

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON WORK-FAMILY RELATION AND GENDER ROLES IN ROMANIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: *The aim of the present study targeted to explore specific perceptions of Romanian respondents, based on gender approach, focusing on different facets of the work-family relation. The methodology comprised a survey procedure on three major dimensions - work-family conflict, work-family facilitation and role stress, collecting data from 160 participants, evenly distributed from a gender criterion. Data showed different tendencies concerning the perceptions of individuals, based on the gender category, on the work-family conflict theme, the role stress view and the gender role ideology. In conclusion, results explored new stances of present-day social functioning and resource allocation towards work or family sector, depending on gender.*

Key words: *gender, role stress, work-family conflict, work-family facilitation.*

1. Introduction

Work and family are both first-page research topics. The way in which they relate and interact captures the attention of the academic sector and crystallizes interests of general public with visible echoes in mass-media. Moreover, articles explore how personal and professional aspects are conditioned by an optimum connection of the two domains. A primary reason of such growing interest at so many levels can be considered women integration in paid work, outside the house. The process is explained somehow by present technological development that brings affordable, large scale available devices that facilitate or replace entirely routine activities both at home and in the workplace. Moreover, western welfare regimes took over another series of activities and responsibilities, traditionally assigned to women or to the extended family in the past, such as: childcare and education, care facilities for the elderly, care for the ill or dependant persons. A second reason brings out the set of transformations regarding

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European policies that aim at increasing employment rates for both men and women, according to the inclusive labour market perspective (Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020 Strategy).

Beyond such trends, towards a higher enrolment for women in the workforce, researchers see a higher involvement for men in household activities and childcare responsibilities nowadays, than 30 years ago (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1997). Nevertheless, in some papers it is argued that “research has documented that women still assume the main burden of domestic tasks and childcare within the household, despite the recent changes towards a greater equality” (de Miguel-Luken, 2019, p. 303). All of these above-mentioned issues question the classical delimitation between the two domains. In this regard the functionalist approach served as a first key in understanding work-family relation for several decades. According to this first theoretical perspective, men and women were assigned different sets of roles, mutually incompatible and family’s optimal functioning was granted by the accomplishment of certain tasks and activities, specific to each representative of the two sexes (Grandey & Cropanzano 1999). Later, expansionist paradigm, came to contradict this dominant view, arguing that roles accumulation has positive implications (Barnett & Hyde 2001). Like any other social theory, none of the above-mentioned dominant perspectives succeeds in explaining all situations encountered in practice. Furthermore, the two separate spheres of work and family, described by Kanter 50 years ago (1977), have undergone significant transformations. Considering such aspects, the present research intends to describe how the two role sets mitigate for the two genders, in terms of conflict and facilitation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Work-family relation is a theme that draws research focus, exploring concepts such as „work-life balance”, (e.g. Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Casper et al., 2018), “work-family facilitation”, “work-family enrichment” or “work-family conflict” (Greenhaus & Allen 2011; Casper et al., 2018) when observing the relation between personal and professional dimensions. From a chronological perspective, the first concept which emerged when addressing work-family interaction was proposed by Greenhaus, who described “work-family conflict” as a “form of inter-roles conflict defined by the fact that the roles’ requests at work and in the family are incompatible to such an extent that participation either in work related roles or in the family related ones is more difficult because of the individual’s participation in the other role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 76).

Starting from Goode’s theory on role strain (Goode, 1960), this conceptualization mainly portrays resources conservation theory, based on scarcity hypothesis. Thus, the starting assumption is that humans’ energetic, temporal, emotional or cognitive resources are limited. Therefore, involvement in a specific role leads to resource consumption and a greater number of undertaken responsibilities and roles which will inevitably lead to exhaustion. From this perspective, work and family are seen as competing dimensions for the individual’s resources and joining the two role sets is a priori a trade-off. Since both profession and family can be sources of stress and demands, researchers consider that there can be two directions of the conflict: the

work-family conflict and the family-work one. In this situation the conflict regards a person's time, requests or behaviour, although the latter form is to a lesser extent analysed.

