

## Parents' experiences of work-family conflict: Does it matter if coworkers have children?

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To examine how the perception of work-family conflict relates to the share of parents in women's and men's direct coworking environments.

**Background:** The idea of relational demography posits that individuals' relative positions within their coworking environments have an impact on their wellbeing. Depending on women's and men's parenthood status and the corresponding (dis-)similarity compared to their colleagues, this idea was applied to the perception of work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts.

**Method:** Time-based and strain-based work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts were analyzed by gender and parenthood with random effects panel regression models using longitudinal data from the LEEP-B3-survey, a large-scale linked employer-employee survey from Germany (2012/2013 and 2014/2015; 2,228 women and 2,656 men). The composition of the respondents' working groups was included as a moderating variable.

**Results:** Mothers and fathers of children aged 0–11 years reported higher work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts than parents of older children and childless women and men. For mothers of children aged 0–11 years, a higher share of parents in their working groups was associated with less time-based family-to-work conflict. For fathers of children aged 0–11 years, the same associations were found for overall work-to-family conflict, strain-based work-to-family conflict as well as for all dimensions of family-to-work conflict.

**Conclusion:** Similarity between the team members regarding parenthood seemed to reduce mothers' and fathers' perceptions of work-family conflict beyond several other characteristics of the individuals and the workplaces.

**Key words:** environment, gender, Germany, person-team fit, similarity, dissimilarity



## 1. Introduction

Work-family conflicts arise when expectations of working and private life interfere with one another and expose individuals to time, role and behavioral strains that work in either direction, i.e., resulting in work-to-family (WFC) and family-to-work (FWC) discords (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Gutek et al., 1991; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Voydanoff, 2005). Over the last decades, major changes in female labor market participation and the expansion of public childcare, among others, have questioned the traditional gendered division of labor and increasingly produced work-family conflicts for women and men, mothers and fathers (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Such inter-role conflicts are natural to every individual, and call for adjustments, negotiations and coping strategies in individual and coupled living and working arrangements, as they were found to be associated with health-related issues, couple dynamics, or individual well-being (Allen et al., 2000; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Greenhaus et al., 2006).

Empirical research aiming to uncover how perceptions of work-family conflict vary by individual and situational characteristics has flourished over the last years, and different operationalizations and antecedent settings of WFC and FWC were subject to large-scale quantitative analyses. Today, much is known about positive, negative, or zero correlations between WFC/FWC and several demographic characteristics of women and men, such as gender or parenthood. Family demands such as care responsibilities or marital tension, and work demands such as long or irregular working hours or work pressure, were found to be associated with the experience of higher conflicts. Further, research identified the supportive or impeding roles of family characteristics, such as spousal support, or workplace characteristics, such as job autonomy, supervisor support, or schedule flexibility, for the individual experience of conflict (Allen et al., 2000; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Byron, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2006; Michel et al., 2011).

Beyond these individual and environmental characteristics, it is plausible to assume that individual experiences of WFC and FWC are further affected – directly or indirectly – by the immediate social context in which individuals interact. This can be the overall context of the work organization (Behson, 2002; Kossek et al., 2011), but also the more direct context of the working group. Drawing on the ecological idea that individuals evaluate their situation in relation to other individuals around them, the present study aims to additionally assess if the composition of employees' direct working group by parenthood moderates women's and men's, mothers' and fathers' perceptions of WFC and FWC. Previous research applying this approach to other domains has been rare, but even nonexistent in the field of work-family conflict. Drawing on the idea of a life-stage neighborhood fit, for example, Swisher et al. (2004, pp. 281–282) argued that women's and men's perception of family friendliness highly depends on the “match between a couple's life stage and the demographic structure of their neighborhood.” The present study adapts this idea to the distribution of parents in the workplace. Based on the perspective of relational demography, it examines how individual workers compare to their coworkers by highlighting the importance of similarity in the direct coworking environment regarding the shared experience of parenthood.

In light of this, the present study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it is the first study on how the distribution of parents among coworkers moderates work-family conflict. Using large-scale longitudinal data from “LEEP-B3” (Diewald et al., 2014), a linked employer-employee survey which is representative of large organizations in Germany, it offers new insights in the associations between gender, parenthood and work-family-conflict using the share of coworking parents as a predictor as well as a moderator. Second, it uses a broad set of relevant outcomes, including work-to-family conflict, family-to-work-conflict, as well as the strain- and time-based dimensions of these two forms. Third, it offers gender-sensitive reasoning and empirical modeling, as work- and family-roles in a still conservative context such as Germany are subject to traditional gender construction.

## 2. Background

Based on demands-resources approaches (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Voydanoff, 2002), it has been argued that demands at the workplace as well as in the family usually (re-)produce and reinforce work-family conflicts. Concurrently, resources such as support in the workplace or in the family were suggested to avoid or at least mitigate this inter-role conflict (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Usually, but not exclusively (Henz & Mills, 2015), previous research used many different indicators of work and

family demands and resources as individual variables of women and man to assess their impact on work-family conflict, supporting this theoretical approach in virtually every single aspect under study (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011).

From ecological or social comparison perspectives, it has been argued that it is not only characteristics associated with individuals that influence women's and men's perceptions of well-being or supportiveness, but the context, its composition, and individuals' relative positions within their environments have an impact as well. In the workplace context, individuals are embedded in different environments, for instance in the overall organization, in different departments, or in different work teams. Most notably, Swisher et al. (2004) found that couples with own children rated their neighborhoods as more family-friendly when there were more other families with children around.

