Abstract (127 words)

Although many studies that examine work-family conflict issues, empirical results on the impact of social policy on individual’s work-family conflict are still inconclusive. In addition, the different impacts of family policies on the work-family conflict levels for men and women have not yet been examined in depth. This paper examines the impact of family policy on work-family conflict of men and women using data from 2007 across 28 European countries. Results show that family policies do impact work-family conflict of both men and women, but this is mostly done indirectly through the impact social policy has on job demands and resources of individuals. This is especially true for women, where when job demands and resources are taken into account, we do not observe large differences across countries.
**Introduction**

As work and family structures change, one key problem individuals face today and perhaps even more so in the future is balancing work with family responsibilities. Unlike previous generations where tasks were more strictly divided, many individuals face dual burdens of on one hand family and household responsibilities and on the other gainful employment. Individuals are thus likely to face work-family conflict from the pressing demands of both work and family life. It is crucial to examine the determinants of these conflicts, since the failure to do so can lead to problems for individuals in terms of mental and physical health impairment, or lead them to exit the labour force entirely which has consequences for the companies and societies as well (see S. E. Anderson et al., 2002; Frone et al., 1992; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Due to this importance, increasing number of studies examine why and where, in which country and context individuals are more prone to feel work-family conflict (for an overview see Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011). However, the results on the impact of social policy on individual’s work-family conflict are still inconclusive.

Most studies hypothesize a significant impact of social policy on individuals’ work-family conflicts, due to the fact that policies help individuals cope with the pressing family demands. Empirical results on the other hand are mixed. Some do find a positive impact (Crompton, 2006; Stier et al., 2012) but others suggest that policies have little or no effect on individuals’ perceived work-family conflicts (Cousins & Tang, 2004; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe et al., 2006), especially when other context factors are taken into account (Edlund, 2007; Steiber, 2009). However, most study limit their analysis to the direct impact of family policies on work-family conflict without taking into account the complexity of the impact family policies can have through other mediating factors, such as job and employment characteristics.
In addition, one aspect that is still lacking in the literature is the gender differences found in work-family conflict and how national contexts and various work characteristics impact men and women differently. In the gender role theory, the roles given to men and women through societal norms will impact how one perceives work-family conflict (Gutek et al., 1991). Following this logic, it is highly likely that the factors contributing to women’s work-family conflict will differ from that of men’s. Likewise, various policies that provide resources both at the national and company level to address work-life balance issues may also impact men and women differently. This is due to the fact that women still play a larger role in providing care and household tasks and thus may benefit from the support more than men (Grönlund & Öun, 2010; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). Despite the numerous empirical studies on work-family conflict, there is a dearth of comparative studies that focus on the issue of gender differences.

Another limitation to the previous studies of work-family conflict is that most limit their analysis to a small number of countries, which makes it difficult to compare the impact across different contexts. Moreover, most empirical studies are based on data from the early 2000s if not earlier. Given that there have been many changes during the past years in the area of family policies, a large cross-national comparison using recent data is necessary to examine and explain the variance across countries. In sum, empirical research using large number of country cases based on recent data, to disentangle the relationship between social policy and work-family conflict and the different impact this may have between men and women is necessary to enhance our understanding of the impact of policies on work-life balance.

This study aims to fill this void, by examining and explaining the cross-national variance in the work-family conflict of individuals across Europe, with a special emphasis on the role of institutional contexts and how these contexts may impact men and women.
differently. This relationship is modelled through the use of multi-level modelling techniques, and cross-national European data sets for 28 countries, that is, EU 27 and Norway. Two different conflict types are examined; time-based work and family responsibility conflict, and strain-based work and household task conflict.

In the next section, the theories behind work-family conflict are examined. In this section, I also elaborate on some of the crucial country level context factors that may explain work-life conflict of individuals, and how there may be differences for men and women. In the third section, the data and method of analysis is explained. The fourth section includes the analysis outcomes and the fifth some conclusions and policy implications.

Theory

**Work-family conflict**

Greenhaus and Beutel (1985), using the role conflict theory of Kahn et al. (1964) define work-family conflict as a conflict coming from the opposing pressures of work roles and family roles that are mutually incompatible in some respects. More specifically a work-family conflict occurs when the participation in a work role inhibits the participation in a family role (work-to-family interference), or when family roles inhibit performance at work (family-to-work interference) (Duxbury et al., 1994; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Of the two types, I focus on the former, thus the tension felt when work interferes with family or other household roles. Greenhaus and Beutel (1985:78) distinguish three forms of work-family conflict. They are time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict is when time spent on one role makes it difficult to address the other role. This can be due to the physical difficulty to comply to another role, pure lack of time, or when the pressures preoccupy the individual making it difficult to meet the demands of another role. Long working hours, frequent over time, shift work, and lack of flexibility over
one’s work schedule are some of the sources of this conflict. Strain-based conflict is when the stress coming from one role produces both physical and mental strain symptoms – such as fatigue, anxiety – and affects the performance of another role. Lastly, behaviour-based conflict occurs when behavioural habits and role expectations from one domain hinders role performance in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Michel, et al., 2011). In this paper I focus on the former two types of work-family conflict. To sum up, this study examines time-based and strain-based work-to-home interference.