The expansionist theory, contrary to the resource conservation hypothesis, starts with the assumption that energy or time resources can be increased, not being limited to a predetermined value. Thus, occupying various roles helps individuals develop their energy reserves. Multiple roles are seen as being beneficial for the physical, mental and relational health. This view is best described by the "work-family facilitation" construct, defined by Frone as "the extent to which participation at work (or at home) is facilitated by the experiences, skills or opportunities gained or developed at home (at work)" (Frone, 2003, p. 143). Work-family facilitation describes a beneficial relationship between the two areas of life, it is not synonymous with the absence of conflict, as in the case of the term "work-family balance", but it implies earnings for both areas. As conflict, facilitation can act from the family to the professional area and vice versa and may involve values, behaviours or principles.

Both work-family conflict and work-family facilitation are often in relation with role stress. From this point of view, accomplishing several sets of positions (e.g. worker, parent, partner, caregiver) can lead to role stress. These positions are often described as influencing the quality attributed to these role sets. Previous perspectives showed that role quality is determined by the interference of role satisfaction and role stress, considering role stress assessment an adequate tool when investigating work-family relation (Baruch, 1986).

Several cross-cultural studies suggest that socio-cultural factors moderate the potential of work-family experiences to generate physical and mental outcomes and have examined gender role ideology, individualism/collectivism horizontally and vertically, alongside legislative policies or personal factors (Korabik, Lero, & Ayman, 2003; Joplin et al., 2003). Gender ideologies are defined as "sets of widely taken-for-granted cultural beliefs about the essential nature and relative worth of men and women. In contemporary Western societies, these beliefs are nearly always based on a binary understanding of two naturally distinct and "opposite" sexes that are rooted in biology and map unambiguously onto two gender categories" (Chatillon, Charles, & Bradley cit. in Risman, Froyum, & Scarborough, 2018, p. 217).

Furthermore, gender ideologies are shaped through social institutions, traditions, models and day by day interactions which reproduce such beliefs. These representations about what and how a woman or a man should do/act, conceptualized as gender role ideology, influence a person's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his or her situation, experiencing work-family conflict or facilitation, moderate behaviour and expectations. Researchers distinguish between traditional and egalitarian/modernist gender role ideology. The interactionist perspective explains the permanent defining of gender ideologies, as a continuous process, through which previous beliefs regarding femininity and masculinity influence behaviours, interactions, cognitive assessment and at the same time, all these "confrontations" between ideologies and daily social functioning reframe the understanding of roles' positioning (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Previous research also emphasized the role of specific socio-demographic aspects in work-family relation (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), frequently mentioning the amount of time spent at the job or the time dedicated to domestic duties. Other studies emphasized the negative relation between the time spent on household activities and personal satisfaction (Barstadt, 2014; de Miguel-Luken, 2019).

3. Methods

The present study examines the way Romanian women and men experience work-family relation, addressing issues such as work-family conflict, work-family facilitation, role stress, gender role ideology, and several socio-demographic aspects regarding the amount of time spent with professional activities and household responsibilities.

Our exploration approach targeted the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences regarding the work-family conflict perspectives between female and male respondents?
2. Are there any significant differences regarding the work-family facilitation perspectives between female and male respondents?
3. Is there a distinctive perception between respondents from the two categories regarding the role stress dimension?

To address the above-mentioned questions, we used a purposive sample, of 162 respondents ($N_{\text{female}} = 80$, $N_{\text{male}} = 82$). From the 162 respondents, 116 completed the survey online, on a web-based manner and 46 used the pen and paper personal survey. The present study aimed to explore gender differences of the respondents' sample with direct focus on work and family conflict and facilitation, not determining causality processes or outcomes. The participants' age varied between 19 years of age to 62 years of age, most of the cases being situated between 30-40 (40% of the cases). Concerning their profession, 29.6% of cases came from the education sector, 27.8% of cases from the services area and 25.9% represented the production sector, while 16.7% did not report a specific profession. On the education level, 59.3% of the respondents had completed the university studies. For the features of the marital status, 84.6% of the respondents reported being married or living as a couple with a partner, 62.4% of the total sample declaring they have one or two children.

The survey was available as a Google Forms questionnaire and a pencil-paper format also. Before enrolling in the study, the potential participants were informed about the scope and procedures engaged and signed an informed consent form which contained precise information regarding confidentiality and data anonymity, in accordance with the existing legal regulations and GDPR requirements.

