, Asia, East Europe, and Latin America) assuming to represent culturally homogeneous clusters (Spector et al., 2007). In this study, a competing hypothesis is tested whether cluster differences can be identified by the availability of family and paid domestic help.

Hammel et al. (2011) provide empirical results about the effect of training and family-to-work conflict on employee job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and physical health. Positive training effects were observed for employees with high family-to-work conflict, and vice versa. These effects were mediated by the

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interactive influence of training and family-to-work conflict on employee perceptions of family-supportive supervisor behaviors.

It is agreed that working long hours per day can leave insufficient time and energy for the family role of the woman, thereby producing an intra-family conflict with lower chances for the woman to counteract the pressure. In this respect, previous studies have examined the impact of the social support as a cultural institution that has a substantial role in assisting women, especially

those with low-age children, to intensify their social inclusion. Discussions centered at the question of how social support (including the within-family, community, corporate, and public aspects) can reduce the risk of persisting social exclusion and thus, indirectly, can affect positively WFC through facilitating the participation of women in social and economic activities (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Cousins & Tang, 2004; Hill et al., 2004; Hammer et al., 2005; Poelmans et al., 2005; Tang & Cousins, 2005).

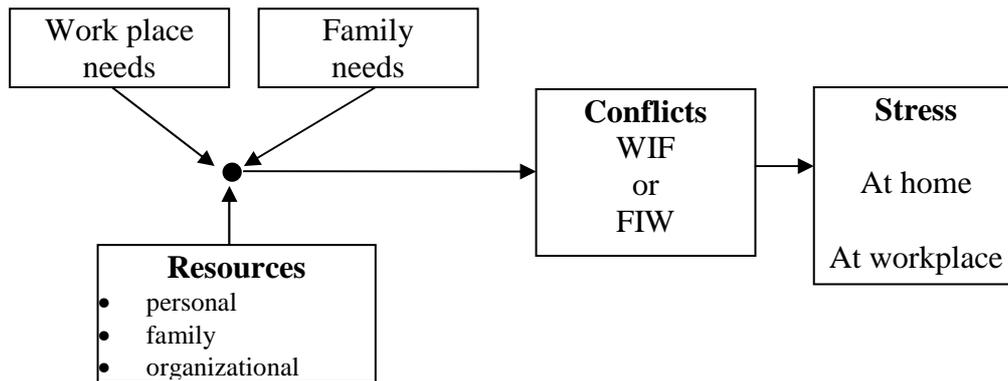


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of WFC

In the European context, the Lisbon European Employment Strategy targeted in 60% rate of female participation in the labor market till 2010, in line with which the National Plans for employment and social inclusion of EU member countries emphasized on encouraging the female employment through proactive social and economic inclusion policies. Thus, gender-related policies have been integrated with labor market, local development, and inclusion policies of EU. The focus was put on the approaches for reconciliation of family care, paid work, career advancement, and leisure regarding both men and women. This however necessitates a development of a time allocation pattern that is not entirely determined by market mechanisms and/or policy measures, but also by cultural trajectories, moral values, intrinsic motivations and rules (Folbre and Nelson, 2002; Garofalo and Marra, 2007).

Having in mind this EU strategy it is important to consider the factors that could increase the risk for social isolation and potential socio-economic exclusion of those women that are exposed to WFC of type FIW. Assuming that gender combined with the specific cultural inheritance in a country are decisive factors of the individual's life style, the policies have been oriented to the empowerment of the social support system, mainly the enhancement of welfare services (e.g. day-care institutions) and parental leave rights. It is widely recognized that numerous factors of the social environment have a substantial impact on the risk for social exclusion, e.g. family, ethnicity and the traditions for social networking along with the level of human

capital and employment opportunities. Special attention in various studies is paid on some adverse cultural traditions in respect of gender equality that suppress the access of women to the labor market and power centers more often than men. Thus, the obstruction of work-family reconciliation has been linked to various forms of social exclusion caused by educational disadvantages, long-term unemployment, low paid (irregular) working positions, marital instability, etc. (Garofalo and Marra, 2007).

A recent meta-analytical study (drawing on 115 samples from 85 studies comprising 72,507 employees) shows that work-family specific constructs of supervisor support and organization support are more strongly related to work-family conflict than general supervisor support and organization support (Kossek et al., 2011). The authors test a mediation model which evaluates the effects of all measures simultaneously. It shows that the positive perceptions of work-family specific supervisor indirectly relate to work-family conflict through organizational work-family support. These results demonstrate that work-family specific support plays a central role in individuals' work-family conflict experiences.



