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## Work-Family Conflict, Coping Strategies and Burnout: A Gender and Couple Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the amount of research on family-work conflict and burnout, there persist questions about their relations and which coping strategies are the most effective. In this paper we address this issue from a gender perspective with a sample of 131 dual-earner couples developing both individual and couple analyses. The results at individual level yield gender differences when each of the two burnout components is explained. The main predictor of emotional exhaustion is work-family conflict while family-work conflict is the main predictor of depersonalization, especially for men. Regarding coping strategies, behavioural coping is negatively related to male depersonalization. However, behavioral and emotional coping increases both burnout dimensions in women, particularly if family-work conflict is high. At couple level, findings confirm the relationship between conflicts and burnout and the moderating role of behavioural coping to explain emotional exhaustion.

### El conflicto entre el trabajo y la familia, las estrategias de afrontamiento y el agotamiento: análisis de género y pareja

### RESUMEN

A pesar de la gran cantidad de investigación en torno al conflicto familia-trabajo y el *burnout* laboral, aún persisten dudas sobre la relación entre estos constructos, así como sobre qué tipo de estrategias de afrontamiento son más efectivas. En este trabajo analizamos el tema desde una perspectiva de género con una muestra de 131 parejas con dos fuentes de ingresos y desarrollando análisis a nivel individual y de pareja. Los resultados a nivel individual muestran diferencias de género en la explicación de cada uno de los componentes del *burnout*. El principal predictor del agotamiento emocional es el conflicto trabajo-familia, mientras que el conflicto familia-trabajo lo es de la despersonalización, pero especialmente para los hombres. Sobre las estrategias de afrontamiento, conductual aparece relacionado negativamente con la despersonalización de los hombres. Sin embargo, el afrontamiento conductual y emocional incrementa ambas dimensiones del agotamiento en las mujeres, especialmente si el conflicto familia-trabajo es elevado. A nivel de pareja, los resultados confirman la relación entre los conflictos y el *burnout* y el papel moderador del afrontamiento conductual para explicar el agotamiento emocional.

The study of work-family conflict and its consequences has grown in importance in recent years and current conditions will make it continue to increase in the future (Kao et al., 2020). Work and family are the most important facets in both women's and men's lives and conflictive demands arising from them have turned out to be one of the most relevant psycho-social risks in today's occupational world. Work-family conflict has serious consequences for employees and it is related to stress (Tziner & Sharoni, 2014), psychological health (Nigatu & Wang, 2018; Sun et al., 2020), and burnout (Jerg-Bretzke et al., 2020; Medrano & Trógo, 2018; Smith et al., 2018; Terry & Woo, 2020), including its dimensions: emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation (Wang et al., 2012). Such outcomes of work-family

conflicts, like burnout, could, for its part, develop into significant problems for employees and organizations (Palenzuela et al., 2019).

Evidence suggests that women have greater family demands while men suffer more from work demands which has led to a rising interest in addressing the study of work-family conflict and its consequences from a gender perspective (Quinn & Smith, 2018). However, various meta-analyses did not find a moderator role of gender between work-family conflict and different consequences (Amstad et al., 2011; Nohe et al., 2015). In this sense, adopting an alternative approach to the study of the role of gender and examining potential mediating variables could yield better results and contribute to shedding some light on work-family conflicts and their outcomes.

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One of the most important mediating variables is coping strategies, since men and women have different ways of interpreting and responding to social demands (Arman, 2020), which can be explained by the influence of gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Lyu & Fan, 2020). Although the relationship between gender and work-family conflict has been extensively studied, relatively little is known about whether gender shapes the relationship between work-family conflict, coping strategies, and burnout. In this study, we analyze if there are differences between men and women in these variables and the relationship between family-work conflict (in both directions), coping strategies (behavioural and emotional coping), and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). We also address the effectiveness of these coping strategies indirectly as moderators of the relationships between the two conflicts and the two dimensions of burnout. This is examined at both individual and couple levels. From a couple perspective, we study to what extent sources of conflict and coping strategies are shared by couple members. We start from the idea that shared sources of conflict and coping strategies can result in lower levels of burnout.