Within this broader context, concepts of "person-environment fit" or "person-team fit" (van Vianen, 2018) as well as "relational demography" (Riordan, 2000) were applied to hypothesize the associations between individuals' relation to context characteristics and individual outcomes. The basic idea of these approaches and their variants is that the match between individual characteristics and the attributes of the context, for example in terms of goals, values, or demographics, shapes individual as well as organizational and contextual outcomes, such as satisfaction, happiness, or team functioning (Riordan, 2000; van Vianen, 2018). Especially the relational demography approach has been particularly strong in relating the demographic composition of work units to group processes and individual performances (Elfenbein & O'Reilly, 2007; Riordan, 2000). Swisher et al. (2004) extended this basic idea from a life-course perspective, arguing that individuals' relative positions in the social space change over time, because different stages in life go hand in hand with different challenges, demands, and needs.

From the viewpoint of family research, the latter is arguably most important regarding parenthood. Having children challenges mothers and fathers not least in terms of competing demands and time binds, and imposes the need to reconcile labor market behavior and the sphere of private living. Applying the idea of relational demography in combination with Swisher et al.'s (2004, p. 283) "life stage-neighborhood fit" approach to the working environment, the present study seeks to assess "the degree to which a [working environment] is a good fit for the interests, abilities, and needs of [parents] at varying life stages." Depending on parenthood status, and the corresponding similarity or dissimilarity compared to their respective coworking environments, women's and men's perceptions of work-family conflict should be influenced either through "similarity-attraction", or "tokenism" (Riordan, 2000).

The perspective of relational demography assumes that individuals compare themselves with the demographic composition of a group – here: a working group – and assess, if they are similar to specific characteristics – here: parenthood – or not (Riordan, 2000). This process of self-categorization can influence individuals' perceptions of their work environments and their performances (Elfenbein & O'Reilly, 2007). Following the similarity-attraction paradigm, originally proposed by Byrne (1971), similarity in traits is regarded an important source of attraction between individuals, which may return "frequent communication, high social integration, and a desire to maintain group affiliation" (Tsui et al., 1992, p. 551). Consequently, in a coworking environment with high similarity from the perspective of an individual – i.e. a mother or father in a team of mostly parents, or a childless woman/man in a team of mostly childless coworkers – this predicts that there is a "common ground" among all coworkers, and everyone knows the situation of the others well, creating a climate of understanding and support. This would result in the perception of less work-family conflict in all its directions (WFC or FWC) and sub-dimensions (time-based or strain-based).

The other side of the coin, the tokenism hypothesis, originally proposed by Kanter (1977), predicts that dissimilarity in terms of demographic characteristics may put individuals in highly visible positions, which "often creates a negative situation for the 'token' individual" (Riordan, 2000, p. 137). This is because dissimilarity was said to increase the possibilities of misunderstanding, or decrease mutual trust, organizational commitment or the willingness to offer collegial support. Consequently, in a coworking environment with low similarity from the perspective of an individual – i.e., a mother or father in a team of mostly childless coworkers, or a childless woman/man in a team of mostly parents – this predicts that the "sole exception" of this individual might be acknowledged but not be treated any special because not any individual case matters. This should eventually lead to the perception of more work-family conflict, again in both directions and for both sub-dimensions.

Previous empirical research in the field of relational demography has overwhelmingly supported the similarity mechanism (Riordan, 2000). Even though research has acknowledged possible benefits of

diversity (Roberge & van Dick, 2010; Thatcher, 2008) or complementary person-team fit (van Vianen, 2018), extant studies rather consistently concluded that “demographic similarity generally has positive effects on liking, satisfaction, commitment, tenure, performance, and decreased turnover” (Elfenbein & O’Reilly, 2007, p. 114).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Data and sample

The analysis was based on the first two waves (t1: 2012/2013; t2: 2014/2015) of the LEEP-B3 data, a linked employer-employee panel data set that has been collected as part of the study “Interactions between Capabilities in Work and Family Life” (Diewald et al., 2014). The longitudinal study was composed of an employer survey with work organizations from various segments of the economy including both the private and the public sector, and an employee survey based on a simple random sample of employees within these organizations. The employees who participated in the survey are representative of the employees of large work organizations (> 500 employees) in Germany and are heterogeneous in occupations, jobs, and socioeconomic groups. Employee interviews were conducted using computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI), employer interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face. T1 comprised 100 organizations and 6,454 employees. The response rate was 30 % for employees. T2 comprised 6,338 employee interviews including 4,359 panel respondents, and a refreshment sample of 1,959 employees. As we were interested in the immediate work group, 17.6% of the respondents in the original sample were excluded because they worked in very large teams of more than 20 employees, leaving 5,286 cases in the sample. After listwise elimination due to missing values on dependent or independent variables, the final sample used for the analyses included 4,938 cases (2,282 women, 2,656 men).

*Table 1: Work-family conflict scale by Carlson et al., (2000), as applied in the LEEP-B3-survey*

	(Sub)Dimension	Items	Cronbach’s $\alpha$ (t1)
Work-to-family conflict (overall   $\alpha = 0.85$ )	Time-based work-to-family conflict	My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like. The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities. I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities.	0.85
	Strain-based work-to-family conflict	I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy. When I get home from work I am often too physically tired to participate in family activities and responsibilities.	0.78
Family-to-work conflict (overall   $\alpha = 0.73$ )	Time-based family-to-work conflict	I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities. The time I spend on family responsibilities often interfere with my work responsibilities. The time I spend with my family often causes me not to spend time in activities at work that could be helpful to my career.	0.75
	Strain-based family-to-work conflict	Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work. Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work. Tension and anxiety from my family life often weakens my ability to do my job.	0.69

*Note:* German translations of these items were used in the original survey.