Regarding the data collection phase and instruments, we used a questionnaire, consisting of several dimensions grouped around the above-defined concepts: work-family conflict, work-family facilitation, role stress, and gender role ideology. We also added a section addressing socio-demographic aspects, such as the number of children, the number of hours allocated to different activities, age, education and others. In the following lines we will describe the construction of each variable and instrument, designed to record our respondents' positioning regarding the addressed issues.

According to Frone (2003), work-family relation consists of both conflict and facilitation and researchers recommend the use of scales that measure work-family conflict and work-family facilitation in analysing work-family relation (Grzywacs & Marks, 2000). As other researchers argued that work-family facilitation and conflict are rather two distinct processes than the two opposite ends of a continuum (Stephens, Franks, & Atienza, 1997), the scales targeting work-family conflict and work-family facilitation, used in this research, were not parallel. Thus, in the case of participants in the study it may happen that high scores can be obtained both in terms of work-family conflict on certain components, but also on the items addressing facilitation, because the feeling of pressure does not automatically mean the disappearance of earnings from fulfilling a role. We built a scale that investigates work-family conflict and family – work conflict concerning time and demands starting from the existent model of Netemeyer and colleagues, which have good psychometric properties proved by the selection of this instrument in many researches (Netemeyer, Boles, & McNurrian, 1996). The facilitation component of the work-family relation was investigated through a bidirectional scale also, developed starting from the model proposed by Hanson, Hammer and Colton (2006) and the answers could be placed on a scale from totally disagree to totally agree. Scoring the results, a total score concerning conflict/facilitation can be obtained and the directionality of the relation can be also investigated. In order to analyse the way in which participants in this research position themselves, at least ideologically, in relation to the roles that women and men occupy, we used a Likert-type scale, which contains several statements that investigate the beliefs that people can have regarding these roles. For each statement, the respondents were asked to choose a response, from one to seven, indicating their degree of agreement in this regard. When building the scale, we used some of the items of a SOROS survey concerning family life, as their utility was also discussed (Popescu, 2010). When scoring the results, the items are divided between the two types of gender role ideology and an index is calculated, by adding the items specific to each type of the two possible orientations. Role stress was investigated through a composite scale, that measured self-reported stress impact for each role, regarding profession, childcare activities, caregiver, household aspects and education. Respondents were asked to choose an answer that best represents the stress intensity perceived for each of the above mentioned roles, on a scale from one to seven. A total score for role stress variable was afterwards computed, adding the values reported for each component. We also obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of .83 in this case, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the composite scale we used.

4. Analyses and Results

The analysis we conducted focused on exploring from a comparative perspective women's and men's perceptions and opinions regarding work-family conflict, facilitation, role stress, and gender ideology through independent t tests.

In Table 1, results show a t value of 1.89, statistically significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results prove there are significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning

the work-family conflict variable. In the case of male respondents, data shows that these individuals obtain higher scores on the work-family conflict dimension ($M = 16.35$) than in the case of female respondents ($M = 13.93$).

Independent t test for work-family conflict and gender Table 1

Work-family conflict	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.11	.73	1.89	.02
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	80	13.93	8.06
	M	82	16.35	8.21

Analysing Table 2, results show a t value of 2.03, statistically significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results state there are significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning the family-work conflict variable. In the case of male respondents, data shows that these individuals obtain higher scores on the family-work conflict dimension ($M = 13.42$) than in the case of female respondents ($M = 10.97$).

Independent t test for family-work conflict and gender Table 2

Family-work conflict	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	6.60	.11	2.03	.02
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	79	10.97	6.72
	M	81	13.42	8.37

In Table 3, results show a t value of 4.03, statistically significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results show significant statistical differences between the two groups concerning the work hours per week dedicated to domestic duties. For female respondents, data shows that these individuals spend more work hours per week for domestic duties ($M = 2.81$) than in the case of male respondents ($M = 2.19$).

Table 3

Independent t test for work hours per week for domestic duties and gender

Work hours per week for domestic duties	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.28	.59	4.03	.00
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	80	2.81	0.99
	M	81	2.19	0.97

Studying Table 4, results show a t value of -1.16, not significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results show there are

no significant statistical differences between the two categories concerning the work hours per day dedicated to the job. In the case of female respondents, data shows that these individuals spend the same amount hours of work hours per day at job ($M = 1.80$), similar with the case of male respondents ($M = 1.94$).

