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Employed parents' reactions to work-family conflicts: Adaptive strategies of scaling back in Germany

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Abstract

Objective: This study investigates the extent to which employed mothers and fathers scale back on working hours or job pressures in response to work-to-family conflicts (WFC).

Background: Drawing on the concept of adaptive family strategies, it is assumed that WFC is an antecedent to a reduction in work demands. Considering partners' gender ideology net of other resources and characteristics, we can expect to see gender differences in the adoption of this strategy. Relatively little research has been conducted on associations among WFC, gender ideology, gender, and work-related coping strategies.

Method: We use six waves of the German Family Panel (pairfam, release 11.0), covering the survey years 2012-2019, to examine the effect of WFC and gender ideology on employed mothers' and fathers' work-related coping strategies (N=791 mothers and N=1292 fathers). OLS regression is used to estimate the effect of WFC at t and gender ideology t_{-1} on changes in job pressure and working hours between t and t_{+1}.

Results: Parents who experience WFC are more likely to reduce their job pressure and less likely to scale back on working hours. Gender differences in the reaction between mothers and fathers on WFC only occur in connection with traditional gender ideology.

Conclusion: Scaling back seems not to be a commonly used strategy to react to WFC.

Key words: gender ideology, parenthood, scaling back, work-to-family conflicts

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1. Introduction

Conflicts between work and private life, their catalysts, and possible solutions are one of the dominating discourses around employees' wellbeing. Besides debates on work and family policies, such as the right to work in home office, sufficient childcare facilities, or flexible work contracts that fit the life course, more and more research is focusing on parents' coping processes (Young & Schieman 2018; Badawy & Schieman 2021; Mosseri 2021). Coping strategies for dealing with conflicting work and family experiences are particularly relevant in cases where organisational work-life cultures do not adequately address the structural aspects of compatibility problems. This especially applies for couples with children as childcare is an additional family demand which increases the overall workload and duties and therefore the risk of work-family interference (cf. Jacobs & Gerson 2004).

If parents develop routines and employ strategies in response to work-family conflicts, what should be the focus of the study? Work-family conflicts are a bidirectional construct (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). Employees, however, evaluate their compatibility problems more often from work to family than vice versa (Eurofound 2017; Notten et al. 2017). We, therefore, propose that parents are most likely to seek work-related coping strategies to deal with these work-to-family conflicts (hereafter mostly referred to as WFC) because work demands lead to these conflicts. Thus, we examine strategies for coping with this particular direction of conflict only.

A very common coping strategy for WFC is to *scale back* one's commitment to work – at least if there is a desire for more family compatibility. Scaling back is a family adaptive strategy and one of several patterns of action that couples apply to reduce compatibility problems between the work and family domain (Moen & Wethington 1992). Reducing work demands, for example, by reducing working hours or job pressures, could be interpreted as a confirmation that couples employ the strategy of scaling back in order to reduce their WFC (Becker & Moen 1999). Models that explain the mechanisms of work-family spillover suggest that the reduction in work demands solves compatibility problems and their consequences (Bakker, Demerouti & Dollard 2008: Fig. 1). Empirical findings, indeed, indicate that scaling back on work demands is related to a reduction in WFC (Higgins, Duxbury & Johnson 2000; van Rijswijk et al. 2004), but also comes at the cost of lower career prospects (McDonald, Bradley & Brown 2008) and a lower social standing in the workplace (Kirby & Krone 2002).

Previous research has revealed gender differences, e.g. mothers in Canada are far more likely to scale back as a consequence of WFC (Young & Schieman 2018). In the light of the current state of research, the extent to which this coping strategy also plays a role in other countries, such as Germany, remains an open question. One reason is that there are persistent structural and cultural differences across countries as work-life practices and the prevalence of women's part-time work and the related wage penalty compared to full-time jobs are found to vary (McGinnity & McManus 2007). Moreover, parents differ in their beliefs about the importance of work and family roles and the extent to which work or family roles are central to their self-image. Work-related coping strategies may thus not only be interpreted as an attempt to abate WFC, but should also be seen in the light of gendered approaches to the life course (Moen 2011) and the modernized male breadwinner model (Berghammer 2014). Connected with this is the question of whether or not a reduction in work demands is a strategic response to WFC.

A central theoretical assumption of this paper is that parents' gender and gender ideologies may determine strategies for coping with WFC. Gender ideologies may provide further insight into whether WFC may be experienced differently by mothers and fathers and whether easing WFC is achieved via different scaling back strategies.

Using longitudinal data from the German Family Panel (pairfam, years 2013-2019), this study extends research on the work-family interface by investigating the relationship between WFC and scaling back, namely the reduction in working hours or job pressures. In order to understand decision-making processes, we discuss the impact of gender ideologies on mothers' and fathers' tendencies to scale back on work demands when controlling for the intra-couple distribution of economic resources and family characteristics. The present paper aims to answer the following research questions: First, to what extent do couples with children follow a strategy of scaling back to reduce their WFC? Second, do mothers and fathers adopt similar strategies? Third, what role is played by gender ideology and partners' ideological pairings? Our approach is similar in some ways to a study conducted by Young and Schiemann (2018). We improve upon previous research by explicitly examining the role of gender ideologies.

2. Theoretical considerations

2.1 Work-to-family conflicts and scaling back

In Western countries, a large number of employees report that work interferes with family life (Schieman, Glavin & Milkie 2009; Eurofound 2017; Remery & Schippers 2019). Work-to-family conflict is one form of inter-role conflict caused by spillover from work stress to family life (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). Time-based and strain-based WFC result from incompatible work and family demands, especially in dual-earner couples with children (Moen 2003; Flood & Genadek 2016; Steiner & Krings 2016). In this context, the amount of working time and job pressure are identified as two central antecedents to WFC (Voydanoff 2005; Schieman et al. 2009).

Perceived levels of WFC depend on various factors such as work stressors, career orientation, or perceptions of work schedule flexibility. At the same time, the degrees of family involvement and work-family boundaries as well as the subjective importance of family roles shape sensitivities towards inter-role conflicts (Cinamon & Rich 2002; Michel et al. 2011). Both work- and family-related factors, as antecedents to WFC, vary systematically by gender and differ accordingly in the amount of reported WFC (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2021).

The experience of WFC is often stressful and is found to have negative effects on the mental health, well-being, and the satisfaction with different aspects of life (Yucel & Fan 2019; Yucel & Latshaw 2020). Some research on the work-family interface assumes that parents develop strategies that aim to reduce WFC, in particular when their family roles are salient. The concept of family adaptive strategies describes patterns of action couples use intentionally to reduce their inter-role conflicts (Moen & Wethington 1992). These patterns of action include negotiation processes within the couple relationship, conscious evaluation of the different spheres of their lives, and work-related decisions (Haddock et al. 2001). Scaling back is one commonly used work-related decision. It describes how individuals reduce their work commitments and job demands in order to protect other domains of life – primarily the family. As Becker and Moen (1999) describe, people can scale back at and from different levels of workforce participation and other job demands. This seems reasonable for employees in order to reduce inter-role conflicts. The job demand-resource model assumes that job demands tie up employees' resources and cause job strain through "*a disturbance of the equilibrium between the demands employees are exposed to and the resources they have at their disposal*" (Bakker & Demerouti 2007: 310). The spillover theory, further, states that these effects impair the work-family interface and therefore cause WFC (cf. Demerouti, Peeters & van der Heijden 2012). Congruently, job demands in general and working hours and job pressure in particular were found to be two main causes of WFC (Michel et al. 2011). Practically, work-related coping strategies vary with regard to both job resources and job demands, as well as to gender. The next section discusses why mothers and fathers may differ in their scaling back strategies.