### 3.2 Outcome variables

Time-based and strain-based work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts were measured using the work-family conflict scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000). This scale was built to measure multiple dimensions of the work-family conflict construct, which is useful to disentangle different aspects of this complex phenomenon, even though the theoretical predictions should not differ between the sub-dimensions. Each subscale is represented by three items (Table 1). The items measure how often respondents experienced time-based and strain-based WFC and FWC, ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often); the sub-dimensions of behavior-based WFC and FWC of the original scale were not included in the LEEP-B3 data. For each of the four strain-based and time-based sub-dimensions of conflicts, the values of three items were summed up. For the comprehensive measures (WFC/FWC), the values of six items for the respective direction of conflicts were summed up. All variables were standardized by dividing the sum scores by the number of items and values, resulting in a range between 0 and 1 each, with higher values indicating higher levels of perceived conflicts. All analyses were reproduced with factor scores, but the results did not change.

### 3.3 Predictors and controls

The main predictors were the gender of the respondent (1=male), the parenthood status of the respondent, defined by having either no child aged 18 years or younger in the household, the youngest child aged 0–11 years in the household, or the youngest child aged 12–18 years in the household, and the shares of parents in the direct working group of each respondent, ranging from 0 (0 %) to 1 (100 %). To measure the relative shares of parents in the direct working group, the absolute number of parents in the team was divided by the absolute number of persons in the team (team size). The absolute team size was also included as a control variable, ranging from 1–20.

Moreover, all analyses controlled for the respondent's age (in years), education (in years), and whether the respondent was in a partnership (1=yes). At the individual job level, actual working hours, the use of flexible working hours (1=yes), having supervising responsibilities (1=yes), and hourly earnings (logarithmized) were included. Job autonomy (Breaugh, 1985) was measured using three items (‘During my working hours, I have control over the sequencing of my work activities’, ‘I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done’, ‘I am able to define what my job objectives are’) on 5-point scales that were then added to an index and standardized to ranging between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater occupational autonomy (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  t1=0.72). Parenthood of the supervisor (1=yes) and gender of the supervisor (1=male) were also considered. To capture actual social support at the workplace, respondents were asked whether their supervisors supported employees in their efforts to reconcile work with family life, and whether colleagues helped one another to get their work done when one had to leave early or came to work late for personal reasons on 5-point scales ranging from ‘applies completely’ to ‘does not apply at all’ (1=high social support [1, 2]; 0=low social support [3-5]). All models control for different survey years (0=2012/13; 1=2014/15). For the multivariate analyses, all variables were mean centered, except for dichotomous variables (Table 2).

### 3.4 Modelling

Random-effects regression models were used to estimate differences in the perception of work-family conflict between parents and childless individuals depending on the share of parents among their direct coworkers. This approach utilizes the longitudinal structure (a maximum of two observations nested within respondents) of the “LEEP-B3” linked employer-employee data (Diewald et al., 2014) to obtain more efficient estimates of group differences for time-constant variables than simple cross-sectional models (Petersen, 2004). Regarding a possible “causal” interpretation, a within-estimator would have been the model of choice. However, only very few intra-person changes, such as the transition to parenthood or a notable change in respondents' coworking environments, were observable in the data. Thus, the random-effects approach allowed to include each case in the analysis (observed once or twice), and to estimate the coefficients for all time-constant variables that discriminate between parenthood status and the composition of the direct working group.

To answer the research questions, a series of random-effects regression models was estimated, predicting (a) the composite measure of WFC, (b) the time-based dimension of WFC, (c) the strain-based

dimension of WFC, (d) the composite measure of FWC, (e) the time-based dimension of FWC, and (f) the strain-based-dimension of FWC. By running separate models for the sub-dimensions of work-family conflicts, we were able to exploit the analytical possibilities of the LEEP-B3 data set. In addition, several sensitivity checks were performed to assess the robustness of the results, most notably all analyses were re-estimated for different subsamples (e.g. occupational clusters) and with different age groups of the youngest child in the household. Yet, none of these checks proved to alter the main conclusions of the study.

*Table 2* Descriptives of all variables, by survey year and gender

	2012/2013				2014/2015			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Dependent variables</i>								
WFC	0.416	0.231	0.413	0.214	0.375	0.226	0.374	0.209
WFC–time	0.424	0.287	0.459	0.269	0.377	0.281	0.406	0.262
WFC–strain	0.409	0.227	0.368	0.216	0.373	0.220	0.343	0.209
FWC	0.197	0.144	0.205	0.148	0.203	0.157	0.210	0.148
FWC–time	0.119	0.157	0.124	0.156	0.119	0.162	0.124	0.148
FWC–strain	0.275	0.119	0.286	0.203	0.287	0.214	0.296	0.206
<i>Predictors</i>								
No child <=18 in household	0.484	0.500	0.447	0.497	0.519	0.500	0.462	0.499
Youngest child 0–11 in household	0.293	0.455	0.349	0.477	0.267	0.442	0.325	0.469
Youngest child 12–18 in household	0.223	0.416	0.203	0.403	0.215	0.411	0.212	0.409
Share of parents <sup>a</sup>	0.562	0.323	0.555	0.329	0.627	0.293	0.612	0.284
<i>Controls</i>								
Age	42.39	8.139	42.62	8.315	43.92	8.396	44.00	8.617
Years of education	14.28	2.741	14.35	2.875	14.23	2.748	14.27	2.835
In partnership	0.834	0.372	0.874	0.332	0.824	0.381	0.854	0.354
Hourly earnings (log)	2.054	0.070	2.119	0.061	2.061	0.060	2.120	0.053
Actual working hours	35.50	10.53	43.18	7.038	35.63	9.532	42.34	6.403
Flexible hours	0.576	0.494	0.646	0.478	0.686	0.464	0.720	0.449
Supervisory role	0.303	0.460	0.473	0.499	0.264	0.441	0.424	0.494
Job autonomy	0.705	0.187	0.722	0.182	0.703	0.186	0.727	0.451
Supervisor is a man	0.556	0.497	0.869	0.338	0.554	0.497	0.860	0.347
Supervisor parent	0.723	0.448	0.777	0.416	0.725	0.447	0.786	0.410
Support by supervisor high	0.757	0.429	0.715	0.451	0.768	0.422	0.753	0.432
Support by coworkers high	0.779	0.415	0.804	0.397	0.786	0.410	0.801	0.400
Team size	0.726	0.507	0.693	0.462	0.752	0.515	0.692	0.463
N	1,447		1,676		1,853		2,171	

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> Share of parents in the direct working group of respondents; means and standard deviations (if applicable), rounding differences to 1 may apply. LEEP-B3 Survey, own calculations.