### Work-Family Conflict and Gender

Work-family conflict has been defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which work and family pressures are mutually incompatible domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The conflict between work and family spheres has two directions: work-to-family conflict (WFC) occurs when experiences and commitments at work interfere with family life, while family-to-work conflict (FWC) arises when family responsibility interferes with work duties. Both conflicts seem to deliver consequences related to both work and family spheres, but show stronger relationships to same-domain outcomes (Amstad et al., 2011). However, most studies on work-family conflict and burnout are mute on the relative merits of each perspective since they do not simultaneously consider WFC and FWC. For example, Smith et al. (2018) find that WFC is strongly related to burnout, but they do not analyze family interference with work life. Recently, Terry and Woo (2020) studied only the WFC and its influence on burnout. Nonetheless, when the two directions of conflict are considered the results can change (Nohe & Sonntang, 2014).

Gender perspective is crucial for understanding work-family conflict. Gender roles shape the way both men and women operate in society, which includes family and work spheres (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Although traditional gender roles are in dispute in western societies, especially since the process of incorporation of women to the labour market, women still play a bigger role in family issues, while men's primary domain still work (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). It would, therefore, be expected that men suffer a higher WFC, whereas women score higher in FWC (Quinn & Smith, 2018). However, literature provides conflicting evidence at this respect. A meta-analysis carried out by Shockley et al. (2017) shows that men and women do not differ in their reports of bi-directional work-family conflict. More recently, Lyu and Fan (2020) do not find significant differences between men and women in work-family conflict (in both directions). Neither men nor women would lower their work engagement when work interfered with family issues. However, when family interfered with work, women became less likely to engage in work than men. Novel evidence contributing to shedding some light on the relationship between gender and work-family conflict is certainly needed.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive relation between work-family conflict (in both directions) and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

At couple level, dual-earner couples are found to be more symmetrical in relation to gender roles since both members are subject to the same type of work-family pressures and experience lower levels of work-family conflict than single-earner couples

(Fellows et al., 2015). In this research, we expect the couple to show less burnout if the two members of the couple share the sources of conflict.

### Stress and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), in their transactional model of stress, already pointed out the relevance of considering coping strategies in the stress-reaction relationship. The inability to cope with stress properly is associated with different negative outcomes, and more specifically, it is a burnout trigger (Zani & Pietrantonio, 2000).

We can find many taxonomies of coping in the literature. Dewe (1985) proposes two coping strategies: direct action coping strategies and palliative coping strategies. Lazarus (1999) distinguishes between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Similarly, other authors also propose a dichotomous classification that differentiates between positive and negative coping strategies (Palupi & Findyartini, 2019). Positive, problem, or behavioural coping can be defined as rational strategies oriented to solve the problem or control the situation. Negative, passive, or emotional coping tend to reduce emotional discomfort, ignoring or trying to tolerate the situation (Shimazu & Kosugi, 2003). Despite that, emotional strategies can also sometimes be positive by focusing on emotional regulation and helping individuals to feel, understand, and express their feelings (Roesch & Weiner, 2001; Shin et al., 2014).

Regarding the relationship between coping and burnout, the meta-analysis of Shin et al. (2014) revealed that problem-focused coping correlates negatively with the three dimensions of burnout symptoms, whereas emotion-focused coping correlate positively with the three dimensions. More recently, Palupi and Findyartini (2019), using four coping strategies, also find that more negative coping strategies show a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, whereas more positive coping strategies have a negative correlation only with depersonalization.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant negative relationship between behavioural coping strategies and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) and a positive relationship between emotional coping strategies and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

The inclusion of a gender perspective to the study of coping and burnout has a long tradition, although results are diverse. In the nineties, Greenglass et al. (1990), from the role conflict theory, already proposed a gender perspective in the study of coping and burnout, finding that men experience greater work stress than women and are less likely to employ positive coping strategies to reduce burnout. Women, for its part, seemed more willing to use positive coping strategies. Ptacek et al. (1992) suggested that males tend to avoid using emotion-focused strategies in contrast to females who predominantly use them. New studies also confirm gender differences in coping strategies, although contradicting previous findings. Caruso et al. (2017) note women use request for social support (negative coping) as a coping strategy more than males, whereas Shimanoe et al. (2015) report men use more positive coping strategies and women employ mainly negative coping strategies. However, Menéndez-Espina, et al. (2019) found that women implement a greater number of coping strategies, with more positive results for psychological health.