2.2 Gender differences in strategies of scaling back throughout the life course

Evidence from life course research shows that many couples change their workforce participation and work responsibilities across their career (Simonson, Gordo & Titova 2011). From comparative studies, we know that women in Western Germany reduce their workforce participation during their lifetime, irrespective of educational and professional status (Aisenbrey & Fasang 2017). Life course events such as the birth of a child or marriage play a special role (Drobnic, Blossfeld & Rohwer 1999; Hynes & Clarkberg 2005). By contrast, no such flexibility around full-time employment can be found on the part of men – with the exceptions of involuntary unsteady employment and pre-retirement reduction in working hours (Biemann, Zacher & Feldman 2012). In addition, many men do not realize a desire for fewer working hours, even if this is permitted (Stier & Lewin-Epstein 2003).

A pattern that can be observed – not only in Germany – is that scaling back on working hours takes place in temporal contexts of life course events. The birth of a child is the main driver of temporal or steady female reduction in workforce participation (Damaske & Frech 2016), while men tend to increase working hours after the transition to fatherhood, or at least not to decrease them (Bünning & Pollmann-Schult 2016). As a result, two-thirds of women but only five per cent of men living in a heterosexual dual-earner

relationship are part-time employed. (Datenreport 2018: 65). Furthermore, the vast majority of fathers never switched to part-time work – not even temporarily (Bünning 2020).

Beside a re-traditionalization of gender roles within the life course, reasons for these gender differences lie in the German tax system (Hofmeister, Blossfeld, & Mills, 2006), generous welfare state support for maternal leave, and a lack of adequate childcare facilities, especially in West Germany (Misra, Moller, & Budig, 2007; Schober & Stahl, 2016). Another explanation for why pathways are often gendered is that partners bargain for their division of labour based on relative resources. A partner's comparative advantage with regard to labour market resources increases the desire of the economically disadvantaged partner to scale back (Heckman 1974), which is often the woman (Bonke 2008). Holding an income advantage over one's partner accordingly decreases the desire to scale back (van Breeschoten, Roeters & van der Lippe 2018).

A reduction in job pressures as the second type of potential scaling back can be related to the amount of working hours. Job pressure can be defined as employees perceiving a lack of time, energy, or capabilities to fulfil work tasks (Voydanoff 2005). A reduction in working hours, therefore, may limit the lack of energy and might reduce the time pressure. In addition, scaling back working hours and job pressure may be reciprocally related, as reducing job pressure potentially limits the time spent working, while a decrease in working hours may come with a reduction in (potentially demanding) responsibilities (Schieman et al. 2009). However, job pressure as one expression of job demands is a distinct category that is strongly related to job resources as they reduce physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti 2007; Schieman 2013). Similar to reducing working hours, reducing job pressure in order to ensure work-family compatibility is more often done by mothers than by fathers (Nomaguchi & Fettro 2019; Badawy & Schieman 2021).

Findings from empirical research that includes family demands and WFC directly in the analyses show similar gender differences in the likelihood of scaling back. In the past, women were far more likely than men to reduce work efforts in order to make work and family demands more compatible (Carr 2002; Maume 2006). Even women already working part time further reduced their working hours to meet family demands (Blair-Loy 2003). More recent findings indicate that women with children younger than age 6 in Canada are more likely than men to scale back in response to WFC (Young & Schieman 2018).

2.3 The role of gender ideology in parents' work-related coping strategies

Behaviour and decisions do not necessarily follow the logic of economic bargaining power but are based instead on gender ideologies (Bittman et al. 2003; Risman 2011; Sullivan 2011). According to Davis and Greenstein, gender ideologies "represent individuals' levels of support for a [gendered] division of paid work and family responsibilities" (2009: 88). Parents still seem to have some reservations about female breadwinners, and women do not seem to make use of their workforce possibilities when they have an earning potential advantage over their partner (Bertrand, Kamenica & Pan 2015; Klesment & van Bavel 2017). According to the doing gender approach (West & Zimmerman 1987), mothers and fathers experience societal pressure due to gendered norms around workforce participation and caregiving, and this induces them to conform to these norms (Williams 2001; Hays 1996). Findings from a vignette study on men's and women's decisions to scale back also reveal that fathers expect this to have long-term negative consequences for their career, while mothers do not (van Breeschoten, Roeters & van der Lippe 2018). Furthermore, mothers are most satisfied with a part-time and fathers with a full-time job, which indicates that they internalize norms of gendered workforce participation (Booth & van Ours 2008). Consequently, parents following traditional gender norms are more satisfied with their behaviour and decisions (Balbo & Arpino 2016; Roeters, Mandemakers & Voorpostel 2016).

The downside of this mechanism is that it is mothers in particular who experience societal pressure and stigmatization for deviating from traditional gender norms with regard to work and family life (Mosseri 2021). In terms of the impact of WFC, this means that inter-role conflicts from work to family induce women to reduce their work demands. Masculine norms of primacy of work, instead, force fathers to follow their careers, regardless of family compatibility (Larsson & Björk 2017).

However, gender ideologies have changed, and egalitarian views on the distribution of paid and unpaid work are shared by the majority of people (Pedulla & Thébaud 2015; Scarborough, Sin & Risman 2019). Mothers, on the one hand, lay natural claim to similar career opportunities to men, and female careers have gained stability (Abendroth, Huffman & Treas 2014). At the same time, the social role of fathers and their

self-image have been re-orientating towards a desire for more family time (Bünning 2015; Edlund & Öun 2016). On the other hand, there is still diversity with regard to *traditional* and *egalitarian* gender attitudes in western societies (Hudde 2018). In particular, fathers are still expected to be the breadwinner of their family, while norms of intensive parenting are persistent for mothers (Koslowski 2011; Forbes, Donovan & Lamar 2020). On the macro level, the prevalence of egalitarian gender ideologies affects the prevalence of equal-income couples in European countries (Vitali & Arpino 2016). For individuals, gender ideologies are expected to shape their decisions to cut back on work demands. Fathers have to choose between the "good-provider" model or the "involved-father" model and react to the level of childcare demands by increasing or decreasing their working hours, depending on their gender ideology (Kaufman & Uhlenberg 2000). It can therefore be assumed that for fathers with traditional gender role attitudes, WFC will not lead to a reduction in work demands, while egalitarian gender norms can be assumed to increase the likelihood of scaling back. For women, the mechanisms are expected to lead to opposite outcomes.

At the same time, gender ideologies may have an impact on the perception of WFC. The experience of inter-role conflicts and its consequences is found to be stronger for individuals with an inconsistency between their work-family arrangement and their gender role ideology (Bornatici & Heers 2020). It can therefore be assumed that employed women with traditional gender ideologies and employed men with egalitarian gender ideologies are more sensitive towards WFC.

2.4 The role of conflicting gender ideologies in parent's work-related coping strategies

Besides the individual impact of gender ideologies, it has to be taken into account that scaling back is a decision that is preferably made in consultation with the partner. Partners in couple relationships, however, do not necessarily share the same gender values (Hudde 2020). As shared gender ideologies are a strong predictor of the division of work within couple relationships (Nitsche & Grunow 2018; Evertsson 2014), diverging ideologies may lead to conflicts with respect to couples' arrangements (Kalmijn 2005). Leaving out any nuances, we generally find four combinations here: homogenous relationships where both partners share either egalitarian (1) or traditional gender ideologies (2) and heterogeneous relationships with either a more traditional man (3) or a more traditional woman (4).