Demands and resource model

As can be seen in the definition, many studies that deal with work-family conflicts make use of the demands and resources approach. Voydanoff (2005) defines demands and resources as follows,

“Demands are structural or psychological claims associated with role requirements, expectations, and norms to which individuals must respond or adapt by exerting physical or mental effort. Resources are structural or psychological assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources.”

(Voydanoff, 2005: 708)

In work-family conflicts the most important demands and resources come from the job and the family domain. Job demands are “physical, psychosocial, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or mental effort and are, therefore, associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Geurts, 2004: 348). Job resources on the other hand, are aspects of the job that may be functional in meeting task requirements (i.e., job demands) and may thus reduce the associated costs - and at the same time stimulate personal growth and development (see also Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Geurts, 2004: 348).
Job demands include interpersonal conflicts, job noxiousness, job insecurity, boring work, job pressures – such as demanding work or tight deadlines, and long work hours. Job resources on the other hand, are schedule control, control over pace of work, job authority, job autonomy, decision-making latitude, job skill, social support and personal earnings (Schieman et al., 2009). As we can see from the list of possible demands and resources, it is not only characteristics at the individual level, but also firm and country level policies/characteristics that can be important in buffering or worsening work-family conflict. The availability of various family policies at the firm or country level, including leave provisions, flexible working time schemes, and a supportive working culture, may buffer some of the work-family conflict (Major et al., 2002; Steiber, 2009; Stier, et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2004). In this paper I use the information on whether or not the individual is employed in the public sector to account for the firm level policy involvement. Since the public sector has been shown to be better in providing family policies (Evans, 2001; Plantenga & Remery, 2005), individuals employed in the public sector will be more likely to have greater job resources. National policies will be dealt in the latter part of this paper.

**Family structure and life course**

Similar to the job demands and resources, family structures also changes one’s family or household demands and resources. Thus, presence of a child and spouse, and spouse’s employment status change the dynamics of how individuals perceive their work-family conflict, due to the changes in the demands and the resources stemming from these family members (Duxbury, et al., 1994; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; Winslow, 2005). Presence of a child or other family members that need care may increase family demands. Time and financial demands that stem from household tasks and family responsibilities can be shared when one has a partner or when there is another adult living in the household. However, the presence of partners or other family members may increase family demand due to the time
and energy needed to maintain the relationship. Thus, I include family structure variables in
the model to take household demands and resources into account. I do not however include
the actual hours an individual spends on care and housework because this may be a result of
the perceived work-family conflict rather than the antecedent (also see Schieman, et al., 2009;
Steiber, 2009; Voydanoff, 2005).

**Other Individual level variables**

Other than household composition and job characteristics, there are several variables that
should be controlled for when examining work-family conflicts. For example, age, education
level, household income or income security, and migrant status have been shown to impact
work-family conflict (Nomaguchi, 2009; Steiber, 2009; Winslow, 2005). In addition, an
individual’s health status can also be a resource or a demand that could impact how they
perceive their work-family conflict, thus is also included.

**Work-family conflict and gender roles**

In terms of the differences between men and women in work-family conflict, Gutek et al.
(1991) provide a framework of rational view versus gender role explanations. In the rational
view approach, the probability an individual will perceive work-family conflict is linearly
explained by the number of hours the individual spends in paid and unpaid work, e.g.,
household and family tasks. Using this approach, both men and women would face the same
amount of conflict given that they have similar job and household demands, and similar
resources to address these demands. In addition, it could be expected that the impact of the
various country contexts will be same for both men and women. Competing with this
hypothesis is the gender role explanation. Gender role orientation has been defined as “the
degree to which one identifies with the traditional conceptions (i.e., expectations) of his or
her gender role” (Livingston & Judge, 2008: 208). In the gender role perspective, gender and
the roles individuals adhere to not only impacts the number of hours spent at the respective
role of family in moderating work-family conflict

In terms of job demands, previous research (Gallie & Russell, 2009; Steiber, 2009) has shown that job demands impact both men and women similarly. However, some argue that household demands impact women much more (Steiber, 2009; van der Lippe, et al., 2006), although others argue that job demands are more important (Gallie & Russell, 2009; Steiber, 2009). However, it seems that there are differences in the impact of the job demands. Steiber (2009) and Stier et al. (2012) show how working hours and unusual hours (evenings and weekend work) impact women more than men. Gallie and Russell (2009) show how having taken into account working hours and work intensity, the cross-national variance for women across the seven countries under investigation is reduced greatly, whereas for men a distinct variance still remains. Examining these empirical results, we can expect that women may be impacted more by job demands especially by working hours, and this may be the driving source of the cross-national variation in work-family conflict for women.