Some authors also identify the detrimental effects of employing some coping strategies. For example, González-Morales et al. (2010) explore gender differences in the relationship between coping strategies and exhaustion and depersonalization. Their results pointed out that direct-action coping was beneficial only for men, while indirect-action coping was not beneficial for women and it was found to be detrimental for men.

The role of coping in relation to work-family conflict has also been addressed in the literature from a gender perspective. With a

large sample of Finnish employees, [Mauno et al. \(2012\)](#) indicate that women prioritized more at home than men, whereas men prioritized more at work than women and some direct strategies were positive. Specifically, 'delegating' was positive but 'prioritizing' was negative because of its association with higher conflict. [Sousa et al. \(2018\)](#) found that men and women use different strategies to cope with work-family conflict, being the variety of coping strategies used by women larger than in the case of men.

In this study, we analyze gender differences in previously exposed relations on the basis of the gender roles theory ([Eagly & Wood, 2012](#)). At couple level, we expect that when the two members of the couple share coping strategies, they will show less burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

Some studies have addressed the effect of coping on well-being when experienced stressors are severe. These studies focused on the idea that coping could be moderating the stressor-well-being relationship. For example, [Bhagat et al. \(1995\)](#) observed that problem-focused coping had a moderating effect between stressors and the two dimensions of burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Emotion-focused coping strategies, for its part, only showed a moderating effect in the stressors-depersonalization relation. [Day and Livingstone \(2001\)](#) found an interaction effect between stress and palliative coping strategies on health, so in high-stress situations, people that frequently use palliative coping strategies showed worse health conditions than people who did not use them frequently. However, under low-stress situations, this difference was small.

Hypothesis 3: There is a moderating effect of coping strategies on the relationship between family-work conflict and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

In this study, we also explore potential gender differences in the moderating role of coping in the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout and examine if results are confirmed at the couple level.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The sample was composed of 262 individuals (131 men and 131 women), who formed in turn 131 heterosexual couples. The average age of the sample was 38.4 years ( $SD = 7.1$ ), men being (39.5 years) slightly older than women (37.4 years) ( $t = 2.46, p < 0.05$ ). Their educational level was assessed in 5 levels: 12.2% had completed primary education, 36.6% secondary education, 20.2% professional training, 24.4% an undergraduate university degree, and 6.5% had master's/doctoral studies. By sex, men were less educated than women: 17.6% of men had primary education, as compared with 6.9% of women, while women had higher percentages than men in the remaining educational levels. All individuals in the sample had

a job at the time data were obtained, 72% had a permanent contract, and 26% held a senior position. By sex, the percentage of men (34%) in senior positions was higher than that of women (21%) ( $t = 2.38, p < .05$ ).

The sampling technique was non-probabilistic and incidental, participation in this study being voluntary. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire that contained socio-demographic and labor variables, in addition to eight sections with Likert scale items; 264 questionnaires were collected and 2 were eliminated due to errors in completion of forms.

### Instruments

In order to analyze burnout, we employed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; [Maslach et al., 1996](#)). This instrument has 3 components: 1) emotional exhaustion (feeling of tiredness caused by work), 2) depersonalization (attitude of indifference towards work or clients), and 3) reduced personal accomplishment (negative emotions and cognitions about one's achievements and capacities to succeed at work or life in general). In this study, we only used the results of the subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The subscale of emotional exhaustion consisted of 4 items (e.g., "Because of my work, I feel emotionally exhausted";  $\alpha = .85$ ) and the subscale of depersonalization consisted of 5 items (e.g., "I think I have lost the passion for my profession";  $\alpha = .72$ ) whose answers were recorded through a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

The stress from the conflicts between work and family was evaluated by the Work-Family Conflict Questionnaire by [Carlson et al. \(2000\)](#). We used specifically the two scales that address the strain-based dimension of conflict: strain-based work to family conflict and strain-based family to work conflict. Both work-family conflict (e.g., "When I come home from work, I often feel too irritated to engage in family activities or responsibilities";  $\alpha = .77$ ) and family-work conflict (e.g., "Due to the tension I have at home, I am often worried about family problems at work";  $\alpha = .86$ ) subscales were composed of 3 items, respectively, whose answers were recorded through a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