The influence of the homogenous combinations (1 & 2) seems quite clear, as empirical evidence shows that couples sharing more egalitarian views also make decisions directed towards more egalitarian work-family compatibility, while couples with traditional values more often stick to a specialized model of male breadwinning and female housekeeping (McMunn et al. 2020; Nitsche & Grunow 2018).

As regards the value-heterogeneous couples, however, the question arises as to which partner will prevail if the gender ideologies of the partners are conflicting. Couple relationships are a bulwark for traditional gender norms (Gerson 2002; England 2010; Ridgeway 2011). This phenomenon is partly driven by persisting traditional gender norms during the courtship period (Eaton & Rose 2011; Lamont 2014) and seems to result in a higher assertiveness of traditional values within couple relationships (Humble, Zvonkovic & Walker 2008). In addition, most couples may experience less headwind by making traditional decisions regarding the division of paid work. In cases of intra-couple conflicts arising from diverging norms, societal expectations on conformity to gender norms may make the partner with non-traditional views give in more often. We assume, therefore, that in couples with heterogeneous gender norms the more traditional partner prevails over the more egalitarian partner.

2.5 Hypotheses

In summary, the literature review suggests the following hypotheses about the work-related coping strategies, gender ideologies and WFC of employed mothers and fathers.

> Hypothesis 1: If mothers experience work-to-family conflicts, they are more likely to scale back. For fathers, work-to-family conflicts are likely to have no or only a weak effect on their work-related coping strategies.
> Hypothesis 2a: Parents' adoption of work-related coping strategies in response to work-to-family conflicts is partly moderated by gender ideology.
> Hypothesis 2b: Gender differences in work-related coping strategies in response to work-to-family conflicts are linked to mothers' and fathers' gender ideology.

Hypothesis 3: Heterogeneous gender norms in couple relationships lead to gender differences in work-related coping strategies in response to work-to-family conflict.

3. Data and method

3.1 Data and sample

Empirical analyses are based on longitudinal data provided by the pairfam study (2012–2019) (Brüderl et al. 2020). Yearly follow-up interviews are conducted with respondents (anchor persons) who are exclusively drawn from the birth cohorts 1971–1973, 1981–1983, or 1991–1993. The partners of the anchor persons are also interviewed via separate questionnaires. The survey provides, inter alia, a wealth of information on relationship histories and dynamics, the occurrence of conflict and its resolution strategies, as well as on beliefs of personal efficacy. The sample is restricted to employed persons who work at least 20 hours per week (but are not in vocational training or self-employed), are in a heterosexual couple relationship, and are living together with at least one child under 18 years. WFC as the primary independent variable were presented in the survey years 2013/14, 2015/16, and 2017/18. As our aim is to investigate the effect of WFC on future work-related decisions, we merged the survey years 2013/14 with 2014/15 (n=748), 2015/16 with 2016/17 (n=697), and 2017/18 with 2018/19 (n=638) and pooled the single data sets into one data set. The final analysis sample includes 2,083 observations of 1,132 respondents.

3.1 Measures

Work demands have been shown to be antecedents to WFC (Steiner & Krings 2016). Central to our theoretical considerations is the assumption of alternative causal direction: parents may scale back as a response to WFC. We therefore consider scaling back as a dependent variable and WFC as an independent variable.

3.1.1 Dependent variables

We measure *scaling back* by changes in job pressure and actual working hours between t and t_{+1}. *Job pressure* is measured with a 2-item summative index that represents (dis)agreement with the statements "I often have to work under heavy time pressure" and "*I often have to deal with too heavy workloads*" (0 = *disagree completely*, 4 = *agree completely*). Deviation in individual job pressure can take positive or negative values, with positive values representing an increase in job pressure across waves. Changes in actual working hours are measured by the difference in respondents' answers to the question "*What, on average, are your actual weekly working hours, including overtime?*" between t and t_{+1}.

3.1.2 Primary independent variable

Work-to-family conflict is measured by four items addressing time- and strain-based conflicts (Thönnissen et al. 2020). Time-based conflicts are measured by the two items: "*Because of my workload in my job, vocational training, or university education, my personal life suffers*", and "*My work prevents me from doing things with my friends, partner, and family more than I'd like*". Strain-based conflicts are measured by: "*Even when I am doing something with my friends, partner, or family, I must often think about work*" and "*After the stress of work, I find it difficult to relax at home and/or to enjoy my free time with others*" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *absolutely*). The WFC index ranges between 1 and 5 with higher values indicating higher levels of WFC.

3.1.3 Potential moderators

To explore the role of gender, individual-level gender ideology and conflicting gender ideologies in mothers' and fathers' scaling back on work demands, it is important to control for the various characteristics of each partner as well as the couple. These include not only absolute and relative economic resources but also occupational characteristics that may constrain the ability to scale back. Moreover, we must also consider aspects of family formation and the gender division of housework, as well as changes therein over time.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for mothers (N = 791) and fathers (N = 1292)

	Mothers		Fathers	
	M	SD	M	SD
Focal variables				
Job pressure (0=low, 4=high)	2.34	1.11	2.37	.99
Job pressure (t_{+1})	2.36	1.10	2.39	1.03
Actual working hours	31.62	8.72	43.24***	6.79
Actual working hours (t_{+1})	32.27	9.46	43.49***	7.33
Work-to-family conflict (1=low, 5=high)	2.25	.88	2.40***	.82
Gender ideology (0=egalitarian; 3=traditional) (t_{-1})	1.46	.91	1.58**	.93
Partner's gender ideology (t_{-1})	1.34	1.02	1.61***	1.00
Family variables				
No. of children	1.90	.80	1.89	.80
No. of children (t_{+1})	1.89	.80	1.95	.80
Age of youngest child				
1-2	.07	-	.22***	-
3-6	.28	-	.32+	-
6-14	.54	-	.39***	-
>14	.11	-	.07**	-
Married (1=yes)	.88	-	.90	-
Partner working hours	40.96	12.57	20.01***	15.79
Partner working hours (t_{+1})	40.63	12.67	22.00***	15.46
Chores (0=partner, 1=self)	.71	.21	.28***	.18
Chores (t_{+1})	.70	.21	.28***	.18
Childcare (0=partner, 1=self)	.63	.17	.34***	.15
Childcare (t_{+1})	.63	.17	.35***	.15
Share of education				
Advantage partner	.16	-	.13	-
Homogenous	.66	-	.63	-
Advantage anchor	.18	-	.24**	-
Occupational variables				
ISEI	53.05	19.07	50.02**	21.93
Public sector (1=yes)	.24	-	.11***	-
Fixed-term contract (1=yes)	.10	-	.05***	-
Same job between waves (1=yes)	.94	-	.94	-
Same occupational status (1=yes)	.98	-	.97	-
Sociodemographic variables				
Cohort				
1991-93	.01	-	.01	-
1981-83	.36	-	.35	-
1971-73	.63	-	.64	-
Living in East Germany (1=yes)	.45	-	.38**	-

Note. Asterisks signify significant differences between mothers and fathers within waves. We present means for continuous variables and percentages for categorical variables. We use t tests to test gender differences across continuous variables and logistic regression significances for all binary variables. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed test).