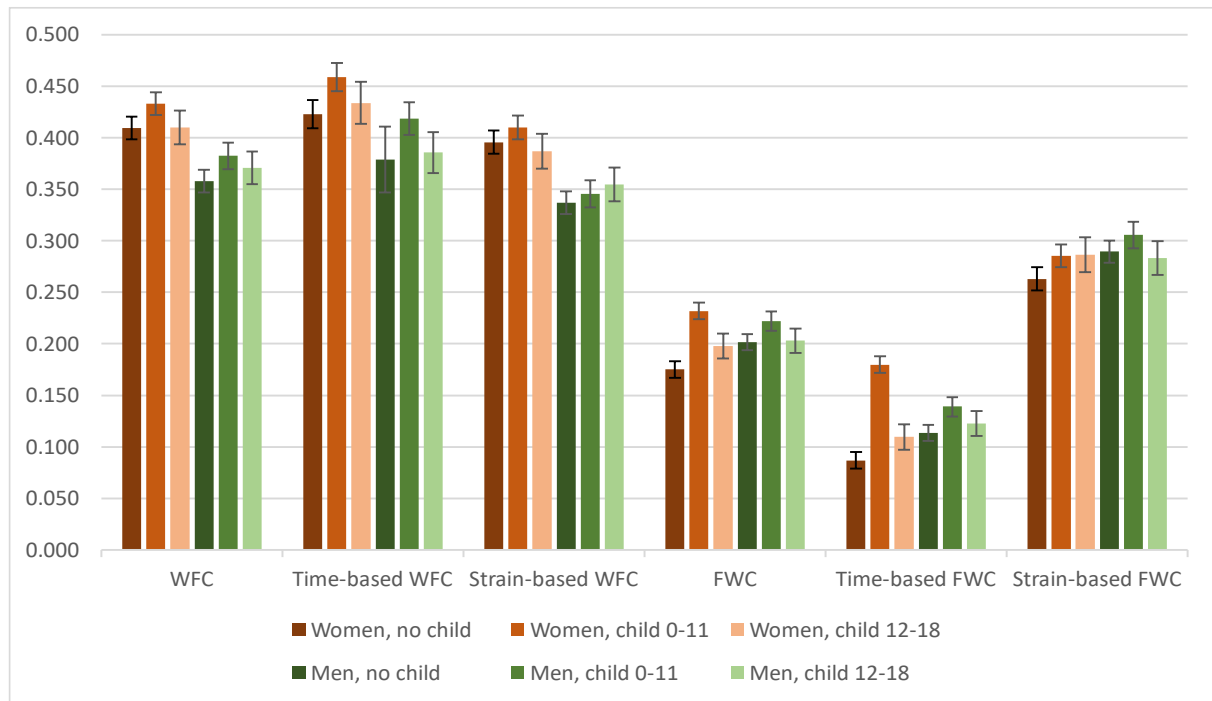
## 4. Results

Table 3 shows the results of the random-effects regression models of women's perception of WFC and FWC, and Table 4 shows the results of the same models for men. Figure 1 shows the linear predictions of the perceived work-family conflicts, which were calculated as margins at the means from these models. When taking into account differences in all family- and work-related characteristics we controlled for, women with and without children consistently reported higher levels of WFC and FWC compared to men and fathers. For instance, childless women's perceptions of WFC averaged a score of about 0.432 compared to childless men's average perception of 0.360. This applied to all sub-dimensions of conflicts but one: Women without children under the age of 18 years in the household reported less time-based and strain-based FWC than mothers and men. Conflict perceptions for all other dimensions were highest for mothers with the youngest child aged 0–11 years of age. Moreover, both women and men perceived higher WFC than FWC.

As the results in Table 3 indicate, having the youngest child aged 0–11 years in the household was associated with higher levels of mothers' reported WFC and FWC in each model compared to women without children or mothers with children aged 12–18 (there was no difference between the latter two groups in any model). The share of parents in the direct coworking environment of women was statistically significant ( $p < .1$ ) only for the time-based dimension of FWC, reducing the conflict for all three groups. For

the same outcome, “FWC time”, the interaction coefficient of childless women with the share of parents was positive and statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), indicating a slight convergence in the perception of “FWC time” with an increasing share of parents in the direct coworking environment of women (Figure 2).

**Figure 1:** Predictive margins of WFC, time-based WFC, strain-based WFC, FWC, time-based FWC, and strain-based FWC, by gender and age of the youngest child in the household



*Note:* The predictive margins of WFC, time-based WFC, strain-based WFC, FWC, time-based FWC, and strain-based FWC were calculated from the random-effects regression models. “LEEP-B3 Survey”, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015; own calculations.

