



Reducing work–family conflict through different sources of social support

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Abstract

The present study examines the relationship between four sources of social support (i.e., spouse, relatives and friends, supervisor, and colleagues) and time and strain-based work-to-family and family-to-work conflict among 444 dual-earners. Gender differences with respect to the relationship between social support and work–family conflict were examined as well. The relationship between the sources of support and work–family conflict was tested using multiple regression analyses. Results showed that women reported more strain-based work-to-family conflict than men. Social support from spouse and from colleagues were related to family-to-work conflict, while none of the sources of social support were related to work-to-family conflict. Social support from supervisor and from colleagues were related differently to work-to-family conflict (time-based) and family-to-work conflict (strain-based) for men than for women. We conclude that social support is especially important in reducing family-to-work conflict.

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1. Introduction

Today, many working people experience stress as they struggle with the difficulties of combining work and family responsibilities, i.e., they experience work–family conflict.

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Work–family conflict has negative consequences for women as well as men, leading to reduced well-being and impaired health (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997). Social support has been found helpful in reducing or managing stress associated with combining work and family life (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994). Most of these studies focused on the relationship between supervisory support or spousal support and work–family conflict. In the present study, we examine four sources of social support, stemming from the work and home domain, in relation to work–family conflict. As men and women are generally believed to differ with regard to perceived social support and work–family conflict, gender differences are studied as well.

1.1. Work–family conflict

Work–family conflict is “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77), such that participation in one domain becomes more difficult due to the demands of participation in the other domain and vice versa (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work–family conflict is considered to be bi-directional (Adams et al., 1996; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a), i.e., work can interfere with family (work-to-family conflict; WFC) and family can interfere with work (family-to-work conflict; FWC) (Allen et al., 2000). As work–family conflict originates from various conditions, different forms of conflict are distinguished (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Stephens & Sommer, 1996). The two forms most commonly distinguished are time-based and strain-based work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1994; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2003). Time-based conflict occurs when time devoted to a role in one domain (i.e. work or home domain) leaves too little time to participate in the other domain. Strain-based conflict occurs when strain experienced in one role domain interferes with effective performance of role behaviours in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

1.2. Work–family conflict and gender

Traditionally, the relationship between work and family roles is expected to differ for men and women. Pleck (1977) suggested that roles from the work domain are more likely to intrude into the family domain for men, whereas for women, roles from the family domain are more likely to interfere with the roles from the work domain. Accordingly, men are more likely to experience WFC and women are more likely to experience FWC.

Nowadays, with most men and women combining work and family responsibilities, one would expect both men and women to experience WFC and FWC to the same extent. However, only a few studies have supported this assumption i.e., reported no gender differences (Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle, 1997; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992b; Kinnunen, Geurts, & Mauno, 2004). Most studies have shown that men and women differ with respect to experienced WFC and FWC. Some found women to report more WFC than men (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994), whereas others found women to report both more WFC and FWC than men (Williams & Alliger, 1994). Still others, such as Behson (2002), in line with Pleck (1977), found women to report more FWC than men.

Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000), who distinguished between time and strain-based forms of WFC and FWC, found that women reported higher levels of both strain-based and time-based FWC, as well as higher levels of strain-based WFC. However, they

found no gender differences in time-based WFC. Wallace (1999) also found that women reported more strain-based WFC than men, and did not find gender differences for time-based WFC.

In sum, most studies support the existence of gender differences in experienced WFC and FWC. However, results are inconclusive, making it difficult to draw solid conclusions about differences in WFC and FWC between employed men and women.

In the present study, we follow Pleck's (1977) proposition and expect men to experience more WFC and women more FWC. In line with Carlson et al. (2000), we expect gender differences for the different forms of conflict, and hypothesize that:

H1: Men experience more time-based WFC (1a) and more strain-based WFC (1b) than women.

H2: Women experience more time-based FWC (2a) and more strain-based FWC (2b) than men.

1.3. *Work–family conflict and social support*

Social support involves the exchange of resources between at least two persons, with the aim of helping the person who receives the support. It can involve providing empathy, care, love and trust (emotional support), actual aid in time, money and energy (instrumental support), information relevant to self-evaluation (appraisal support), and advice, information and suggestions (informational support) (House, 1981, p. 39).

One may receive social support from work-related sources or non-work related sources (Adams et al., 1996). Men generally receive more social support from their spouse than women (Reevy & Maslach, 2001; Vaux, 1985), whereas women generally receive more social support from relatives and friends than men (Joplin, Nelson, & Quick, 1999; Olson & Shultz, 1994). With respect to social support received from the work domain some studies report no gender differences at all (cf. Geller & Hobfoll, 1994), while others find that women receive more social support from the work domain (cf. Fusilier, Ganster, & Mayes, 1986). Others, who did find gender differences in social support, reported that women received more social support from colleagues than men (Roxburgh, 1999; van Daalen, Sanders, & Willemsen, 2005). The latter two studies examined gender differences in social support from the home domain as well. Roxburgh (1999) did not find gender differences in spousal support, whereas van Daalen et al. (2005) found men to receive more social support from their spouse and women from relatives and friends.