We include *gender* in our models (0 = male, female = 1). The anchor's and the partner's gender ideology is measured by (dis)agreement (0 = disagree completely, 3 = agree and agree completely) with the statement "*Women should be more concerned about their family than about their career*" at t_{-1} because the item is presented in every uneven wave. We refrain from the integration of gender ideology at t_{+1} as the second option because of its potential bias through an adaptation to the dependent variables (Carlson & Lynch 2013). The (dis)agreement represents both a particular and a general dimension with regard to views on the gendered division of work and family tasks in a multidimensional framework (Grunow, Begall & Buchler

2018). Originally a 5 point-scale, we combine the two response categories signalling agreement with the statement into one category, since less than two per cent of our final analysis sample completely agreed. The pooled category includes ~13 per cent of the sample. In addition, we construct a variable to measure the *gender ideology heterogeneity* of couples by subtracting the partner's from the anchor's agreement level. Values below zero indicate that the partner has a more traditional gender ideology, values above zero indicate that the partner has a more egalitarian gender ideology, and zero reveals a homogenous gender ideology between both partners (-3 = *partner is far more traditional*, 3 = *partner is far more egalitarian*).

3.1.3 Control variables

We also control for several variables to cover familial circumstances that might affect the presence of WFC, the resource distribution within couples, and the familial workload as a proxy for the necessity to scale back. The *number of children* living with the anchor, the *change in the number of children* between the waves, and the *age of the youngest child* in the household (1 = aged 0–2, 2= aged 3–6, 3 = aged 6–13, 4 = aged 14 or older) possibly affect WFC, as younger and more children need more attention and are the main reason for parents – especially mothers – to scale back on work demands. We control whether the couple is married in the first wave (0 = no, 1 = yes) as an indicator for the institutionalization of the couple relationship. *The partner's working hours* at t_1, the *change in the partner's working hours* between the waves, and the distribution of the anchor's and the partner's highest educational degree (1 = *partner's comparative advantage*, 2 = *homogenous partnership*, 3 = *anchor's comparative advantage*) are included as indicators of the bargaining power within the couple relationship. In addition, a partner with high workforce participation increases the risk of WFC and the necessity of scaling back. To measure the everyday praxis of the couple's *division of chores and the care of the children*, we include the answers to the questions of to what extent the partners share duties in "*Taking care of the children*" and "*Housework (washing, cooking, cleaning)*" (0 = *(almost) completely my partner*, 1 = (*almost) completely me*) as well as their changes between the waves.

We control for various occupational characteristics that may influence the possibility or the consequences of scaling back. We use $ISEI$ as an index of the status of an occupation (Ganzeboom 2010), *type of employment contract* (0 = permanent, 1 = temporary), *public sector* (0 = no, 1 = yes), *same occupation in* t and t_{+1} (0 = no, 1 = yes), and *same occupational position* in t and t_{+1} (0 = no, 1 = yes). To give two examples, the public sector in Germany gives employees far-reaching rights to temporarily or permanently reduce working hours, while employees with a temporary contract who aspire to get tenure are not in the position to react to high work demands. In addition, we take the *anchor's birth cohort* (1 = 1991–93, 2 = 1981–83, 3 = 1971–73) as well as the *current place of residence* in Germany (0 = west, 1 = east) into account. East and West Germany are still very distinct in terms of female employment rates, gender ideologies pertaining to working mothers, and the availability of childcare (Bauernschuster & Rainer 2012; Schober & Stahl 2016), and this influences the likelihood of scaling back, especially for mothers (Heckman 1974).

3.2 Analytical Strategy

We run pooled ordinary least squares regression to estimate the effect of WFC at t on the difference between job pressure and working hours between t and t_{+1} ($\Delta y = y_{t+1} - y_t$). If the values of the change score go up (or down), job pressure and working hours increase (or decrease) over time. Positive coefficients, therefore, reveal a predicted increase, while negative coefficients signal a reduction in job pressure and working hours between time points.

For each dependent variable, we present an additive model in which we gradually introduce interaction effects. We start with an initial regression model to investigate the association between WFC, gender, and work-related coping strategies:

$$y_{it_2} - y_{it_1} = \alpha + \beta X_{it_1} + \beta W_{it_{-1}} + \delta V_{it_2 - it_1} + \gamma Z_i + \varepsilon$$

where X is a vector of time-varying independent variables lagged by one year, W captures gender ideologies two years prior, V represents change in some time-varying variables across waves and Z is a vector of time-invariant covariates. Next, we add an interaction effect between WFC and gender to examine whether gender and WFC interact as determinants of work strategies (Hypothesis 1). The next task is then to include the three-way interaction between WFC, gender, and gender ideology (Hypothesis 2a and 2b). Finally, we provide a model controlling for the partner's combined gender ideologies instead of the respondent's ideology (Hypothesis 3). This model similarly includes a threefold interaction between WFC, gender, and the couple's gender ideology heterogeneity.

While panel regression models are better suited to causal analysis, it was not possible to implement a panel data approach with multiple time points to analyse the data at hand, due to very few measurement points in time and the two-year gap between the measurement of WFC resulting from the biennial implementation in the survey. We use robust standard errors clustered on the respondent level to account for respondents who take part in more than two combined waves. Moreover, all models use panel weights with post-stratification to control for systematic panel attrition and design until the time of measurement. A detailed description of the weighting can be found in the data manual (Brüderl et al. 2020: 56).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive findings

We provide means and percentages of the variables used in our analysis in Table 1, shown separately by gender. The asterisks represent significance levels of linear and – for binary variables – logistic bivariate regressions between the variables and gender. We find significant differences between men and women in most characteristics. Regarding our main variables, fathers work more hours per week and report – in contrast to other findings – a significantly higher level of WFC. Fathers' and mothers' reports of job pressure, however, do not differ significantly. Turning to family variables, fathers spend less time on housework and are less involved with childcare. In addition, fathers are more likely to express traditional gender ideologies. Table 1 also reports significant occupational differences between women and men. Although mothers have a slightly but significantly higher ISEI-score, they are more often at a comparative disadvantage with regard to educational attainment. This finding – together with the differences in partners' working hours – reveals that women are far more often part of a dual-career couple, while most men in the sample are the breadwinners in their relationship. In addition, we provide correlations of the main variables in the appendix (Table A.1).

4.2 Do parents scale back on their job pressures?

As indicated in Table 2, parents who experience high WFC are more likely to reduce their job pressure (Model 1: $b = -.091$, $p < .01$). Compared to fathers, mothers more often report an increase in job pressure (Model 1: $b = .162$, $p < .10$). In Model 2 we add the two-way interaction effect between WFC and gender, however this does not show any significant effect on changes in job pressure. Model 3 includes the three-way interaction between WFC, gender, and gender ideology.

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted change in job pressure for the focal independent variables presented in this model. High WFC for fathers who strongly agree with the statement "*Women should be more concerned about their family than about career*" is related to a reduction in job pressures (Panel A). For mothers and fathers who agree to the statement the visualization does not show an effect of WFC on changes of job pressure (Panel B). Looking at parents with ideologies that combine traditional and egalitarian views, Figure 1 shows gender differences (Panel C). Compared to those with weak WFC, mothers with high conflicts increase job pressures. By contrast, for men with an in-between gender ideology, changes in job pressures do not differ by level of WFC. The strongest gender differences, however, are found for mothers and fathers with a (strongly) traditional gender ideology (Panel D). While for fathers holding traditional gender ideologies high WFC are related to a reduction of job pressure, mothers report an increase in job pressure the higher their reported WFC are (Panel D).