II. WFC AND THE ISSUES OF FEMALE SOCIAL INCLUSION IN BULGARIA

In the process of transformation of Bulgarian society during the last 20 years a significant restructuring of the time use of the citizens has taken place unbalancing the devotion to work and family. This imbalance is fueled by the increasing share of employment in the time budget of economically active population leaving less time for the family and/or the personal life. In this respect, the WFC emerged as a “social roles” conflict having a clear gender dimension and directly related to the issues of social integration, work satisfaction, infrastructures for support of family roles, etc.

As special cases, the transitions from single to dual earner family or from economic inactivity to employment of a single parent invoke a necessity of substantial changes in the family roles. The emergence or expansion of labor involvement of the individual requires restructuring of the duties at home accompanied by a search of “extended family” and/or societal support. These transformations stimulated the social and academic interest in the interrelation between family commitment and the socio-economic inclusion of Bulgarian women in the post-transition society. Recent research in Bulgaria found that WFC is identified in much larger extent for the women than men because of the double burden they face every work day (Vladimirova, 2003; ASA et al., 2003). In conditions of intensifying workload, relatively lower wage level, increasing risk of losing the job, and limited options for absence of working mothers the risk for social isolation of women in families with unfavorable economic status substantially increases. The paper henceforth considers this aspect as one of the many dimensions of the social exclusion considered generally as a process of social disintegration, in the sense of a deterioration of the relationship between the individual and society occurring because of long-term unemployment, the inability of young people to enter the labor market, greater family instability, isolation of single-member households, obstruction of the single parents (mainly women) to normally incorporate in the labor market, etc. (Rodgers et al., 1995).

The results presented hereafter are based on the Bulgarian section of the international comparative study of stress at the workplace (CISMS) considering a variety of issues, e.g. intercultural aspects of WFC, its potential sources and consequences in different regions in the world (Spector et al., 2007). Respondents were sampled in 25 countries (covering most parts of the world) among which Bulgaria where the survey was conducted in the period March-July 2005. A quota sample of 286 working individuals, of which 99 women, has been drawn and respondents were interviewed face-to-face. The distribution of respondents by gender, age and family status is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Men	Women	Total
Up to 30	13.4	25.3	17.5
31-40	31.0	57.6	40.2
41-50	39.6	13.1	30.4
Over 50	16.0	4.0	11.9
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total by gender:	65.4	34.6	100.0
Married /incl. cohabitating/	94.1	77.8	88.5
Single / Divorced	5.9	22.2	11.5
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0

Over one third of respondents are female and, purposively, relatively younger women (over 80% of age up to 40) have been interviewed assuming that this segment is more involved in WFC. It can be noted that the share of single (or divorced) women is higher than the same share within men which is one indication for the assertion that women are exposed in greater extent to the pressure of WFC.

The identification of WFC of the two types (WIF and WFI) has been approached through the following direct questions:

(a) Do you agree with the following statement: “the time which I have to devote to my job duties do not allow me to accomplish my family duties”?

(b) Do you agree with the following statement: “the time which I have to devote to my family duties do not allow me to spend the necessary time for my job duties, to develop my career, etc.”?

A more significant disparity of the answers of men and women was found in respect of the first question (related to WIF) as compared with the second one. For the majority of men the work takes most of their time and thus obstructing their equal participation in household work and other family duties (it is commonly hypothesized that this statement is used as an excuse by the men for their limited engagement at home). As a tradition, the Bulgarian women have used to make efforts (during their economically active life) for simultaneously executing the two kinds of duties which is confirmed by their responses to the first question – almost 2/3 of the female respondents express a disagreement with statement (a). However, still over 20% could be characterized as exposed to WFC-WIF of some extent which provides a condition for exposure to some risk of socio-economic exclusion.

In respect of the second type of WFC (FIW) some discrepancies are observed between male and female respondents (fig.3). Almost twice higher is the share of women (42%) that confirm the existence of a hindrance effect of the household and family obligations on their

professional development. This disparity provides additional indication about the asymmetrical perceptions of the conditions for equal participation in social and/or economic activities. In this respect, it is important to note that quite a low share of female respondents (26%) agree that their managers fully recognize the necessity of female employees to commit in adequate extent to their potential family obligations –

in the same time, about 1/3 explicitly state that they face the opposite attitude of superiors. In the contrary, about 80% of the male respondents do not meet any problematic attitudes from the managerial staff in the organizations where they are employed.