Although men and women seem to differ with respect to the sources from which they receive social support, both nevertheless seem to experience social support to be effective in reducing work–family conflict (Adams et al., 1996; Behson, 2005; Warren & Johnson, 1995). It appears that social support reduces work–family conflict either directly or through altering the impact of stressors that lead to work–family conflict, such as role conflict and role ambiguity. Carlson and Perrewé (1999), for instance, found that social support from the work domain reduced WFC through its' impact on work role conflict, work time demands, and work role ambiguity. Social support from the home domain reduced the severity of family role conflict, family time demands, and family role ambiguity, which in turn reduced FWC. Other studies examining the effects of one particular source of social support reported the same. Thomas and Ganster (1995) found that support from the supervisor reduced work–family conflict directly, as well as indirectly, through the

increased sense of control over the areas of work and family. Aryee, Luk, Leung, and Lo (1999) found spousal support to moderate the effects of parental overload on FWC.

These results indicate that social support from the work domain reduces WFC and social support from the home domain reduces FWC. However, most of the studies mentioned above examined only one source of social support, or examined the effects of social support from the work domain on work-related antecedents of WFC and the effects of social support from the home domain on home-related antecedents of FWC (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999).

Therefore, it remains unclear whether social support from the work domain relates more strongly to WFC than social support from the home domain, and whether social support from the home domain relates more strongly to FWC than social support from the work domain. The present study examined the relationship between social support from the work and home domains, and WFC and FWC. In line with the studies mentioned above we hypothesize that:

- H3: Social support from the work domain relates more strongly to time-based (3a) and strain-based (3b) WFC than social support from the home domain.
- H4: Social support from the home domain relates more strongly to time-based (4a) and strain-based (4b) FWC than social support from the work domain.

In addition to the studies that found social support beneficial in reducing work–family conflict, Elliott (2003) found social support to affect men and women’s work and family role strain differently. Elliott (2003) found a larger effect of spousal supportiveness for women than for men. She did not find gender differences regarding the effect of support from colleagues on work and role strain. Perrewé and Carlson (2002) also found a stronger decrease of FWC for women when levels of social support from the family increased than for men, and no gender differences in the relationship between work-related support and WFC.

In the present study, social support from the home (i.e., spouse, relatives, and friends) and work domain (i.e., supervisor and colleagues) were included to examine whether or not men and women benefit from the same sources of social support when combining work and family responsibilities. We expect that one benefits most from the social support received from the domain in which, traditionally, one’s core responsibilities lie (see also hypotheses 1 and 2). We hypothesize that:

- H5: Sources of social support from the *work domain* are more strongly negatively related to both forms of men’s WFC (5a) and men’s FWC (5b) than to women’s.
- H6: Sources of social support from the *home domain* are more strongly negatively related to both forms of women’s WFC (6a) and women’s FWC (6b) than to men’s.

2. Method

2.1. Respondents and procedure

The data used in this study are part of a larger research project on work–family conflict, social support, health, and well-being. Although the data of the present study were used in an earlier study, and hence share the same respondents, both studies report on different

outcome variables. The present study reports on the relationship between social support and work–family conflict, whereas the other study reports on the relationship between social support and psychological well-being, health and life satisfaction.

Data were obtained from the CentERpanel, a so-called telepanel, which consists of about 2000 Dutch households. Members of this panel are requested to fill out a questionnaire on various topics once a week through the internet. Questionnaires were sent to all panel members with a paid job at the time of the survey ($n = 1171$). After a reminder, a total of 962 questionnaires were returned (response rate 82%). If two or more panel members from the same household returned the questionnaire, the data of only one of these respondents were used for the present study. In this case, equal numbers of male and female respondents were randomly removed from the sample. To be included in the present study, panel members had to be employed and have a spouse who was also employed, i.e., they had to be part of a dual-earner relationship. A total of 459 respondents met these inclusion criteria. Listwise exclusion of missing data of all variables resulted in a final sample of 444 respondents.

Of the 444 respondents, 271 were men and 173 were women. Respondents ranged in age from 22 to 62, with a mean age of 41 years (on average, men were 5 years older than women, 43, respectively, 38 years). Most respondents (57%) completed some form of secondary or higher vocational education. There were no gender differences in this respect. On average, respondents worked 36 h per week. Women worked fewer hours per week than men, respectively, 28 and 41 h per week.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Work–family conflict

To measure work–family conflict, we used four scales developed by Carlson et al. (2000). The original scales were translated into Dutch using standard procedures, including back-translation into English. Each scale consists of three items and measures one of the four dimensions of work–family conflict, that is, time-based work–family interference, time-based family–work interference, strain-based work–family interference, and strain-based family–work interference. Sample items are: “My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like”, “I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities”, “Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy”, “Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work”. Items were scored on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1, ‘totally disagree’, to 5, ‘totally agree’. Cronbach’s α for time-based work–family interference was .70, for time-based family–work interference .83, for strain-based work–family interference .80 and .93 for strain-based family–work interference.