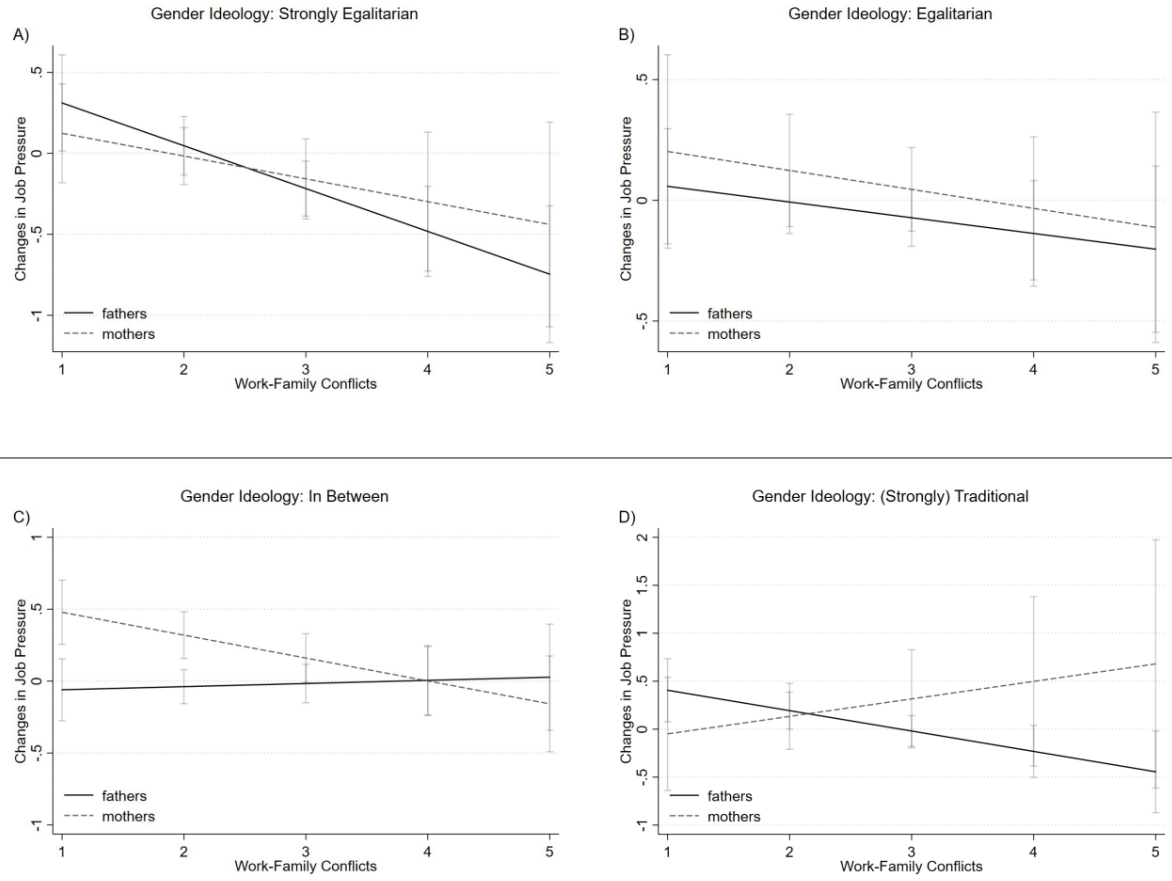
In Model 4, we examine the effect of the partners' combined gender ideologies instead of gender ideology on the individual level. The results indicate that holding a more egalitarian view than the partner leads to a slight reduction in job pressure ($b = -.041$, $p < .10$). The interaction effects, however, fail to reach statistical significance. Figure 2 presents the results of Model 4 for the three-way interaction between WFC, gender, and gender ideology. Fathers who experience a higher level of WFC reduce job pressures, irrespective of their gender ideology differences with the partner (Panel A). If there are no WFC, only fathers holding more egalitarian gender ideologies than the partner scale back on job pressures. The results for mothers are strikingly different (Panel B). We find changes in job pressure only for mothers holding more egalitarian views with high levels of WFC. Mothers who experience a low level of WFC report an increase in job pressure. No change in job pressure is observed for women with a medium level of WFC, irrespective of the partners' combined gender ideologies.

Table 2. Ordinary least squares regression of changes in job pressure (N = 2083)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Focal variables				
Work-to-family conflict	-.091**	-.090*	-.263**	-.089*
Women	.162+	.161+	-.007	.185*
Gender ideology[a]				
Egalitarian	.052	.052	.016	-
In between	.122+	.122+	.027	-
(Strongly) traditional	.154	.154	.123	-
Gender ideology differences	-	-	-	-.041+
Two-way interaction effects				
Women X WFC	-	-.008	.124	-.008
Women X Gender ideology[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	.199+	-
In between	-	-	286**	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	.052	-
Gender ideology X WFC[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	.132	-
In between	-	-	.282+	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	.128	-
Women X Ideology differences	-	-	-	.063
Ideology differences X WFC	-	-	-	.001
Three-way interaction effects				
Women X Gender ideology X WFC[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	-.137	-
In between	-	-	-.305+	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	.271	-
Women X Ideology diff. X WFC	-	-	-	-.044
Family variables				
No. of children	.027	.027	.032	.033
Δ in no. of children	.017	.017	.007	.014
Age of youngest child[b]				
1-2	.080	.080	.102	.082
3-6	.082	.083	.090	.085
6-14	.034	.034	.040	.037
Married	-.041	-.040	-.038	-.022
Partner's working hours	.002	.002	.002	.002
Δ in partner's working hours	-.003	-.003	-.003	-.003
Chores	-.340+	-.340+	-.353*	-.381*
Δ in chores	-.297+	-.298+	-.291+	-.333*
Childcare	-.382+	-.382+	-.378+	-.389+
Δ in childcare	-.019	-.019	-.008	-.027
Share of education[c]				
Advantage partner	-.022	-.022	-.033	-.029
Advantage anchor	-.115*	-.115*	-.114*	-.129*
Occupational variables				
ISEI	.003*	.003*	.003*	.002+
Actual working hours	-.003	-.003	-.003	-.003
Public sector	-.006	-.005	.004	-.003
Fixed-term contract	.095	.095	.095	.095
Same job between waves	.289+	. 289+	. 288+	.304+
Same occupational status	.282	.283	.271	.307
Sociodemographic variables				
Cohort[d]				
1991-93	-.046	-.046	-.045	-.051
1981-83	-.006	-.006	-.018	-.005
Living in East Germany	-.030	-.029	-.021	-.033
R^2	.047	.047	.062	.048