Role of social policy in explaining work-family conflict for men and women

In addition to individual level and firm level characteristics, there are various national level contextual factors that may impact the degree to which individuals perceive work-family conflict. Of the various context factors, perhaps the most important is the support provided to
ease the demands of the household. Support provided at the country and company level to address the pressing need for care and household tasks aim to provide resources to ease the demands individuals face, thus decreasing their work-family conflict. Given that most of the household tasks and care responsibilities still fall on women (Burchell et al., 2007; Davis & Greenstein, 2004), women’s choices and possibilities and their work-family conflict should be more dependent on the policies provided (Grönlund & Öun, 2010; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). Thus, we could expect that if there is a decrease in work-family conflict due to generous family and childcare policies, it would be mostly evident among women. This would especially be the case in countries where women are expected to take prime responsibility in care and household tasks, thus the male-bread winner model countries.

Although there have been many studies that suggest that national level factors impact individuals’ work-family conflicts (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; also seeMcGinnity & Whelan, 2009; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe, et al., 2006), cross-national studies that examine the impact of contexts are still lacking. Most studies on work-family conflict are based on data gathered from one country (e.g. Bakker & Geurts, 2004; Schieman & Glavin, 2008; Schieman, et al.; Voydanoff, 2004; Winslow, 2005). Others(e.g. Cousins & Tang, 2004; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; Gallie & Russell, 2009; Scherer & Steiber, 2007; Schieman, et al., 2009; Scott & Plagnol, 2012; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006; van der Lippe, et al., 2006) only examine a small number of countries, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly which national context variable explains the cross-national variance of work-family conflict as well as to generalize the findings. Only few studies have systematically examined the impact of social policies systematically using large number of countries (e.g. Stier, et al., 2012), whilst controlling for other factors (e.g. Chung, 2011; Edlund, 2007; Steiber, 2009).

In addition, when examining the results of the studies that look at the impact of social policy on individuals’ work-family conflicts, the results are still inconclusive. While some
studies come to the conclusion that extensive welfare states (i.e., the Nordic countries) do facilitate a better work–family balance (Chung, 2011; Crompton, 2006; Stier, et al., 2012), other studies show that individuals, especially women in the more egalitarian and family friendly Nordic countries report the highest levels of work–family conflict (e.g. Gallie & Russell, 2009; Grönlund & Öun, 2010; Strandh & Nordenmark, 2006). Gallie and Russell (2009) note that although generous family policies seem to decrease work-family conflict of men, this is not necessarily the case for women. Steiber (2009) similarly finds that in countries with public childcare provisions for 0-3 year olds, women seem to have higher perceived work-family conflict when other country characteristics – such as GDP per capita, unemployment rates and emancipation pressure/gender norms - as well as individual level characteristics are taken into account. However, this impact of policy is not seen for men, where policies do not seem to make any impact. Although Stier et al. (2012) found that generous maternity leaves decrease women’s work-family conflict, and extensive 0-3 year old childcare coverage decrease men’s work-family conflict, they do not control for other factors as done in the study of Steiber. Edlund (2007) found no significant impact of family policies, measured as a composite indicator, for both men and women.

The reasons behind the non-significant impact of social policies, as well as its negative impact have also varied amongst scholars. Strandh and Nordenmark (2006) and van der Lippe et al. (2006) use these results to argue that there is only weak empirical evidence for family policy context impacts, and to support the gender culture hypothesis – i.e., gender cultures have stronger impact compared to national policies when explaining the cross-national variance in work-family conflict. Grönlund and Öun (2010) argue that although in the countries with higher welfare state support women may indeed experience role conflict or work-family conflict, these women will also experience role expansion which may lead to overall higher life-satisfaction. Scherer and Steiber (2007) argue that this odd cross-national
variances can be attributed to sample selection effects, suggesting that work-family conflict is particularly acute in countries where most women are employed and not just those who find it particularly easy to combine work and family responsibilities. However, even in their study they do not provide any empirical evidence to disentangle this relationship. In other words, we still need some clarification on how exactly social policies impact work-family conflict of individuals directly and indirectly.