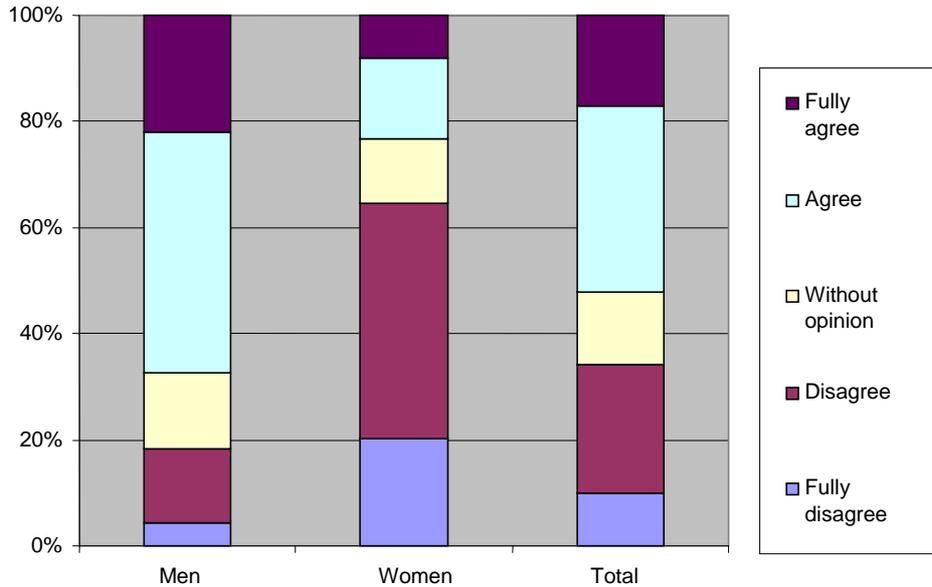


Figure 2. Distribution of responses to the question: Do you agree with the following statement: “the time which I have to devote to my job duties do not allow me to accomplish my family duties”?

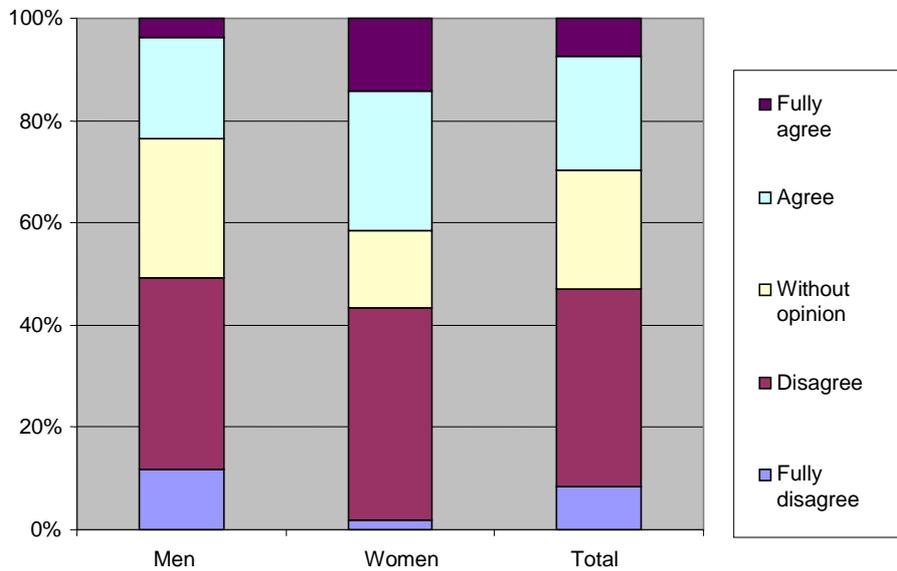


Figure 3. Distribution of responses to the question: Do you agree with the following statement: “the time which I have to devote to my family duties do not allow me to spend the necessary time for my job duties, to develop my career, etc.”?



A particular factor stimulating WFC appears to be the rare (and in many cases missing) institutional/organizational support for working family members with an inevitable burden of family duties. At the moment of the survey (and we believe the situation has not changed much since then) their organizations in general do not provide opportunities for any flexible forms of employment (e.g. flexible start/end of workday, virtual job places, etc.). There is a lack of modern “on-site child care” centers or other practices of social support subsidized by the organization (e.g. services facilitating the bringing-up of children, care for elderly) along with a lack of adequate information about any accessible social services.

The only existing forms (as known by the respondents) are the options for part-time employment (e.g. 4 hours per workday) or paid maternity leave for some period after the birth of a child. About 2/3 of the female respondents have used their rights for such a regulated maternity leave and about 10% have utilized the opportunity for a part-time labor contract. As another positive fact reflecting a definite anti-exclusion effect is that over half of the organizations-employers of female respondents provide the opportunity for a part-time employment, although the interviewees did not take advantage of it. However, the option exists and provides a buffer in case of any adverse intensification of WFC.

The situation of a permanent exposure to such a risk exists for a large share of the women interviewed having in mind the large amount of time necessary to spend for household work and child care at home (table 3).

TABLE 2.
DOES THE ORGANIZATION PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS?