Coping strategies were measured through the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) by [Cooper et al. \(1988\)](#). We conducted a factor analysis to explore existing coping strategies in our sample. Our results pointed to the existence of two coping strategies: behavioural coping and emotional coping, in line with [Lazarus and Folkman \(1986\)](#). The behavioural coping subscale was composed of 5 items (e.g., "Dealing with problems as soon as they occur";  $\alpha = .72$ ) and the emotional coping subscale had 4 items (e.g., "Seeking as much social support as possible";  $\alpha = .68$ ). Responses were recorded through a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

**Table 1.** Differences between Men and Women, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations between Variables

	$M\bar{X}$	MSD	$W\bar{X}$	WSD	$t$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Hours work	42.16	10.38	35.09	8.61	5.95***	-	.00	.21*	.01	.24**	.08	-.07	-.14
2. Hours home	10.30	8.70	19.77	14.31	6.39***	-.15	-	-.12	-.06	-.07	-.03	.04	-.09
3. Emotional exhaustion	3.19	1.64	3.31	1.60	0.59	.07	-.01	-	.55***	.39***	.27**	-.15	.11
4. Depersonalization	2.89	1.27	2.90	1.32	0.07	.02	-.05	.48***	-	.25**	.34***	-.26**	.01
5. WFC	3.12	1.68	3.35	1.63	1.12	.14	-.06	.43***	.00	-	.34***	.03	.10
6. FWC	2.15	1.42	2.37	1.56	1.20	-.13	.15	.27**	.26**	.47***	-	-.10	-.15
7. Behavioural coping	5.47	0.97	5.78	0.92	2.61*	.00	.03	-.02	-.09	-.06	-.22*	-	.50***
8. Emotional coping	5.40	1.07	5.44	1.03	0.32	-.03	.06	-.07	-.02	-.12	-.13	.49***	-

Note. Correlations of men above the diagonal, of women below.

$M\bar{X}$  = men mean; MSD = men standard deviation;  $W\bar{X}$  = women mean; WSD = women standard deviation;  $t$  =  $t$ -test.

$N = 262$  (men  $N = 131$ ; women  $N = 131$ ).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.** Regression Equations with Family-Work/Work-Family Conflicts and Coping Strategies for Explaining Emotional Exhaustion

	All				Men				Women				Couple			
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Hours work	.02	.02	.01	.02	.04*	.02	.02	.02	.01	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00
Hours home	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.004	0.00	.00	.00	.00	.02	.01	.01	.01
WFC		.32***	.32***	-.21		.32**	.33***	.35		.32**	.32**	-.123*		.22*	.23*	-1.02
FWC		.18*	.16*	.16		.26*	.23*	.74		.10	.10	.01		.19	.16	-.27
Behavioural coping (BC)			-.10	-.42			-.23	-.01			.02	-.90**			-.21	-1.15**
WFC x BC				.10				-.002				.27**				.11*
FWC x BC				.001				-.10				.02				.04
F	2.03	13.83***	11.27***	8.52***	3.46*	8.90***	7.74***	5.62***	0.16	5.35**	4.25**	4.76***	0.93	5.30**	4.57**	4.48***
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.19	.19	.20	.06	.24	.26	.27	.00	.15	.15	.22	.02	.17	.18	.24
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.02**	.17***	.00	.01*	.06**	.18***	.02**	.01*	.00	.15***	.00	.07**	.02**	.15***	.03**	.06**

	All				Men				Women				Couple			
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Hours work	.02*	.02	.02	.02	.04**	.03	.03*	.03*	0.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Hours home	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.01	0.00	.00	.00	.00	.03*	.02	.02	.02
WFC		.32***	.31***	-.25		.31**	.28**	-.03		.32**	.33**	-.67		.23*	.23*	-.63
FWC		.17*	.18*	-.07		.24*	.27*	.00		.10	.09	-.26		.16	.15	.19
Emotional coping (EC)			.04	-.40			.19	-.011			-.06	-.81*			-.10	-.60
WFC x EC				.10				0.06				.18*				.08
FWC x EC				.05				0.05				.06				-.01
F	2.37	13.68***	10.95***	8.62***	4.16*	8.59***	7.23***	5.27***	0.16	5.53***	4.43**	4.28***	2.05	5.15**	4.20**	3.43**
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.19	.19	.21	.07	.24	.25	.26	.00	.16	.16	.21	.04	.17	.18	.20
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.02**	.17***	.00	.02**	.07**	.17***	.01*	.01*	.00	.16***	.00	.05**	.04**	.13***	.01*	.02**

Note. N = 262 (men n = 131, women n = 131).