**Direct and indirect impacts of family policies**

One of the reasons why we need to disentangle the relationship between social policy and work-family conflict is due to the fact that social policy may have direct but also indirect impacts on one’s work-family conflict. From previous studies we know that countries with general family policies are those where women, especially mothers are more likely to work and continue to work (Gornick et al., 1997; Stier et al., 2001). From this, we can infer that countries with better family policies will be those with a larger population in the labour market, and thus a larger population which has the potential to be in work-family conflict, compared to countries with low support. Similarly, as noted by Scherer and Steiber (2007), in countries with low support, those – especially women - who can handle the work-family conflict may be working.

Second, I expect countries with better family policies to be the ones where there are generally more support at the company levels as well (Chung, 2009; Chung et al., 2007), though the changes in corporate or working culture. This can entail that there may be indirect effects of family policies on work-family conflict of individuals through changes in the working conditions. Third, although gender norms in society may impact how family policies are formed, social policy may also be linked to changes in individual’s preferences in work and care. Generous family friendly policies, or more specially paternity leave, may affect the way men take part in childcare and housework by enabling fathers to take responsibility for
childcare in the longer run after the leave ends (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Hook, 2006; Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2007). This may decrease the work-family conflict for women, for they can share the responsibility for childcare, but may increase conflict for men if their working conditions do not change while their preference to be involved in the household increases. However, if their preference for a less demanding work life can be met, this could potentially decrease work-family conflicts for men as well. On the other hand, when women are able to take part in the labour market through generous family policies, this may ease the responsibility of income generation for men which may also ease one work-family conflict – perhaps through changing one’s working patterns.

**Differing impact of different policies**

Another aspect not examined in depth in most studies is the different impact of varying social policies on one’s work-family conflict. As mentioned in the previous section, various (indirect) impact of social policy may differ depending on the policy in question, which could also depend on the gender of the individual. Public childcare provision can provide direct relief from one’s childcare demands, by providing services that can be used to alternate from one’s own responsibility. Maternity leave and paternity leave provides leaves for working parents, however, they do not necessarily directly relieve one’s childcare demand once one is working. They can provide an alternative to childcare by enabling parents to stay at home, with or without pay, during the most care intensive months of a child’s development. However, this would entail that these parents would not be included as our sample, which are those who are currently in paid employment-working in the past week.

**Country level controls**

Based on previous studies that examine work-family conflict cross-nationally (Chung, 2011; Steiber, 2009), I also include GDP per capita, gender norms, and female labour participation
index, to control for wealth of the country and their respective resources, and general labour market participation level of women.

**Data and Methods**

**EQLS**

The European Quality of Life Survey 2007 is chosen for this study for several reasons. First, it includes a good selection of indicators in one data set. It has perception indicators measuring tensions between work and life, as well as background indicators to measure individuals’ relevant characteristics, especially those on job demand and resource variables, which are not readily available in other data sets. Second, it covers a large number of countries, 27 EU member states plus four EU candidate and other European countries, namely, Norway, Turkey, Macedonia, and Croatia. Third, the data is relatively recent, gathered during 2007. The number of cases per country is on average 1000 cases, however, it is 1500 for larger countries such as France, Italy, Poland and the UK, 2000 for Germany and Turkey. The survey method was face to face survey, and the response rate was on average 58% (for more details see R. Anderson et al., 2009). In this paper, we focus on the EU-27 countries and Norway, due to the lack of comparability and data for the other countries.

**Dependent Variables**

The following questions were used to measure individual’s perceived tension between work and life/family responsibilities. The respondents were asked: “How often has each of the following happened to you during the last year?” “I have come home from work too tired to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.” “It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on the job.” The answers are measured on a five-point scale: never / less often or rarely / several times a year / several
times a month/several times a week. The first measures the frequency to which the individual was not able to take up household tasks due to the strain felt at work. This will be referred to as strain-based work-household task conflict in this paper. The second measures the degree to which individuals were unable to respond to family responsibilities due to the demand for time at work. This will be referred to time-based work-family responsibility conflict. Note that these questions have only been asked to persons who are or have been employed or self-employed, so those who are or have not been employed are excluded from the data. I also exclude those who are above the pension age, that is 65 or above, and only include those who have answered to both strain- and time-conflict questions from the survey. This leaves us with 15,205 cases, 7319 men and 7886 women.