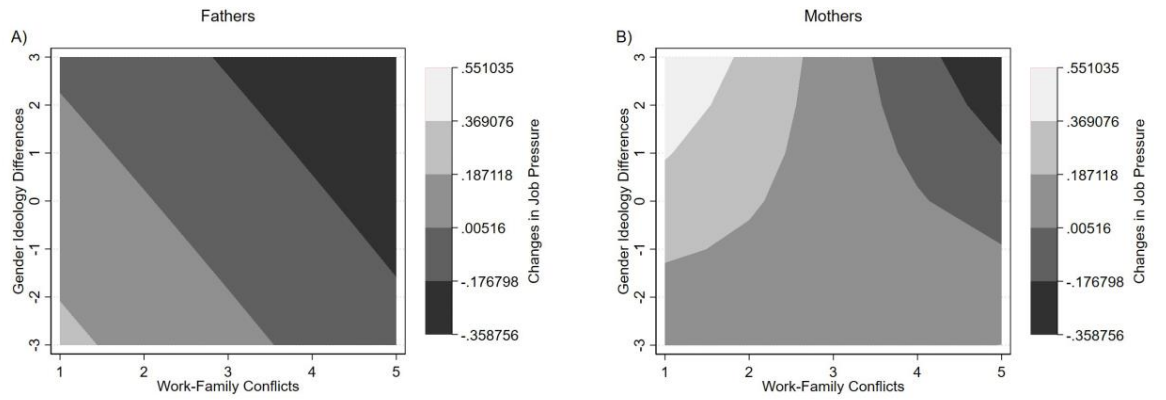
Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. All models control for the probability of attrition between waves and use clustered standard errors to control for individuals with information in more than two consecutive waves. Δ refers to "change in" each respective variable. [a]Compared to strongly egalitarian gender ideology. [b]Compared to no presence of a child aged younger than 14 years. [c]Compared to the same educational level. [d]Compared to birth cohort 1971-73. +p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed test).

Figure 1: Predicted change in job pressure by the level of work-to-family conflict (1=low, 5=high) for different gender ideologies divided by gender



Note. Source: pairfam, 2012-2019, $n_{\text{strongly egalitarian}} = 336$, $n_{\text{egalitarian}} = 592$; $n_{\text{in between}} = 863$; $n_{\text{(strongly) traditional}} = 292$. Predicted values are based on Model 3 of Table 2.

Figure 2: Predicted change in job pressure by the level of work-to-family conflict (1=low, 5=high) and gender ideology differences (-3=partner more traditional, 3=partner more egalitarian) for fathers and mothers



Note. Source: pairfam, 2012-2019, $n_{\text{fathers}} = 1292$, $n_{\text{egalitarian}} = 791$. Predicted values are based on Model 4 of Table 2.

4.3 Do parents scale back on their working hours?

Table 3 presents the findings for actual change in working hours as the dependent variable. In contrast to job pressure, the estimates do not reveal any significant impact on WFC. Overall, Models 1 to 3 have no explanatory power on changes in working hours. Figure 3 visualizes the interaction effects of Model 3 and presents predicted change in working hours by the level of WFC and gender ideology separately for mothers and fathers. Figure 3, indeed, indicates that mothers and fathers do not scale back on working hours in response to WFC. No additional effect of mothers' and fathers' gender ideology is found. Model 4 in Table 3 examines partners' combined gender ideologies and reveals a significant interaction effect between WFC and gender, indicating that women reduce their working hours more strongly as a reaction to higher WFC than men (b = -.744, p < .1). In addition, couples' differences in gender ideology have a gendered effect on changes in working hours in the way that a more egalitarian partner predicts an increase in working hours for women compared to men (b = .826, p < .001).

Table 3. Ordinary least squares regression of changes in work hours (N = 2083)

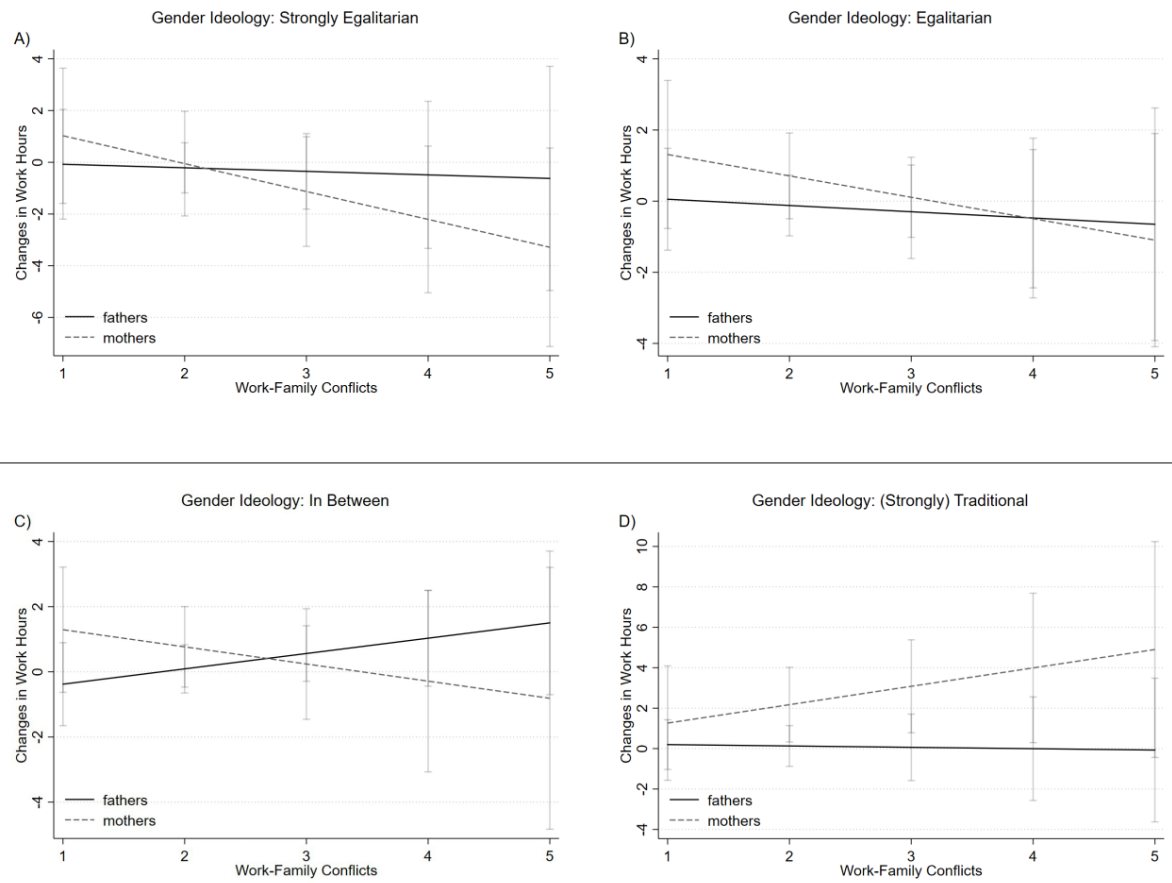
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Focal variables				
Work-to-family conflict	-.060	.148	-.137	.204
Women	.575	.472	-.270	.492
Gender ideology[a]				
Egalitarian	.257	.292	.041	-
In between	.717	.725	.623	-
(Strongly) traditional	.808	.835	.269	-
Gender ideology differences	-	-	-	-.382^{+}
Two-way interaction effects				
Women X WFC	-	-.612	-.941	-.744^{+}
Women X Gender ideology[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	.908	-
In between	-	-	.488	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	2.761^{+}	-
Gender ideology X WFC[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	-.039	-
In between	-	-	.607	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	.069	-
Women X Ideology differences	-	-	-	.826**
Ideology differences X WFC	-	-	-	.118
Three-way interaction effects				
Women X Gender ideology X WFC[a]				
Egalitarian	-	-	.515	-
In between	-	-	-.056	-
(Strongly) traditional	-	-	1.919	-
Women X Ideology diff. X WFC	-	-	-	.044
Family variables				
No. of children	.378^{+}	.374^{+}	.378^{+}	.387^{+}
Δ in no. of children	.012	-.010	.009	-.035
Age of youngest child[b]				
1-2	-.048	-.019	.056	.087
3-6	-.607	-.592	-.556	-.533
6-14	-.269	-.256	-.292	-.238
Married	.025	.061	.122	.171
Partner's working hours	.018	.019	.020	.018
Δ in partner's working hours	.030^{+}	.030^{+}	.029^{+}	.029^{+}
Chores	-2.178	-2.219	-2.310	-2.329
Δ in chores	-2.436^{+}	-2.445^{+}	-2.229	-2.522^{+}
Childcare	1.342	1.349	1.323	1.326
Δ in childcare	-.722	-.728	-.722	-.646
Share of education[c]				
Advantage partner	.315	.261	.198	.219
Advantage anchor	.019	.001	.006	-.113