†p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

As control variables we use the number of working hours per week and the number of hours per week spent on housework. Men work more hours outside home ( $t = 5.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while women spend more time involved in housework ( $t = 6.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Results

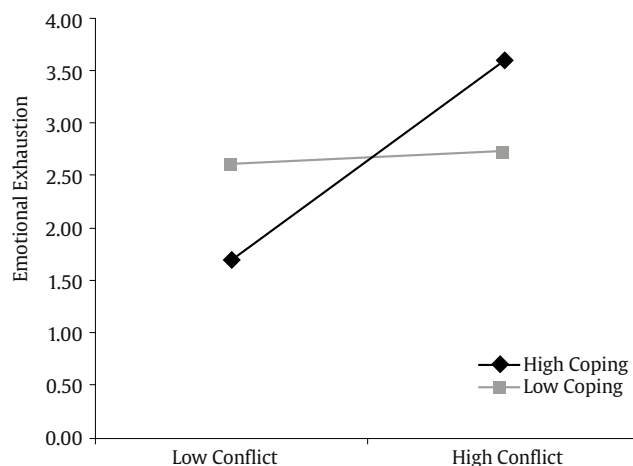
Table 1 provides means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables by sex. To prove whether significant differences exist between men and women in these variables, we also performed  $t$ -tests. Women score higher on behavioural coping than men ( $t = 2.61$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The correlation analysis also reveals differences between men and women. Regarding control variables, more hours of work outside home relates to more stress derived from WFC ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and higher emotional exhaustion ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but only in the case of men. Conflicts appear related to emotional exhaustion in both sexes. With regard to depersonalization, both men and women show positive correlations between this dimension and FWC. However, only in the male group, the greater the WFC, the higher they score in depersonalization ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Coping strategies also show different correlations for men and women. In particular, the use of behavioural coping strategies is associated with less FWC stress only for women ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while for men, it is linked to lower scores in depersonalization ( $r = -.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In order to test the above hypotheses, two hierarchical regression analyses were developed by taking the two dimensions of burnout as dependent variables: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In step 1, we included weekly hours of work outside home and weekly hours of housework as controls. In step 2, we added work-family conflicts. In the third step, coping strategies were introduced, either behavioural coping or emotional coping. Finally, step 4 added interactions between work-family conflicts and coping strategies to measure their modulating role.

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis to explain emotional exhaustion. They are presented for the entire sample as well as for men and women separately. Among control variables, a significant effect is only observed in the case of working hours outside home for men ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In the case of conflicts, WFC relates to emotional exhaustion for men ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and women ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while FWC is linked to exhaustion only for men ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Coping strategies are not directly related in either men or women, although it can be observed that both modulate WFC only in women.

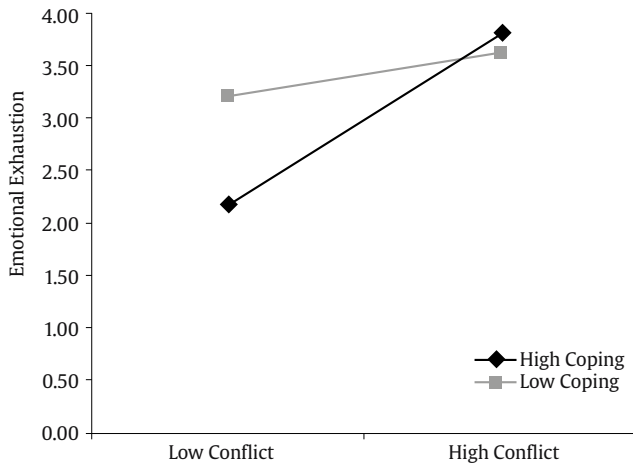


**Figure 1.** Interaction between Work-Family Conflict and Behavioural Coping to Explain Emotional Exhaustion in Women.

As can be seen in Figure 1, women who employ more direct coping strategies experience less burnout, in the case of a reduced WFC scenario. However, in situations of high conflict, they get more

exhausted than those who use behavioural coping strategies less ( $\beta = .27, p < .01$ ).