Independent t test for work hours per day and gender Table 4

Work hours per day	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.61	.43	-1.16	.24
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	80	1.80	0.68
	M	81	1.94	0.81

In Table 5, results show a negative t value of -5.68, statistically significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results show that there are significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning the traditional ideology. In the case of male respondents, data shows that these individuals have a higher tendency to embrace a traditional ideology ($M = 37.31$) more than in the case of female respondents ($M = 25.65$).

Independent t test for the traditional ideology and gender Table 5

Traditional ideology	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.06	.93	-5.68	.00
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	79	25.65	12.66
	M	80	37.31	13.19

As seen in Table 6, results show a t value of 1.59, not significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results show there are no significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning the work-family facilitation variable. For male respondents, data shows that these individuals obtain similar scores on the work-family facilitation ($M = 24.22$), just like in the case of female respondents ($M = 26.63$).

Independent t test for work-family facilitation and gender Table 6

Work-family facilitation	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.51	.47	1.59	.11
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	82	26.63	9.43
	M	79	24.22	9.80

In Table 7, results show a t value of -0.38, not significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results state there are no significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning

the family-work facilitation variable. In the case of male respondents, data shows that these individuals obtain similar scores on the family-work facilitation dimension ($M = 28.74$), just like in the case of female respondents ($M = 28.13$).

Independent t test for family-work facilitation and gender

Table 7

Family-work facilitation	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	0.97	.32	-0.38	.70
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	80	28.13	9.75
	M	77	28.74	10.44

Analysing Table 8, results show a t value of 1.98, statistically significant, whereas the Levene F test for equality of variances did not appear to be significant. The results show us that there are significant statistical differences between the two categories of respondents concerning the role stress variable (le 8). In the case of male respondents, data shows that these individuals obtain higher scores on the role stress dimension ($M = 23.66$) than in the case of female respondents ($M = 20.51$).

Independent t test for role stress and gender

Table 8

Role stress variable	F	Sig.	t	Sig.
	1.00	.98	1.98	.04
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. dv.
	F	67	20.51	10.90
	M	74	23.66	11.31

5. Discussion

As stated in a previous section, the aim of this research is to examine the way Romanian women and men experience work-family relation, addressing issues such as work-family conflict, work-family facilitation, role stress, gender role ideology and the amount of time doing professional activities and household responsibilities.

Beginning with the perception of work-family conflict among our respondents, obtained results give a different perspective than the classical one, according to which in rather traditional societies, women experience a conflict between professional and personal roles to a higher extent than men. On the contrary, the data of the present research show that men are confronted more often with both work-family conflict and family-work conflict. For the work-family conflict variable, men obtained a mean of 16.35, statistically higher than women – 13.93 (see Table 1). The results state that male respondents consider that work-related issues interfere with their personal and family life more than female respondents. The direction of this difference between the representatives of the two genders is also valid regarding family-work conflict. Again, the mean obtained for male respondents (13.42) was above the one of female respondents (10.97) and the difference between the two categories is statistically

significant, with a t value of 2.03 obtained at a significance level $p \leq .05$. Such positioning shows that again, men feel the intrusion of family and personal requests into the work domain to a higher extent than the female participants. Such results made us also consider the time which the representatives of the two genders allocate to activities, tasks and responsibilities coming from both personal and professional domains.

Therefore, the next investigated variables were the number of hours spent on the job and the amount of time dedicated to housework. As shown in the analysis section, the female and male participants in this study spend almost the same number of hours doing professional activities, while at home, women are still the ones that accomplish most domestic duties. The differences between men and women concerning the time they spend with such domestic activities are statistically significant for the participants in the present study. Results show that even if we witness gender convergence in the professional domain, housework still remains women's territory, for our participants. The findings follow trends at international level, showing that even if the rate of housework activities continues to diminish for women, men are still to a lesser extent involved in such tasks (Sullivan cit. in Risman et al., 2018). The results obtained in the present study concerning differences between men and women and the impact of work-family conflict and family-work conflict are divergent from other results reported in previous research, which link women involvement in paid work outside the house with strain and conflict for them (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). We should mention that other studies showed that role accumulation brings benefits in the case of working mothers (Baruch, 1986; Oppenheimer, 1997).