**Independent variables**

**National level variables**

To measure national institutions designed to relieve individuals’ work-family conflicts may impact the gender gaps found across countries, one can look at various qualitative information on government policies for families. However, for a large cross-national study, this task can become complicated because there are many policies that fall under the heading of family policies and a quantified index representing all aspects across Europe has yet been developed. As an alternative, public expenditure on family policy as a percentage of GDP can be used. This will indicate the general emphasis a country puts on providing family policies for its citizens. Since childcare coverage is one of the most important factors in relieving parents of their care tasks, I also include information on childcare coverage; the percentage of children in public childcare for children under the compulsory school age, which is in most countries six. Both data are from 2007. Third, I examine the impact of duration and generosity of maternity leave and paternity leave. The last two data are from Multilinks and are for 2009.
To control for gender norms, I use information from the European Values Study for the year 2008. Given that the different gender norm questions are not necessarily highly correlated and form different dimensions, combining different aspects would distort the impact of norms (Chung & Schober, 2012). Thus, a composite indicator which combines different gender dimensions is not used in this paper. In addition, since the core focus is on work-to-home interference, the norms concerning the roles of men and women in household tasks are of importance in this paper. Thus I use the question “Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children” (V166). Individuals could answer in a four point scale from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, and the variable is coded so higher scores represent gender egalitarian norms. Weighted country averages are used so different groups of the population is proportionately represented.

To control for wealth of the country, GDP per capita five year average from 2003 to 2007 is used which is measured in 10,000 euros. To control for the extent to which women take part in the labour market, female employment rate of 2007 and average female working hours for 2007 are used. All data with the exception of gender norms are from EUROSTAT and is for the year 2007, or the closest year available. All national variables have been standardized to allow for comparison.

**Job characteristics**

To account for job demands and resources I include several job quality characteristics into the analysis such as, working hours, job insecurity (‘How likely do you think it is that you might lose your job in the next 6 months?’), demanding work (‘My work is too demanding and stressful’), tight deadlines (‘I constantly work to tight deadlines’), dull work (‘My work is dull and boring’), and dangerous work (‘I work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions’). Working hours are assessed as the number of hours the respondent works in a job, including paid and unpaid overtime, plus hours worked in an additional job or agriculture, if applicable, to make
five categories, that is, 1-20 hours, 21-30 hours, 31-40 hours, 41-50 hours, and more than 50 hours per week. Working hours are used as a scale in the model centered at 31-40 hours. Several job resource factors are also included in the survey and chosen for analysis, such as: job autonomy (‘I have a great deal of influence in deciding how to do my work’), career opportunities (‘My job offers good prospects for career advancements’), and pay (‘My job is well-paid’). All questions were answered on a five-point scale, ranging from ‘very unlikely’ to ‘very likely’ for the job insecurity questions, and ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ for all other questions. The answers questions are made into dichotomous variables, where the individuals who responded with ‘very likely’ and ‘quite likely’, or ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ are considered to be those facing these demands or having resources.

**Household composition**

Presence of a child and spouse, and spouse’s employment status change the dynamics of how individuals perceive their work-family conflict, due to the changes in the demands and the resources stemming from these family members. Thus the model control for various household composition variables; whether or not one has a partner, whether the partner is currently employed or self-employed, presence of child, the presence of a pre-school child (below six) in the household, and lastly, the existence of an adult other than a partner in the household under the age of 65. In this paper, the reference group are those who have a partner in paid employment, a child younger than six, and do not live with another adult in the household.

**Individual level control variables**

In this paper, age is examined in categories representing different stages of one’s life; i.e., 18-24, 25-35, 36-49, 50-64. Education level is measured in three categories of primary, secondary and tertiary education. We also include migrant status, measured by whether the respondent was been born outside of the country of residence. Household income is measured
through subjective income insecurity of the household (‘Thinking of your household’s total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet?’). Those who answered that the household is only able to make ends meet ‘with difficulty’ or ‘with great difficulty’ can be considered as having an insecure income. An individual’s health status is measured by the question ‘In general, would you say your health is…’ with those who have answered ‘bad’ and ‘very bad’ as being in bad health. A summary of the sets of individual level and national level variables is provided in the Appendix. Data source can be found next to the variable.

**Modelling strategies**

To examine the impact of both national policies and individual characteristics on work-family conflict, two-level random intercept multi-level regression models are used. The dependent variable is a scale to indicate an individual’s work-family conflict level, distinguished between time-based work-household task conflicts and time-based work-family responsibility conflicts. Multi-level modelling takes contextual effects into account and individuals are considered to be nested in countries (Hox, 2002), and is used when it is presumed that the individuals are subject to the influences of groupings (Rasbash et al., 2009; also see Teachman & Crowder, 2002), in this case countries. In other words, through the use of a multi-level model we are presuming or testing to see whether individuals experience work-family conflict differently depending on which country they live in, even when all other factors, such as job demands and resources have been controlled for. In other words, we presume that there are not only individual level characteristics but also country level characteristics that can affect work-family conflict of individuals in Europe. Using this model, we can include both individual level variables and national level variables at the same time, to explain for variance of WFC found both within countries and between countries.