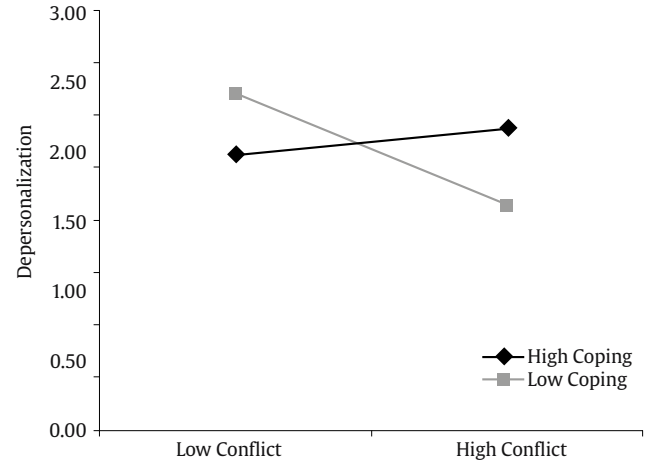
Figure 2 presents the modulating role of emotional coping strategies for women. The results are similar to those of behavioural coping, indicating that emotional coping fails to reduce emotional exhaustion if WFC is high ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ).



**Figure 2.** Interaction between Work-Family Conflict and Emotional Coping to Explain Emotional Exhaustion in Women.

The results of the regression analysis to explain depersonalization are shown in Table 3. In this case, only the FWC appears related to depersonalization for both men ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ) and women ( $\beta = 0.25, p < .01$ ). Among coping strategies, only behavioural strategies reduce depersonalization in men ( $\beta = -.36, p < .01$ ). For women we do not observe a direct effect of coping, but we do find a modulating effect of behavioural coping on the relationship between WFC

and depersonalization ( $\beta = .15, p < .10$ ) (Figure 3). In low conflict situations, women who employ fewer behavioural coping strategies experience higher depersonalization. However, when the conflict is high, women who score higher on behavioural coping are the ones that show higher depersonalization ( $\beta = .15, p < .10$ ).



**Figure 3.** Interaction between Work-Family Conflict and Behavioural Coping to Explain Depersonalization in Women.

### Couple Analysis

With the purpose of replicating the previous analysis at couple level, we calculated intraclass correlation coefficients, ICC(1), following Bartko's (1966) methodology. The highest ICC(1) coefficients are those of the FWC (.29), hours of work outside home (.28), hours of domestic work (.23), and emotional coping (.21). At the opposite

**Table 3.** Regression Equations with Family-Work/Work-Family Conflicts and Coping Strategies for Explaining Depersonalization

Depersonalization	All				Men				Women				Couple			
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Hours work	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-0.01	-.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
Hours home	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	0.00	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	.00	.00	.00	.00
WFC		.04	.04	-.24		0.12	.13	.01		-.04	-.03	-.91		.00	.00	-.35
FWC		.27***	.24***	.22		0.32***	.28**	.27		.25**	.24**	.44		.25**	.22*	.01
Behavioural coping (BC)			-.20*	-.38			-.36**	-.44			-.06	-.47			-.22	-.52
WFC x BC				.05				.02				.15†				.03
FWC x BC				.00				.00				-.03				.02
F	0.34	7.20***	6.99***	5.14***	0.19	5.75***	6.96***	4.91***	0.20	2.56*	2.08*	1.96*	0.13	2.66*	2.60*	1.96
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.11	.13	.13	.00	.17	.24	.24	.00	.08	.08	.10	.00	.09	.11	.11
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.00	.11***	.02**	.00	.00	.17***	.07	.00	.00	.08**	.00	.02**	.00	.09**	.02**	.00
Depersonalization	All				Men				Women				Couple			
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
Hours work	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	-0.01	-.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01
Hours home	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	0.00	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	.01	.00	.00	.00
WFC		.04	.04	-.50		0.12	.12	-.26		-.03	-.03	-.69		.00	.01	-.05
FWC		.27***	.27***	.29		0.32**	.32**	.50		.25**	.25**	-.17		.26**	.24*	.14
Emotional coping (EC)			.02	-.30			-.01	-.17			.01	-.56			-.12	-.20
WFC x EC				.10				.07				.12				.01
FWC x EC				-.01				-.04				.08				.01
F	0.30	6.88***	5.49***	4.53***	0.14	5.42**	4.30**	3.20**	0.20	2.49*	1.98	2.11*	0.22	2.52*	2.22	1.56
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.11	.11	.12	.00	.17	.17	.18	.00	.08	.08	.11	.00	.09	.10	.10
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.00	.11***	.00	.02**	.00	.17***	.00	.01*	.00	.08**	.00	.03**	.00	.09**	.01*	.00

Note. N = 262 (men n = 131; women n = 131).