Continuing the idea of gaining from multiple role involvement, work-family facilitation and family-work facilitation were both investigated, and the results obtained for the two categories included in our study show that female and male respondents consider, to a similar extent, that the two domains – personal and professional bring benefit to one another. More clearly, the mean obtained for work-family facilitation is 26.63 for women and 24.22 for men and the independent samples t test analysis concluded that the difference between the two categories is not significant. A similar data distribution was obtained for family-work facilitation, where the mean for male respondents was 28.74 and for female participants 28.13, and the difference was not statistically significant. Considering the above-mentioned theories regarding work-family interface, besides investigating differences between men and women regarding conflict and facilitation, we also questioned the potential differences between them if we investigate role stress. Male participants reported to a higher extent than women role stress emerging from role accumulation, the mean for the first category being 23.66, while for female respondents was 20.51. Furthermore, the difference is significant from a statistical point of view, with a t value of 1.68 obtained at a significance level of $p \leq .05$. Role stress was often seen in relation to work-family conflict and was therefore expected that, given the positioning of the participants included in the current research, the distribution of responses concerning role stress would be close to the ones obtained for work-family conflict.

Again, male participants declared more often than female participants in the survey that they feel stressed because of the roles they accomplish. Such positioning made us

wonder what variables can explain the scores obtained by the participants in our study compared to previous research. In this view we included in our analysis some socio-demographic indicators often mentioned in other studies to be related with work-family interface and a softer, cultural variable – gender ideology. The male participants in the current research proved to be characterized by a more traditional gender ideology than female respondents, the difference being statistically significant. The mean regarding traditional gender ideology variable was 25.65 for women, lower than 37.31, the average score obtained for men. A traditional gender ideology is specific to low levels of social and economic development, while the changes towards egalitarian gender beliefs are frequently associated with modernization and industrialization processes (Voicu & Tufiş, 2012).

When analysing the gender agenda, we noticed that male respondents of the present study report to an intensive extent an imbalance in their family-profession relation, as scores for both work-family and family-work conflict are higher for men than for women. Such positioning could be explained by the moderating effect of gender-role ideology, as the number of hours dedicated to professional activities doesn't differ for the representatives of the two genders. Moreover, female participants reported longer hours consumed with domestic duties than male participants. The difference between the time variable, which men and women dedicate to household labour identified in this research is convergent to the trend existing at national and European level (Sullivan cit. in Risman et al., 2018). The discussion here should not be over – simplified, as many other variables, besides the ones included in the present paper mediate the work-family relation and the analyses deployed are not adequate for such inferences, as the main purpose of this research was to explore.

6. Conclusions

The present paper underlines the sensible social role act between individuals of different gender categories, stating that even if both male and female participants, in the current research, experience similar work-family facilitation, male respondents report to a higher degree the conflict agenda, pressuring both family and work life. Moreover, the same individuals manifest higher levels of role stress perception in their daily life in comparison with female participants. These results describe that men are confronting more frequently with the work-family or family-work conflict, feeling to a higher degree as expected the stress role tension, in a dynamic society that blurs specific and exact division of these social instances.

The study also brought to attention various socio-demographic indicators, among which the number of working hours per week or the amount of time dedicated to domestic duties. These indicators highlight that women still spend more time with household activities than men, while the amount of work time dedicated to the profession is similar. These results state that men and women work similar amounts of time in the professional sector, while women still tend to fulfil the domestic tasks at the same time managing an equal professional implication as men. The paper also describes another cultural, softer moderator, which may explain our data distribution. In other

words, the gender ideology shows that male respondents are still statistically closer to a traditional ideology than women. From this point of view, embracing a traditional ideology is strongly connected with the high role stress levels and the work-family conflict, in a society that challenges old rules and positions, where roles are not anymore specifically gender designed. Losing old habits and roles, embracing new ones and facing new demands, could be seen as a conflictual approach, tensioning one gender category or another. We therefore recommend further analysis aiming to understand the gender ideology, focusing also on social status and couples' negotiations. Moreover, the international scholarly literature contains numerous studies that investigate with preference work-family relations for women, mainly because professional activity continues to be seen as a "second option" for them. The present paper results open new areas of interest, focusing on the idea that throughout the process men were often neglected in such analysis, where somehow societal changes and the trends towards gender convergence, seem to affect some of them more than they affect women, when analysing work-family roles. It is vital that future studies explore in depth and in detail these perspectives and dimensions, for a better understanding of professional and personal life adaptation.

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