Table 3. Ordinary least squares regression of changes in work hours (N = 2083) (continued)

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Occupational variables					
ISEI		.006	.006	.006	.002
Job pressure		-.225	-.218	-.194	-.241
Public sector		-.339	-.262	-.311	-.232
Fixed-term contract		.547	.507	.410	.499
Same job between waves		-.562	-.560	-.566	-.462
Same occupational status		-1.712	-1.660	-1.710	-1.500
Sociodemographic variables					
Cohort[d]					
	1991-93	-.243	-.257	-.552	-.433
	1981-83	.607	.606	.569	.577
Living in East Germany		.059	.107	.062	.126
R^2		.021	.022	.027	.027

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. All models control for the probability of attrition between waves and use clustered standard errors to control for individuals with information in more than two consecutive waves. Δ refers to "change in" each respective variable. [a]Compared to strongly egalitarian gender ideology. [b]Compared to no presence of a child aged younger than 14 years. [c]Compared to the same educational level. [d]Compared to birth cohort 1971-73. +p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed test).

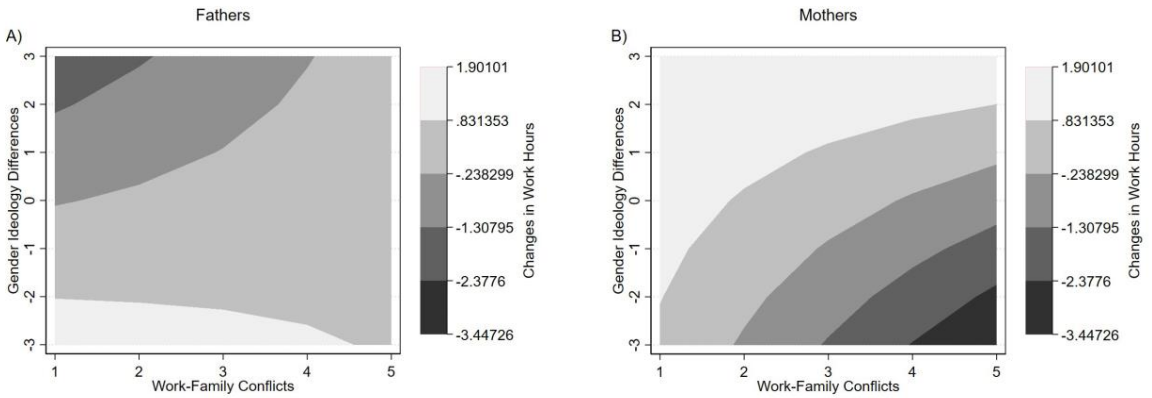
Figure 3: Predicted change in working hours by the level of work-to-family conflict (1=low, 5=high) for different gender ideologies divided by gender



Note. Source: pairfam, 2012-2019, $n_{\text{strongly egalitarian}} = 336$, $n_{\text{egalitarian}} = 592$; $n_{\text{in between}} = 863$; $n_{\text{(strongly) traditional}} = 292$. Predicted values are based on Model 3 of Table 3.

Figure 4 shows the graphical results of this model. Fathers reporting more intense WFC increase their working hours irrespective of their views on women's employment. (Panel A). If there are no WFC, fathers holding more egalitarian gender ideologies than their partners scale back on working hours. The figure for mothers looks different (Panel B). We find changes in working hours for mothers who report higher levels of work–to-family conflicts, and this effect differs depending on the couple's views on women's employment. Mothers who experience a low level of work–to-family conflict report an increase in working hours, especially if the partner holds a more egalitarian view. Moving to the other end of the continuum, mothers with higher levels of WFC are more frequently observed to be scaling back working hours, especially if they hold more traditional views on gender roles than their partner.

Figure 4: Predicted change in working hours by the level of work-to-family conflicts (1=low, 5=high) and gender ideology differences (-3=partner more traditional, 3=partner more egalitarian) for fathers and mothers



Note. Source: pairfam, 2012-2019, $n_{fathers} = 1292$, $n_{egalitarian} = 791$. Predicted values are based on Model 4 of Table 3.

5. Discussion

In this article, we aimed to assess whether parents who experience work-to-family conflicts are more likely to scale back on work demands. Our approach is directly inspired by theory on family adaptive strategies, work-to-family conflicts and gender ideologies. Drawing on this literature, and concentrating on Germany, the two research questions driving the empirical section were: To what extent do mothers and fathers scale back on job pressures and working hours? To what extent is this strategy linked to their gender ideology?

5.1 Summary

Our findings paint a complex picture and provide only partial support for our hypotheses. We find that work-to-family conflicts lead to a significant reduction in job pressure but not in working hours. With regard to hypothesis 1, we do not find support for our assumption that mothers are more likely to reduce job pressure if they experience WFC, and only weak support for a stronger reduction in working hours. Taking different gender ideologies and gender ideology differences in couple relationships into account, the outcomes reveal scarce indications that there are group differences for men and women in terms of scaling back behaviour that is dependent on their gender ideology. The inconsistent results for the interaction between gender ideology and WFC do not support hypothesis 2a that the reaction to WFC is moderated by the respondent's opinion on whether women should be more concerned with their family than with their career. For hypothesis 2b, by contrast, the estimates and slopes presented reveal that mothers and fathers with more traditional views differ in their reaction to WFC. Notably, the slopes for traditional mothers run in the opposite direction to expectation, and traditional mothers are not more likely to scale back. By

contrast, traditional fathers foster their self-image as male breadwinners by even increasing or at least not reducing work demands.

A possible explanation for the unexpected finding that mothers with a traditional gender ideology do not scale back lies in the sample building. As we observe mothers and fathers who work at least 20 hours per week at t, the analysis excludes the large group of German mothers who, at least temporarily, drop out of the workforce as a direct reaction to becoming a parent. For the mothers in our sample who work more than 30 hours on average, traditional beliefs seem less connected to their own way of life.

Fathers, more or less regardless of their gender ideology, do not scale back on working hours in response to WFC. At first glance, this supports the argument that they adhere to the role of male breadwinner (Kaufman & Uhlenberg 2000) and does not support arguments that interpretations of the paternal role are changing (Williams 2008). At second glance, fathers seem to reduce their job pressure more than mothers, but it must also be taken into account that fathers report similar levels of job pressure to mothers and at the same time potentially have a greater economic necessity to maintain a high level of work effort because their partners are less often full-time-employed compared to the partners of the mothers in the sample of analysis. This possibly indicates that fathers do not or cannot reduce working hours as a reaction to WFC but do try to increase energy resources for the time they spend with the family.