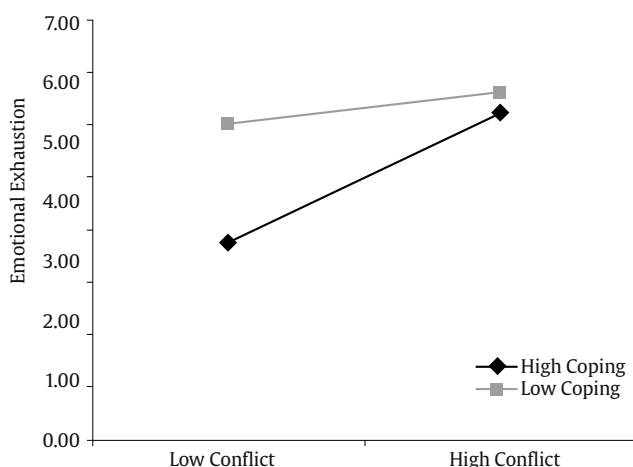
†p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.



extreme, with the lowest ICC(1), we find depersonalization (.09), emotional exhaustion (.12), and behavioural coping (.12). However, all variables exhibit coefficients between 0 and 0.5, which allows us to build couple level data by adding up the values of each partner and thus to replicate previous regression analyses.

The last column of Tables 2 and 3 display the results of the hierarchical regression analysis with couple-level data. Results for emotional exhaustion are presented in Table 2 while those for depersonalization can be observed in Table 3.

In the case of emotional exhaustion, couples' increased WFC relates to greater emotional exhaustion ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ). Among the coping strategies, we find a moderating effect of behavioural coping strategies on the stress caused by the WFC ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ). In this sense, Figure 4 shows that in low work to family conflict situation couples who more actively employ behavioural coping strategies suffer less emotional exhaustion. However, when the conflict intensifies, the emotional exhaustion also does ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ).



**Figure 4.** Interaction between Work-Family Conflict and Behavioural Coping to Explain Emotional Exhaustion.

When depersonalization is examined as a dependent variable, only the FWC appears to be associated with higher levels of it ( $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ). In this case, we find neither a direct role of coping nor a moderating effect of it to explain depersonalization at couple level.

## Discussion

This study emphasizes the role of gender in the relations between work-family conflict, coping strategies, and burnout (Quinn & Smith, 2018). Separate analyses for men and women have allowed uncovering some hidden features when no gender distinction analysis is made.

We confirm hypothesis 1, that postulated that work-family conflict influences burnout levels, adding one more piece of evidence to the vast existing literature (Jerg-Bretzke et al. 2020; Medrano & Trógolo, 2018; Smith et al., 2018; Terry & Woo, 2020). Nonetheless, as expected, we find some gender differences. Work-family conflict in both directions is related to male emotional exhaustion; however, female emotional exhaustion is only related to conflict from work to family. That is, the two types of conflicts increase men's emotional exhaustion, but women are more influenced by the conflict that interferes from work. According to the gender roles theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), women would suffer more from FWC while men's main source of burnout would be WFC. This, however, is only partially reflected in our results. WFC leads to higher scores in emotional exhaustion than FWC for men, which is in line with premises of the

gender roles theory. However, we do not find a direct relationship between FWC and emotional exhaustion for women. They are more used to assuming family responsibilities and it seems that it does not affect them as much as men.

Men and women form couples in our sample; therefore, they are likely to share characteristics and environments, shaping the way their work-family conflicts and coping mechanisms affect them. In this respect, it becomes interesting to analyze the coincidences at couple level. The results reveal that couple variables explain twice FWC than WFC. For its part, the regression analysis shows that only WFC is related to emotional exhaustion of both couple members which would also contribute to the support of previous postulates.

Depersonalization presents the opposite pattern, being fundamentally related to FWC and showing a particular relevance for men. We find similar results at couple level. Our findings do not fully endorse the gender roles theory, but it is worth highlighting that most of the studies on family-work conflict and burnout do not differentiate between the two directions of conflict (Smith et al., 2018; Terry and Woo, 2020), the two dimensions of burnout (Jerg-Bretzke et al., 2020), or gender (Smith et al., 2018; Medrano & Trógolo, 2018); therefore we believe that the relevance of our results lies in this fact and could open a path for future studies.