In this paper, different strategies are applied to examine the impact of social policies on work-family conflict. First, I examine the impact of the four social policies on work-
family conflict, without taking other factors into account. This will allow me to examine which of the four policies is most dominant in explaining the cross-national variance of work-family conflict for our countries. Second, I test the impact, or the changes in the impact of the strongest family policy institution variable as well as the mediating impact of individual and context variables by gradually add blocks of potentially relevant explanatory variables. Individual level variables are included in three blocks; the demographic variables, job resources variables and lastly the job demands variables. Third, I include other country level variables also in blocks to see how the impact of national policies changes. I model men and women separately to see if and how the impacts of these variables differ between the two genders. The software package used for the analysis is STATA 12.0, using the xtmixed function with maximum likelihood estimations.

**Analysis outcome**

**Descriptive(bi-variate)**

In most European countries individuals experience time-based work-family responsibility conflict several times a year or less often on average, and experience strain-based work-household task conflict several times a month to several times a year. There is considerable cross-country variation. In the case of work-family responsibility conflict, the French have the lowest average score with 2.19, and the Greeks with the highest with 3.14. For that of the work-household task conflict, this ranges from 2.85 in Belgium to again 3.80 in Greece. There are no clear patterns, but we can see that the Nordic countries are faring rather well in terms of relieving their workers from work-family conflicts, and the Southern and Eastern European countries are those where individuals are more exposed to conflict. As Figure 1 shows there are large cross-national variances in the gender gap in the various types of work-family conflict. For work-family responsibility conflict, men in Czech Republic and Italy
more frequently feel conflict than women when other factors are not taken into account. Largest gaps where women feel more conflict than men can be found in Portugal and Belgium. In countries such as Czech Republic and Romania, men perceive strain-based work-household task conflict more frequently, although not statistically significant. On the other hand in Cyprus, Portugal and somewhat even Sweden women experience this conflict much more frequently than men. Another thing to note is that the variance across countries in work-household task conflict is larger than work-family responsibility conflict, and the variance across countries for men is slightly larger than that for women. However, we must remember that these gender gaps do not take into account the differences in the job characteristics between men and women, which may change the relationship drastically.

*Figure 1 about here...*

**Multi-variate analyses**

*Social policy and work-family conflict*

Before testing the impact of social policy on work-family conflict, I’ve compared the impact of the four social policies to test their relative importance- since we cannot include all into the model due to problems with degrees of freedom. This comparison is done two ways. The social policy variables were first included individually in the model, and then were included in combination. Note that Bulgaria is excluded when maternity leave is tested – due to its outlier position, and Cyprus is excluded when paternity leave is tested due to lack of data. From these tests, we find that paternity leave is insignificant in explaining any type of work-family conflict for both men and women. Generous maternity leave in its own seems to significantly increase men’s work-family responsibility conflict, although it doesn’t seem to have any significant impact on women’s work-family conflict. It is unclear exactly why this
would be the case – given that in the previous section we expected maternity pay to decrease mother’s work-family conflict. However, when other social policy variables are included, it becomes insignificant. Family policy expenditure significantly decreases one’s work-household task and work-family responsibility conflicts when included separately in the model. However, it is highly correlated to childcare coverage since childcare provision is one of the largest parts of family policy expenditure. When both variables are included in the model, childcare coverage is more influential and family policy expenditure loses its significance. Childcare coverage on the other hand, seem to significantly decrease one’s work-family conflict levels for both men and women, and this impact holds true even when other social policy variables are included in the model. For this reason, we focus on childcare coverage rates. In addition, theoretically it seems to be the most interesting and directly impacting of social policy variables (see section 2 for more detail).

**Childcare coverage and work-family conflict**

In this section, I examine the changes in the impact of family policies when other variables are included in the model. First, I find that when no other variables are included in the model, supportive family policies – namely childcare coverage – help relieve time and strain based work-family conflict for both men and women (see table 1 and 2). This impact decreases substantially when job demands are included in the model, and this is especially true for women. For women, the impact of childcare coverage decreases to almost a third of the impact when job demands are included in the model for both work-household task conflict and work-family responsibility conflict (see 2-3 and 2-4, and 4-3 and 4-4). In the case of men, although the inclusion of job demands in the model decreases the relevance of childcare coverage in explaining the cross-national variance of work-family conflict, the impact is not as strong and remains significant in the case of work-family responsibility conflict (see 1-3 and 1-4, 3-3 and 3-4). Childcare coverage does seem to provide a significant impact in
decreasing the work-family responsibility conflict of men even when job demands and working hours are included, and is found to be the strongest context level predictor.