Finally, hypothesis H3 assumed that differences between the respondent's and the partner's gender ideologies have a gendered effect on the reaction to WFC. Again, we do not find clear support for this hypothesis in the regression results, but the illustration of our findings reveals that there are differences between mothers and fathers in the extent to which their combined gender ideologies make scaling back on work demands more or less likely. This indicates that research on life course trajectories should adopt an advanced linked lives perspective that additionally takes attitudes towards lifestyle and life choices into account, especially as gender ideology homogamy seems as prevalent as one can expect (Hudde 2020). Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of a dyadic couple perspective when analysing life course trajectories which, however, could even be extended towards research on the significance of extended social networks (Bernardi, Huinink & Settersten 2019).

Coming back to the general argument made by this paper, the low variance explanation of our models indicates that even if WFC have some impact on work-related decisions, the majority of changes in job pressure and working hours must be explained by other factors. From the literature on mismatches in working hours (Schröder 2018; Pollmann-Schult & Reynolds 2017; Abendroth & Pausch 2018) and the importance of supervisor support (Kossek et al. 2011; Nomaguchi & Fettro 2019), we can conclude that a potential factor could be the organizational structure and culture. Related to this, the institutional settings as well as family-supporting policies can affect and potentially reduce the impact of work and family demands on WFC (Stier, Lewin-Epstein & Braun 2012).

Another factor could be career trajectories, career goals, and a desire for promotion, which often requires high work effort beforehand as a signal to the employer (Schmidt 2017). In addition, individual life goals seem to be important in the willingness to scale back as well as in the perception of work-family interference, as different types of career orientation were found to influence the level of perceived WFC (Carlson, Derr & Wadsworth 2003). A third factor is the financial necessity of staying in a demanding job. This applies not only to couples at the lower end of the income scale. High liabilities – e.g. a home loan – or the maintenance of a certain living standard could prevent high-income earners from scaling back, too.

From these three factors, we can conclude that the interaction between several personal and environmental characteristics as well as other life course decisions determine the scope of action for employed parents to a certain degree. In addition to this classical view of the sociological theory of action, the study implicitly addresses the question of to what degree gender differences in workforce participation are explained by the strategic decision making of employed parents. The results show on the one hand that employed parents react to the experience of WFC to some degree and especially with regard to job pressure, which supports the findings of Young and Schieman (2018) for Canada. On the other hand, the huge differences in workforce participation between mothers and fathers (Aisenbrey & Fasang 2017) cannot be explained by coping strategies as a reaction to WFC, as the descriptive findings already reveal significant gender differences in the intercept of working hours – notwithstanding the method of sample building, which potentially approximates the differences. Instead, routine life course decisions based on the modernized breadwinner model together with expected work-family interference might explain this phenomenon to a significant extent. This is in line with Lükemann's recent findings in the context of

missing "sorting into occupations"-effects, who concludes that "(...) gender differences in work-hour reductions seem to be more responsive to broader societal gender norms" (Lükemann 2021: 656).

5.2 Limitations

The most obvious limitation lies in the fact that the pairfam study provides limited information on the workplace. Although we control for factors such as job prestige, working in the public sector, or fixed-term contracts, we cannot take into account whether the employees have the opportunity to scale back and whether they can afford it financially, whether they have supportive supervisors, whether they are able to exert control over their schedule, and how they think it would influence their future career prospects. Another limitation of the pairfam study is that using data from both partners has to be treated with caution due to a possible selection bias (Park, Impett & MacDonald 2021). In contrast to regular panel attrition, we cannot control for this selection.

5.3 Outlook

There are several opportunities for future research. While this study examines only work-related coping strategies over a one-year period, future research ought to investigate the long-term effects of compatibility problems on dyadic work-related coping strategies. Furthermore, it may be productive to look in more detail at anticipated WFC in order to get a clearer picture of scaling-back decisions that have a direct temporal dependency on life course events such as the birth of a child. While some psychological studies already address this aspect (Cinamon 2006), the impact on life course decisions remains largely uninvestigated (Westring & Ryan 2011). Future research ought to link information on family life with information on workplace cultures and more detailed data on the financial circumstances of couples in order to better understand opportunities and barriers in the deployment of work-family strategies. Doing so will also increase our understanding of what is behind the often reported desire for a reduction in working hours, a reduction that fathers, in particular, rarely realize.

Acknowledgments

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. The code used for the manuscript is available. The data can be requested under https://www.pairfam.de/.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Correlations of the focal variables and change scores (n = 2083)

	WFC at t_1	Job Pressure at t_1	Job Pressure at t_2	Changes in job pressure	Working hours at t_1	Working hours at t_2
Job Pressure at t_1	.448***					
Job Pressure at t_2	.345***	.645***				
Δ in job pressure	-.115***	-.405***	.437***			
Working hours at t_1	.333***	.206***	.179***	-.028		
Working hours at t_2	.309***	.190***	.234***	.057**	.819***	
Δ in working hours	-.018	-.014	.105***	.142***	-.239***	.362***

Source. Note: Source: pairfam, 2012-2019. Δ refers to "change in" each respective variable. There are no significant differences of these correlations by conducting analyses separately for men and women. +p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tailed test).

Information in German

Deutscher Titel

Die Reaktion erwerbstätiger Eltern auf Work-Family Conflicts: Adaptive Strategien des Scaling Backs in Deutschland

Zusammenfassung

Fragestellung: Die Studie untersucht den Umfang, zu dem erwerbstätige Mütter und Väter als Reaktion auf work-to-family conflicts (WFC) ihre Arbeitsstunden oder ihren beruflichen Druck reduzieren.

Hintergrund: Gemäß dem Konzept adaptiver Familienstrategien kann angenommen werden, dass WFC ein Grund für die Reduzierung von Arbeitsanforderungen ist. Bei der Adaption dieser Strategien erwarten wir geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede in Abhängigkeit der Geschlechterideologie des Paares, unabhängig von anderen Charakteristika. Bisher gibt es nur wenig Forschung zur Beziehung zwischen WFC, Geschlechterideologie, Gender und berufsbezogener Bewältigungsstrategien.

Methode: Wir verwenden sechs Wellen des Deutschen Familienpanles (pairfam, 11.0), die die Surveyjahre 2012 bis 2019 umfassen, um den Effekt von WFC und Geschlechterideologie auf die berufsbezogenen Bewältigungsstrategien erwerbstätiger Mütter und Väter zu ermitteln (N=791 Mütter und N= 1292 Väter). Wir verwenden OLS Regressionen um den Effekt von WFC zu Zeitpunkt t und Geschlechterideologie zu t_{-1} auf Veränderungen des beruflichen Drucks und der Arbeitsstunden zwischen t und t_{+1} zu messen.

Ergebnisse: Wir verwenden sechs Wellen des Deutschen Familienpanles (pairfam, 11.0), die die Surveyjahre 2012 bis 2019 umfassen, um den Effekt von WFC und Geschlechterideologie auf die berufsbezogenen Bewältigungsstrategien erwerbstätiger Mütter und Väter zu ermitteln (N=791 Mütter und N= 1292 Väter). Wir verwenden OLS Regressionen um den Effekt von WFC zu Zeitpunkt t und Geschlechterideologie zu t_{-1} auf Veränderungen des beruflichen Drucks und der Arbeitsstunden zwischen t und t_{+1} zu messen.

Schlussfolgerung: Scaling back scheint keine weit verbreitete Strategie zu sein, um auf WFC zu reagieren.

Schlagwörter: Geschlechterideologie, Elternschaft, Scaling Back, Work-to-Family Conflicts

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