Regarding coping strategies, we do not observe any significant relationship between emotional coping and burnout dimensions, but we confirm that coping results may be different depending on gender (Arman, 2020). Behavioural coping appears negatively related to depersonalization, confirming only partially hypothesis 2, since this relation is only observed in men.

In the group of women, two indirect relationships are observed, which would suggest the confirmation of hypothesis 3, but the moderating effect of coping works in an unexpected way. For women, the two types of coping, behavioural and emotional, are useful, which supports the idea that women possess a greater variety of coping strategies (Sousa et al., 2018), but only in situations of low WFC. However, when the conflict intensifies, both coping strategies have pervasive effects by increasing emotional exhaustion. These results confirm that behavioural or direct coping is beneficial only for men while indirect action coping is not beneficial for women (González-Morales et al., 2010). Many explanations could be proposed for these results. The effectiveness of a coping strategy depends on whether it is in line with a person's gender ideology (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007) or whether it is possible to control the situation (De Rijk et al., 1998). Problem-focused coping has been found to work only when there is success in controlling effectively potential stressors. The lack of control to introduce changes in the work situation could also be seen as a trigger of negative effects of coping, especially for women. Moreover, women use to report more intense emotions than men and usually feel more responsible for maintaining social harmony (Zhou et al., 2018), which could have an influence on the effectiveness of a coping mechanism for them.

At couple level, the results indicate that couples who use more behavioural coping show less emotional exhaustion, and even in situations of high conflict scores on emotional exhaustion are lower than those who get less behavioural coping.

In summary, splitting by gender offers interesting results in the study of the conflict between work and family domains and the role of coping strategies. Although it is clear that work-family conflict is related to burnout and its components (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization), we find gender differences. Among coping strategies, only behavioural coping is positive and reduces the levels of depersonalization for men. For women, neither of the actions is fully effective and encounters pervasive effects by contributing to the increase of burnout levels, especially in high work-family conflict scenarios. Nonetheless, when partners share the levels of conflict and coping strategies, they turn effective and reduce emotional exhaustion.

We believe our results contribute to highlighting the importance

of looking at work-family conflict differentiating by direction of the conflict and sex. Doing that allows us to identify relations that otherwise would be hidden on the aggregate, and that are key to fully understanding the role of coping as a moderator of work-family conflict. Behavioral coping is helpful in reducing burnout triggered by work-family conflict, but we only find that for men. For women, neither behavioral nor emotional coping appears of utility; in fact, both coping strategies increase burnout in situations of risen conflict. In line with the theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), coping is positive if there exist alternatives, this is, something to be done to ameliorate or scape the situation. If that is not the case, the effort of coping can even increase the conflict. This is exactly what we find for female workers, whose labor situation is worse on average than that of men. This pervasive outcome of coping appeared also, at a minor scale, when the analysis was carried out at couple level, which could be explained by contagious processes (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000) in a couple.

From an applied perspective, this study has important practical implications. Firstly, both companies and workers should be aware of differential effects in order take action to enhance positive effects and, most importantly, neutralize negative effects. Thus, although more evidence is still needed, behavioural coping should be encouraged in men and the necessary organizational measures should be adopted so that women can also take advantage of its benefits. The promotion of gender-specific mentoring and support programs could be relevant policies to consider for that matter.

This study also has some limitations that should be mentioned. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit to establish a causal link between work-family conflict and burnout. It is also possible that burnout increases the perception of work-family conflict (in two directions), so that longitudinal studies should be carried out (Rubio et al., 2015). Multi-level studies would also need to be developed to prove cross-sectional relationships (Zhou et al., 2018). Other antecedents of burnout as job and family involvement (Kuo et al., 2018), social support (Blanch & Aluja, 2012), or resilience (Meseguer-de-Pedro et al., 2019) should also be introduced in future studies. In addition, positive aspects of work-family interface should be considered (De Simone et al., 2018). Finally, only using self-reported measures could increase common variance due to the evaluation method. Despite these limitations, the strength of this study relies on its gender and couple approach to the relation between work-family conflict, coping strategies, and burnout.

The different demands faced by men and women, the worst employment situation of women, and the major understanding of the role of coping mechanisms reinforce a gender perspective that analyses the links between work and family spheres and pursues to improve the psychological health of employees and their partners.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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