**Table 3:** Random-effects regression models on women’s perception of work-family conflict

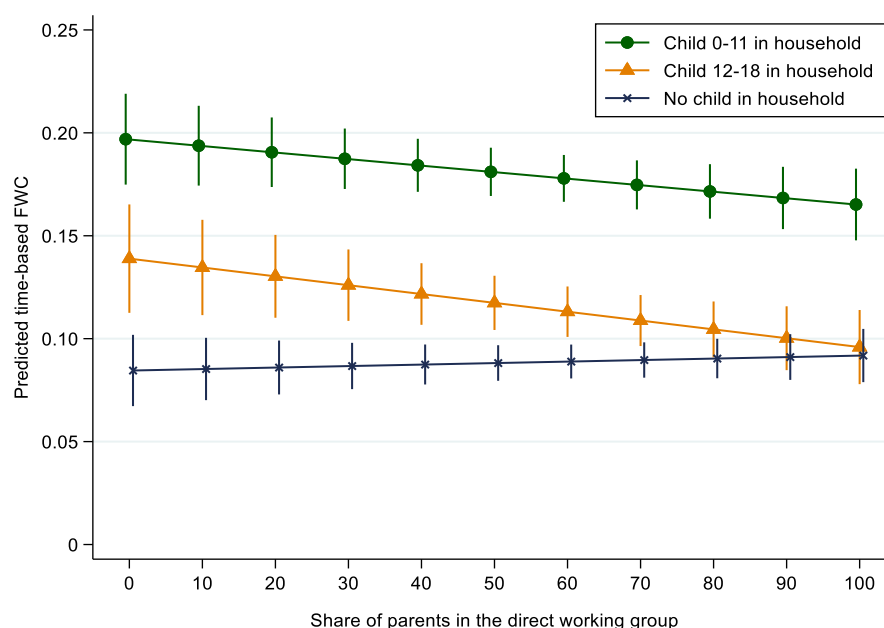
	WFC	WFC time	WFC strain	FWC	FWC time	FWC strain
No child ≤ 18 in household <sup>a</sup>	-0.028** (0.010)	-0.041** (0.013)	-0.018+ (0.010)	-0.055*** (0.007)	-0.089*** (0.007)	-0.022* (0.010)
Youngest child 12-18 in household <sup>a</sup>	-0.030** (0.011)	-0.035* (0.014)	-0.027* (0.012)	-0.031*** (0.008)	-0.065*** (0.008)	0.001 (0.011)
Share of parents in direct working group	-0.015 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.027)	-0.023 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.016)	-0.032+ (0.016)	-0.003 (0.022)
No child * share of parents	-0.001 (0.027)	-0.005 (0.034)	0.002 (0.028)	0.016 (0.020)	0.039+ (0.020)	-0.002 (0.028)
Youngest child 12-18 * share of parents	0.016 (0.032)	0.018 (0.040)	0.018 (0.033)	0.001 (0.023)	-0.011 (0.025)	0.016 (0.033)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)
Years of education	0.005** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.003* (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
In partnership <sup>b</sup>	0.011 (0.010)	0.015 (0.013)	0.007 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.000 (0.008)	-0.016 (0.010)
Hourly earnings (log)	-0.018 (0.077)	0.087 (0.097)	-0.137+ (0.080)	-0.031 (0.056)	0.004 (0.058)	-0.066 (0.079)
Actual working hours	0.007*** (0.000)	0.009*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.001+ (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Flexible working hours <sup>c</sup>	-0.033*** (0.008)	-0.045*** (0.010)	-0.023** (0.008)	0.012* (0.006)	0.016** (0.006)	0.009 (0.008)
Supervisory role <sup>d</sup>	0.034*** (0.008)	0.041*** (0.011)	0.027** (0.009)	-0.003 (0.006)	0.014* (0.006)	-0.018* (0.009)
Job autonomy	-0.115*** (0.021)	-0.132*** (0.026)	-0.105*** (0.021)	-0.013 (0.015)	-0.014 (0.015)	-0.016 (0.021)

Table 3: Random-effects regression models on women's perception of work-family conflict (continued)

Supervisor is a man <sup>e</sup>	-0.024** (0.008)	-0.016 (0.010)	-0.031*** (0.008)	0.003 (0.006)	0.009 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.008)
Supervisor Parent <sup>f</sup>	-0.003 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.011)	0.003 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.009)
Support by supervisor high <sup>g</sup>	-0.068*** (0.008)	-0.072*** (0.011)	-0.067*** (0.009)	-0.022*** (0.006)	-0.023*** (0.006)	-0.022*** (0.009)
Support by coworkers high <sup>h</sup>	-0.044*** (0.008)	-0.045*** (0.011)	-0.047*** (0.009)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.011 (0.009)
Team size	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.009+ (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.012+ (0.007)
Survey year = 2014/2015 <sup>i</sup>	-0.033*** (0.006)	-0.038*** (0.007)	-0.028*** (0.006)	0.012** (0.004)	0.002 (0.005)	0.021*** (0.006)
Constant	0.567*** (0.019)	0.601*** (0.023)	0.539*** (0.019)	0.256*** (0.014)	0.188*** (0.014)	0.326*** (0.019)
N(observations)	3,300					
N(respondents)	2,282					

Note: Reference categories: <sup>a</sup> Youngest child aged 0–11 in the household; <sup>b</sup> No partnership; <sup>c</sup> No flexible working hours; <sup>d</sup> No supervisory role; <sup>e</sup> Supervisor is a woman; <sup>f</sup> Supervisor is childless; <sup>g</sup> Support by supervisor is low; <sup>h</sup> Support by colleagues is low; <sup>i</sup> Survey year is 2012/2013. Unstandardized B-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, levels of significance: \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05, + p<.1 (two-tailed). "LEEP-B3 Survey", 2012/2013 and 2014/2015; own calculations.

Figure 2: Time-based FWC of childless women and mothers, by the share of parents in their coworking environments



Note: The linear predictions of time-based FWC were calculated from the regression models in Table 4 as margins at the means, which were adjusted by setting all covariates to the sample means. Predicted outcomes and 95%-confidence intervals. "LEEP-B3 Survey", 2012/2013 and 2014/2015; own calculations.

For men, Table 4 shows that having no underaged children in the household was associated with a significantly lower perception of WFC and FWC compared to having the youngest child aged 0–11 years. Again, living together with the youngest child aged 12–18 in the household was not significantly different from having no children in the household. The slope of the coefficients representing the share of parents in the direct coworking environments of men and fathers were negative and statistically significant in each model.