**Job demands and work-family conflict**

Job demands are by far the most important determinant of work-family conflict for men and women for both work-household task and work-family responsibility conflicts (see table 3). The inclusion of job demands explains about a third of the cross-national variance of work-family conflict for men; 36% for work-household task conflict and 27% for work-family responsibility conflict. For women, this goes up to 45% for both types of conflicts. When job resources and demographic characteristics are also taken into account, 51% of the cross-national variance for women’s work-household task conflict and 62% of work-family responsibility conflict is explained through the inclusion of these variables (see table 3). This entails that for women most of the cross-national variance can be attributed to the different job demand patterns of the women in the sample across the 28 countries under investigation. Thus, when job demands, and other individual characteristics, are controlled for, the differences across countries disappear to a great extent and women with similar individual level characteristics seem to perceive similar levels of work-family conflict regardless of the country contexts they are in. Because men have similar job demands, resources and somewhat demographic characteristics across the countries, this decrease in variance is not as distinct.

**Female working patterns and work-family conflict**

The inclusion of female working patterns, i.e., female employment rate and national average working hours seem to decrease the strength of childcare coverage on work-family conflict. However, the impact of female employment patterns seems to be actually be on the individual level – thus when individual’s working hours are included in the model, national average working hours do not have a significant impact. In other words, working hours and
work-family conflict is more of an individual level relationship rather than the working hour culture impacting one’s conflict levels.

*Exploration of the mediating role of job demands*

As mentioned, job demands are perhaps the most important factor in explaining the differences in work-family conflict across individuals and countries. We can identify the mediating role of job demands through two aspects. First, when job demands are included in the model, family policies – measured here as childcare coverage rates- lose its impacts on work-family conflict substantially. Second, the increased variance across countries when job demands are included in the model where context factors were already in place show that some sort of correlation between the variables.

From previous studies (see section2), we already know that generous family policies and support from the welfare state increase labour market participation of women. Looking at our data, it is clear that for our 28 countries wider childcare coverage increases women’s labour market participation (see figure2). However, unlike some previous studies (e.g. Gallie & Russell, 2009) it also seems that the average working hours of women is lower in countries where extensive childcare coverage is provided (figure2). In other words, generous family policies allow more women to take part in the labour market but at reduced working hours. On the other hand, in countries where there is not much support from the state in terms of childcare, when women do take part in the labour market they work longer hours, but drop out probably when there are high demands from the households. This is somewhat similar to what has been suggested in the study of Scherer and Steiber (2007), where it was suggested that in certain countries women only participate in the labour market when they can endure the work-family conflict. The difference in the result between this study and other previous studies that examine the relationship between family policies and working hours would most likely to do with the selection of countries under investigation. Similar patterns in
employment rate and working hours can be seen for men as well, but the variance for both employment rate and working hours for men is not as stark as that for women. From this we can infer that in countries where generous family policies are in place, both men and women work but at reduced hours. This perhaps allows both men and women to take a more active part in both income generation and household/care tasks, relieving both parties from taking sole responsibility of one aspect (see Scott & Plagnol, 2012), which then reduces their work-family conflict for both men and women.

*Figure 2 here...*

In addition, it seems that countries with extensive family policies are also those where there are less job demands and more job resources. Looking at the correlation between childcare coverage and other job characteristic variables, it seem that countries with extensive childcare coverage are also those where individuals are less likely to work in insecure, demanding, dull and dangerous jobs and more likely to work in jobs that provide better career chance, well paid and with more job autonomy (See table 4). The decreased likelihood of having jobs with more demands is especially evident for women, and the increased likelihood of having jobs with better resources is especially true for men. In other words, countries with more generous family policies seem to be those where the working conditions are generally better. This confirms somewhat the result found in a previous study on family policies on company provision of working time flexibility arrangements, where countries with generous family policies were those where companies used more employee-friendly working time practices (Chung, 2009; Chung, et al., 2007). This could be due to the changes in working cultures due to family policies and national level efforts to facilitate work-life balance issues of individuals. We can also expect a reverse causality, where family policies have been developed in countries where there are already good working cultures in place at the company level.


**Conclusion & Discussion**

In this paper, I examined the diverse impact of social policies on work-family conflict distinguishing those for men and for women. First, I find that family policies may have different impact depending on the policy type. Family expenditure does not seem to explain the cross-national variance of work-family conflict, while generous maternity leaves seem to increase it for men, and childcare coverage seem to decrease it significantly – especially for men. This shows us that we should not generalise the impact of social policies, but to theorize and test the impact of different policies separately when examining issue surrounding work-life balance.