	Not at all	No, but I would like to	Yeas but I do not use it	Yes, and I use it	Doesn't know / NA
Flexible start and end of the workday					
Women	66,7	–	–	–	33,3
Men	94,1	–	–	–	5,9
Virtual workplace					
Women	66,7	5,9	–	–	27,4
Men	88,2	–	–	–	11,8
Part-time employment					
Women	–	–	55,6	11,1	33,3
Men	–	–	94,1	–	5,9
Paid maternity leave					
Women	–	–	–	66,7	33,3
Men	–	–	94,1	–	5,9

TABLE 3.
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS:

(a) “How many work hours takes a typical work week of yours?”			
	Men	Women	Total
Less than 20	–	3.0	1.0
20–30	1.6	13.1	5.6
31-40	13.4	40.4	22.7
41-50	54.5	39.4	49.3
51-60	27.8	4.0	19.6
Over 60	2.7	–	1.7
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0
(b) “How many hours you spend weekly for child care?”			
Do not have opportunity to spend time with them	1,1	–	0,7
Less than 1	14.4	–	9.4
1-5	25.1	–	16.4
6-10	23.5	–	15.4
11-15	21.9	2.0	15.0
16-20	7.0	10.1	8.0
21-30	1.1	18.2	7.0
Over 30	–	29.3	10.1
N/A	5.9	40.4	17.8
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0
(c) “How many hours you spend weekly for household work?”			
Less than 1	5.3	–	3.5
1-5	35.8	–	23.4
6-10	34.2	9.1	25.5
11-15	16.0	16.2	16.1
16-20	5.3	33.3	15.0
21-30	3.2	19.2	8.7
Over 30	–	14.1	4.9
N/A	–	8.1	2.8
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0

The answers to the questions about the time budget show that female respondents are in much higher extent engaged in their family duties. Within those who have children, only one fifth (12% among 60%) spend less than 20 hours during the workweek for childcare and about half of these women spend more that 30 hours for this purpose. A considerable disparity between the distributions of men and women by their involvement in family duties is observed not only in respect of the time for childcare but also regarding the time for household work (about 3/4 of male respondents declare that they spend up to 10 hours for household work during the workweek; in the same time, an equivalent share of the women spend more than 10 hours for this purpose). As expected, the divergence of the distributions of respondents in respect of the time devoted to work

duties is in favor of men, however, in a smaller extent (table 3.a).

TABLE 4.
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY THE
ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS:

(a) "Do the grandparents help your family in: Childcare?"			
	Men	Women	Total
Never	–	–	–
Few times per year	5.9	–	3.8
At least once per month	16.0	–	10.5
At least once per week	40.1	20.2	33.2
Almost every day	30.5	39.4	33.6
N/A	7.5	40.4	18.9
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0
(b) "Do the grandparents help your family in: Housekeeping?"			
Never	55.1	34.3	47.9
Few times per year	9.1	17.2	11.9
At least once per month	8.6	11.1	9.4
At least once per week	16.0	14.1	15.4
Almost every day	11.2	23.2	15.4
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0

As stated above, the changes in the family roles that have occurred during the hard times of market transition in Bulgaria invoked the needs for societal and/or family support especially to working parents. The hard budget constraints did not (and still do not) allow any considerable public support, so the cultural traditions played a significant role in this respect. Assuming the stagnating level of income and employment risks for almost 15 years of transition, the options for providing paid services for childcare and housekeeping were not affordable even for the middle class families. In order to allow any stable labor involvement, particularly for the women, the help of the "extended" family members appeared to be of main source of support in light of the established customs and norms of Bulgarian family. It's not surprising that the grandparents' help has been identified quite more noticeable by the female than male respondents (table 4). For two thirds of the working women with children the daily assistance by the grandparents definitely has a substantial effect on reducing the risks from the intensification of WFC-FIW. Considerable support is received also in respect of the housekeeping duties by about 37% of the working women. This source of support is also enlightened by the men where 70% of respondents declare that grandparents take part in the care for children.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that after the first 15 years of transition the socio-economic environment in Bulgaria is characterized by conditions of escalating workload of employed persons imposed by the labor market competition. The everyday risk of loosing the job and other risks for isolation of women are persistently high, which is especially valid for individuals from families with unfavorable socio-economic status.

Any of the narrow range of sources for social and public support in this respect is potentially offsetting the risks of social exclusion and could boost up the overall well-being. The refinement of the social inclusion policies can have a substantial role in this process through the informed selection and utilization of effective instruments. Such instruments could be implemented in the framework of the labor market policies (e.g. flexible contracting and/or work time arrangements; employment subsidies; options for job sharing; welfare-to-work stimuli; work-at-distance options; life-long education and professional training; etc.) or social inclusion policies (e.g. provision of child care facilities; special support – housing and/or services – for dependents (children, elderly, disabled) or other kind of work-life reconciliation support; etc.). Thus, the access to unpaid domestic help, corporate concern, and family-friendly public policy could have strong neutralizing effect in terms of WFC achieving an optimal work-family balance with low exclusion risk.

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