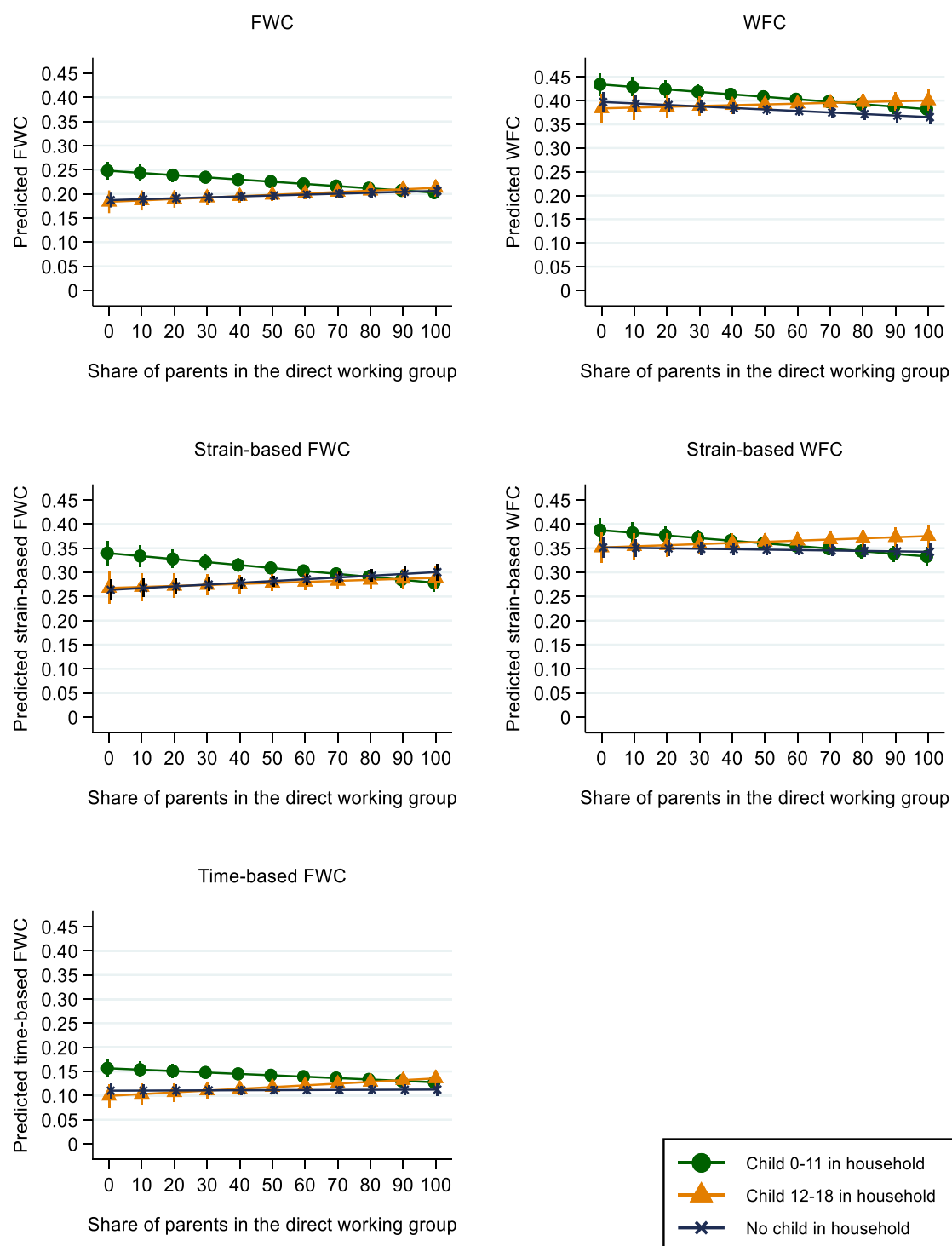
Table 4: Random-effects regression models on men's perception of work-family conflict

	WFC	WFC time	WFC strain	FWC	FWC time	FWC strain
No child <= 18 in household <sup>a</sup>	-0.025** (0.008)	-0.040*** (0.010)	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.022*** (0.006)	-0.028*** (0.006)	-0.017* (0.009)
Youngest child 12-18 in household <sup>a</sup>	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.029* (0.012)	0.011 (0.010)	-0.020** (0.007)	-0.018* (0.007)	-0.023* (0.010)
Share of parents in direct working group	-0.052** (0.017)	-0.050* (0.022)	-0.055** (0.018)	-0.045*** (0.014)	-0.029* (0.014)	-0.061** (0.019)
No child * share of parents	0.020 (0.022)	-0.003 (0.028)	0.046+ (0.024)	0.065*** (0.018)	0.031+ (0.018)	0.098*** (0.024)
Youngest child 12-18 * share of parents	0.069* (0.027)	0.051 (0.034)	0.078** (0.029)	0.074*** (0.022)	0.066** (0.022)	0.083** (0.030)
Age	-0.001+ (0.000)	-0.002** (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.000)
Years of education	0.003* (0.001)	0.004* (0.002)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
In partnership <sup>b</sup>	0.016 (0.010)	0.020 (0.013)	0.011 (0.011)	-0.017* (0.008)	-0.004 (0.008)	-0.032** (0.011)
Hourly earnings (log)	0.077 (0.075)	0.303** (0.093)	-0.158* (0.079)	-0.082 (0.057)	-0.105+ (0.058)	-0.062 (0.079)
Actual working hours	0.006*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.001)
Flexible working hours <sup>c</sup>	-0.015* (0.007)	-0.040*** (0.009)	0.011 (0.007)	0.012* (0.006)	0.012* (0.006)	0.013+ (0.008)
Supervisory role <sup>d</sup>	0.029*** (0.007)	0.042*** (0.009)	0.017* (0.007)	-0.005 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)	-0.011 (0.007)
Job autonomy	-0.165*** (0.019)	-0.195*** (0.024)	-0.134*** (0.021)	-0.035* (0.015)	-0.006 (0.016)	-0.064** (0.021)
Supervisor is a man <sup>e</sup>	0.003 (0.010)	0.008 (0.012)	-0.004 (0.010)	0.003 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.008)	0.008 (0.010)
Supervisor Parent <sup>f</sup>	0.003 (0.008)	0.002 (0.010)	0.003 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.008)
Support by supervisor high <sup>g</sup>	-0.066*** (0.007)	-0.087*** (0.009)	-0.052*** (0.007)	-0.019*** (0.006)	-0.030*** (0.006)	-0.009 (0.008)
Support by coworkers high <sup>h</sup>	-0.037*** (0.007)	-0.041*** (0.009)	-0.035*** (0.008)	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.000 (0.008)
Team size	-0.000 (0.006)	0.000 (0.008)	0.001 (0.007)	0.005 (0.005)	0.009 (0.005)	0.001 (0.007)
Survey year = 2014/2015 <sup>i</sup>	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.023*** (0.006)	-0.020*** (0.005)	0.007+ (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.014* (0.005)
Constant	0.451*** (0.018)	0.512*** (0.023)	0.398*** (0.019)	0.244*** (0.014)	0.163*** (0.014)	0.327*** (0.019)
N(observations)				3,847		
N(respondents)				2,656		