Second, social policy – or more specifically generous childcare coverage- does seem to decrease work-family conflict of individuals. However, much of this impact is mediated through the impact childcare policies have on the employment rate and working hours, as well as other job characteristics of individuals as depicted in Figure 4. This explains why previous studies come to rather conflicting conclusions on the impact of social policies on work-family conflict. Studies that found no impact or a negative impact of social policies most likely had problems in the measurements of policies, the types of policies examined, or by neglecting the mediating roles of job characteristics of the individuals in the sample. The studies that found positive impacts of social policies did not include working hours or other job characteristics in the model.

To sum up, from this study we can infer that in countries where generous childcare is provided, both parents are likely to work, but work shorter hours. This allows for a better work-life balance and lower work-family conflict, especially work-family responsibility conflict for both men and women. In addition, I find that much of the cross-national variance
in work-family conflict is due to the differences in the job characteristics of individuals in each country, especially for women. In other words, the differences in work-family conflict between women are mostly due to differences in job demands and resources, which again are impacted by social policy structures. Once these characteristics are taken into account, women across women are similar in the way they perceive work-family conflict.

There are some aspects that need to be examined further. I found that there is a direct impact of childcare policies for men’s work-family conflict, even when job characteristics are taken into account. Wider childcare coverage significantly decreases the work-family conflict of men directly, unlike the case for women. Why is this the case? It could be due to the positive impact of childcare coverage has in increasing in their employment chances of mothers. The participation of women in the labour market provides families with an extra source of income, which relieves men of the stress of being the sole-breadwinner (see Scott & Plagnol, 2012). This relief could provide men with a sense of a better work-life balance.

It could also be due to the issue of definition of work-family responsibility conflict. For men, family responsibility could predominantly entail childcare. On the other hand, women may have a wider range of responsibilities— including care of elderly parents and keeping a close relationship with other family members. Similarly, even if we only consider childcare, men may believe that they have responsibility for a certain amount of childcare – measured more in terms of hours, whereas for mothers, when given the opportunity, have a more multi-dimensional perspective of care where even once the core care hours are covered, they spend time tending to other care related tasks. Lastly, it could also because for women even if childcare is provided, that doesn’t relieve your guilt about not being with your children. Thus, for women, although public policies enable women to work, when women work a certain number of hours – regardless of what enabled it – women will feel conflict between work and family. These issues could only be addressed through a more qualitative
approach to this question, which could be fruitful in providing further support for the findings found in this study.

References


Figure 1. Cross-national variance of work-family responsibility, work-household task conflict across 28 European countries for men and women sorted by the average work-family conflict

Note: National average frequencies in perceived difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities due to hours at work and difficulties fulfilling household tasks due to strain from work
(5=several times a week, 4=several times a month, 3=several times a year, 2=less often or rarely, 1=never)
N respondents (level 1) = 15,205, N countries (level 2) = 28
Table 1. Explaining work-household task conflict of men and women across 28 European countries

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<th>WOMEN</th>
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<td>0.032</td>
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(MEN) N level 1 = 6491, N level 2 = 28 (WOMEN) N level 1 = 7063, N level 2 = 28

** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001, = p < 0.05, =p <0.07, = p=0.106

$R^2$ level 2 calculated from the empty model, where no predictors are included in the model

All context variables have been standardized
Table 2. Explaining work-family responsibility conflict of men and women across 28 European countries

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Log likelihood

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Log likelihood

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R² level 2 calculated from the empty model, where no predictors are included in the model
All context variables have been standardized
Table 3. Impact of individual level variables on work-family conflict of European men and women

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<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner work</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child</td>
<td>0.076*</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant(0-3)</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young child (3-6)</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra adult</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job autonomy</td>
<td>-0.108***</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.098**</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career chance</td>
<td>-0.131***</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.037***</td>
<td>0.033</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-paid</td>
<td>-0.134***</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.145***</td>
<td>0.032</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>-0.068*</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.012</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Job demands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>0.138**</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.138***</td>
<td>0.014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job insecurity</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.128**</td>
<td>0.049</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demanding work</td>
<td>0.508***</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.689***</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight deadlines</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dull work</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dangerous work</td>
<td>0.365***</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.319***</td>
<td>0.041</td>
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<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>2.233***</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>2.364***</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Var. country</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.035**</td>
<td>0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Var. individual</td>
<td>1.460***</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>1.354***</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2 level 2</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2 level 1</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N level 1 = 6491, N level 2 = 28 for men, N level 1 = 7063, N level 2 = 28 for women
*** = p < 0.001, ** = p < 0.01, * = p < 0.05, = p < 0.08
R^2 level 2 calculated from the empty model, where no predictors are included in the model
Table 4. Correlation between childcare coverage and job demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Care coverage</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working hours</td>
<td>Job insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>-0.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>-0.05**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4. The relationship between social policy and work-family conflict

The impacts of other norm dimensions have also been examined, but did not yield clear significant results.

All results not included in the paper can be provided upon request.