Note: Reference categories: <sup>a</sup> Youngest child aged 0–11 in the household; <sup>b</sup> No partnership; <sup>c</sup> No flexible working hours; <sup>d</sup> No supervisory role; <sup>e</sup> Supervisor is a woman; <sup>f</sup> Supervisor is childless; <sup>g</sup> Support by supervisor is low; <sup>h</sup> Support by colleagues is low; <sup>i</sup> Survey year is 2012/2013. Unstandardized B-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, levels of significance: \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05, + p<.1 (two-tailed). "LEEP-B3 Survey", 2012/2013 and 2014/2015; own calculations.

Figure 3 facilitates the interpretation of the statistically significant interaction coefficients in the models for WFC, WFC strain, FWC, FWC time, and FWC strain. For these outcomes, the interactions of parenthood and the share of parents in the direct working groups were all positive, indicating different slopes for men without children in the household and for fathers with the youngest child aged 12–18 years in the household compared to fathers with the youngest child aged 0–11 in the household. Whereas an increasing share of parents seemed to be associated with a decreasing perception of WFC, WFC strain, FWC, FWC time, and FWC strain for the latter group, it appeared to be associated with an increasing perception in the two former groups.

Figure 3: WFC, strain-based WFC, FWC, strain-based, and time-based FWC of childless men and fathers, by the share of parents in their coworking environments



Note: The linear predictions of overall WFC, strain-based WFC, overall FWC and strain-based FWC were calculated from the regression models in Table 4 as margins at the means, which were adjusted by setting all covariates to the sample means. Predicted outcomes and 95%-confidence intervals. "LEEP-B3 Survey", 2012/2013 and 2014/2015; own calculations.

## 5. Conclusion

Work-life balance, the reconciliation of family and work, or the more negative notion of work-family conflict have become increasingly relevant indicators for women's and men's well-being in modern societies over recent decades. Using longitudinal data from the "LEEP-B3"-Survey, a large-scale linked employer-employee survey in Germany from 2012/2013 and 2014/2015 (Diewald et al., 2014), the present study provided the first investigation of how the share of parents in the direct coworking environments of women and men at their workplaces was related to their perceptions of work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts.

Four findings surfaced in this analysis. First, when taking into account differences in important family- and work-related characteristics (especially: hours in paid work), women with and without children consistently reported higher levels of WFC and FWC compared to men and fathers. This applied to all sub-dimensions of conflicts but one: Women without children under the age of 18 years in the household reported less time-based and strain-based FWC than mothers and men. Moreover, both women and men perceived higher WFC than FWC.

Second, living together with the youngest child aged 0–11 years, which is up to the age until children in Germany usually transit from primary to secondary education, was found to be associated with more WFC and FWC, for both genders, compared to women and men who did not live together with children, or mothers and fathers with older children in their households. Further, a higher share of parents in the direct working group did not change the perception of WFC or FWC for women, but reduced the perception of conflict for almost all indicators of work-family conflict for men. At first glance, all men seemed to benefit more from a higher share of parents in their respective working groups with regard to work-family conflict than women did.

Third, more detailed analyses showed different slopes for the associations between the share of parenthood and specific indicators of work-family conflict for different groups of women and men. For mothers with the youngest child aged 0–11 in the household, an increasing share of parents in their coworking environment promoted less time-based FWC. For fathers of children aged 0–11, the same was found for WFC, strain based WFC as well as for all indicators of FWC.

Taken the last two aspects together, a high share of parents in working groups may create a climate of overall understanding of possible struggles in reconciling work and family obligations, because a large share of the team members shares similar experiences. Therefore, there might be a supportive atmosphere not only towards other parents, but towards all team members in general, if they have to handle conflicts, especially when they emerge in the intersection of private and work life, which may bring forth a lower sense of work-family conflict. A possible explanation for the finding that especially fathers of smaller children benefited most from a higher share of parents in the direct coworking environment may refer to the interpretation and perception of the "ideal worker norm" (Bailyn, 1993; Williams, 1999). Given the massive changes in attitudes towards gendered work and care in the context of parenthood (Churchill & Craig, 2021; Edlund & Öun, 2016), both fathers' commitment to the sphere of the family and mothers' commitment to the sphere of work have become more and more acceptable. However, the attitudinal changes towards a more egalitarian, and less gendered arrangement have not yet been put into practice completely. This is especially true in a still traditional gender regime such as Germany, where fathers and increasingly mothers face "ideal worker norm" expectations when they try to reconcile market work and family life (Lott & Klenner, 2018; Williams et al., 2013). Having said this, the more subtle and cohesive similarity mechanism of a perceived "common ground" – i.e., having children and trying to reconcile this demanding lifestyle – may counter this "ideal worker norm", decreasing its relevance at least informally. If this interpretation proved to be plausible, fathers should benefit most from this normative change, because they were traditionally regarded as the "ideal workers", who show their commitment to their family by serving as the material provider. For mothers, in turn, the norm of the "ideal parent" may still dominate the normative setting in which they face the struggles of reconciliation, which may explain their higher perceptions of work-family conflict and the lower elasticity of these perceptions depending on team composition.

Fourth, concerning the theoretical arguments proposed in this study, the findings provided evidence in favor of the similarity mechanism within the framework of relational demography (Riordan, 2000). Parents, and fathers slightly more than mothers, seemed to benefit more from a high share of parents in their coworking environments. In these cases, similarity between the team members regarding parenthood seemed to reduce the perception of work-family conflict beyond several other situational characteristics of

the individuals and the workplaces. This is in line with research on a variety of other outcomes in work and organizational contexts and, thus, supports this particular notion of the relational demography perspective (Elfenbein & O'Reilly, 2007; Riordan, 2000).

Going beyond the scope of the present study, at least four limitations warrant further investigation. First, this study was limited to the German context. Although Germany is a prime example for studying the concurrence of change and stability in gender inequality, broader conclusions on women's and men's work-family conflict should rely on comparative studies for other countries as well.

Second, to get closer to any kind of "causal" interpretation of the associations between parenthood and the composition of the working group in terms of similarity or dissimilarity, larger samples and observation windows would be needed to spell out the analyses in more detail. Not least, this would increase the possibilities of dynamic analyses of change, either regarding the transition to parenthood, or changes between coworking environments with different compositions, among others. This would also allow to assess the question of (self-)selection into specific environments, which is arguably the most important limitation here, in much more detail. Even though the present study provided basic indications that the demographic composition of the working environment is of relevance regarding the perception of WFC and FWC, this may depend, for example, on the selection into occupational contexts, for instance if the proportion of parents was just a correlate of certain occupations. This may be the case, for example, if high levels of parenthood clustered within occupations with traditional attitudes where men manage to maintain a strict border between their work and family, like in male breadwinner marriages, resulting in low work-family conflict. However, several sensitivity analyses showed no differences in the working group compositions across occupational clusters or sectors. Yet, this issue is reserved for future studies in this field.

Third, possible selection effects of respondents into the study need to be discussed. Though the respondents in LEEP-B3 are representative of employees in large organizations in Germany with respect to demographic characteristics (for instance gender, parenthood, education, age), the likelihood of participation might depend on the level of work-family conflicts. If particularly employees with very high levels of WFC or FWC were less likely to participate and those employees work in teams with particularly high/low shares of parents, the relevance of team composition for work-family conflicts might be underestimated.

Fourth, the sample of the present study included employees from large organizations (> 500 employees) only. Yet, team structures and team dynamics may be very different in small and medium organizations, just because of the pure size of working groups and the availability of personnel for forming working groups at all (Reiter-Palmon et al., 2021). Similarly, the data did not include a measurement of the frequency, the intensity or the quality of interactions with members of the direct working group, which may be crucial for the perception of work-family conflict (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2009). Eventually, it might be interesting to consider the extent of work-family conflicts experienced by supervisors and co-workers as well, to further broaden the understanding how the team composition, and going beyond that: the team dynamics, relate to work-family conflicts.

## Data availability and replication statement

The datasets analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to legal data restrictions by the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung, Nuremberg, Germany. Data are only available on request for analyses to be conducted locally at Bielefeld University in cooperation with current project members. Replication code to this article is available from the webpage of the article.

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# Information in German

## Deutscher Titel

Beeinflusst die Elternschaft der Arbeitskolleginnen und Arbeitskollegen die Wahrnehmung des *work-family conflict*?

## Zusammenfassung

**Fragestellung:** Wie hängt die Wahrnehmung des *work-family conflict* von Frauen und Männern mit dem Anteil der Eltern in ihrem direkten Arbeitsumfeld zusammen?

**Hintergrund:** Der Ansatz der *relational demography* basiert auf der Annahme, dass die relative Position von Individuen in ihrem Arbeitsumfeld einen Einfluss auf ihr Wohlbefinden hat. Davon ausgehend wurde untersucht, ob und wie die Ähnlichkeit oder Unähnlichkeit von Frauen und Männern in Bezug auf die Elternschaft im Vergleich zu ihren Arbeitskollegen die Wahrnehmung des *work-family conflict* beeinflusst.

**Methode:** Verschiedene Dimensionen des *work-family conflict* wurden nach Geschlecht und Elternschaft differenziert; die Zusammensetzung der Arbeitsgruppe wurde als moderierende Variable untersucht. Die Analysen basieren auf den Daten des LEEP-B3-Panels, einer großen Befragung von Arbeitnehmern und Arbeitgebern in Deutschland in den Jahren 2012/2013 und 2014/2015 (2.226 Frauen und 2.656 Männer).

**Ergebnisse:** Mütter und Väter mit Kindern zwischen 0–11 Jahren im Haushalt berichteten von höherem *work-family conflict* verglichen mit Eltern älterer Kinder oder kinderlosen Haushalten. Insbesondere berichteten Väter mit jüngeren Kindern von geringerem Konflikt, wenn der Anteil von Eltern in ihrer Arbeitsgruppe hoch war.

**Schlussfolgerung:** Mütter und Väter, die in einem Arbeitsumfeld mit einem hohen Elternanteil beschäftigt waren, berichteten tendenziell von geringerem *work-family conflict*.

**Schlagwörter:** Soziales Umfeld, Geschlecht, Deutschland, Passung, Ähnlichkeit, Unähnlichkeit

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