2.2.2. Social support

Social support was measured with four 8-item scales, measuring social support from one’s spouse, social support from one’s relatives and friends, social support from one’s colleagues, and social support from one’s supervisor. Social support from one’s spouse and social support from one’s colleagues were measured by two scales developed by Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Granrose (1992). Both scales represent the four types of support as conceptualised by House (1981): emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational support. Social support from one’s relatives and friends, and social support from one’s

supervisor were measured with two complementary scales, based on the social support scales of Parasuraman et al. (1992), and constructed for the present study. The scales developed by Parasuraman et al. (1992) were translated into Dutch using standard procedures including back-translation. Sample items are: “To what extent is/are your [...spouse/relatives/friends/colleagues/supervisor...] willing to listen to your problems?”, “To what extent is/are your [...] concerned about your welfare?”, “To what extent do/does your [...] provide you with information you need to do the things you want to do?” and “To what extent do/does your [...] praise you for your accomplishments?” Items were scored on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1, ‘not at all’, to 5, ‘a great deal’. Cronbach’s α for social support from one’s spouse was .86, for social support from one’s family and friends .87, for social support from colleagues .90 and for social support from one’s supervisor .95.

2.2.3. Background variables

The background variables measured were gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age, number of working hours and number of working hours of the spouse (all measured as continuous variables), and education (measured with one item consisting of six response categories ranging from 1, ‘primary education’, to 6, ‘university’).

2.3. Data analysis

Zero order correlations were used to examine the general pattern of relations among the variables. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA’s) were used to test for gender differences concerning time and strain-based WFC and FWC, controlling for number of children in the household, and own and spouse’s working hours. A series of hierarchical regression analyses was performed to assess the effects of gender and social support on each dependent variable. Independent variables were entered as a block into the regression equation in the following order: (1) background variables; (2) sources of social support, and; (3) the interaction effects between gender and the sources of social support. In order to minimize multicollinearity, product terms were added to the equation one at a time. If an interaction effect was significant, separate regression lines for men and women were obtained by substituting the value of women (0) by the value of men (1) into the regression equation (Jaccard & Turrusi, 2003). In order to eliminate non-essential correlation between the interaction terms and their component variables, all predictor variables were centered (Aiken & West, 1991).

3. Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables are displayed in Table 1.

3.1. Gender differences

Results of the ANCOVA’s on sex differences in work–family conflict showed that, after controlling for number of children in the household, working hours and spouse’s working hours, women reported more strain-based WFC than men ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.26$, $SD = 0.85$; $M_{\text{men}} = 2.23$, $SD = 0.85$; $F(4, 439) = 11.18$, $p < .01$). However, the effect size was small (.03). No gender differences were found for the other forms of work–family conflict. Hence, hypotheses 1a and 1b proposing that men report more time and strain-based WFC than

Table 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	.61	0.49	—												
2. Age	40.69	8.65	.29**	—											
3. Education	5.03	1.38	-.03	-.02	—										
4. Working hours	35.89	10.72	.56**	.13**	.15**	—									
5. Working hours spouse	31.98	14.30	-.61**	-.29**	.04	-.31*	—								
6. Social support from spouse	3.68	0.72	.16**	.02	.02	-.14**	-.02	—							
7. Social support from relatives and friends	2.77	0.73	-.13**	-.21**	.05	-.12	.09*	.36*	—						
8. Social support from colleagues	3.20	0.71	-.11*	-.09*	.04	-.14	.01	.20**	.33*	—					
9. Social support from supervisor	3.06	0.89	.01	-.11*	-.03	-.07	-.00	.09*	.25**	.54**	—				
10. Time-based WFC	2.42	0.88	.32*	.05	.07	.48*	-.32*	-.06	-.10*	-.15*	-.07	—			
11. Strain-based WFC	2.24	0.85	-.05	-.09*	.09	.22*	.01	-.11	-.07	-.19*	-.17**	.51**	—		
12. Time-based FWC	1.89	0.80	-.05	-.03	.09	.07	.03	-.26**	-.07	-.19**	-.05	.35*	.44**	—	
13. Strain-based FWC	1.68	0.68	.04	-.02	-.00	.13**	-.09	-.22**	-.08	-.17*	-.06	.36**	.54**	.47*	—

Note: $N = 444$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

women were not supported. Hypotheses 2a and 2b proposing that women would report more time and strain-based FWC were also not supported.

3.2. Results of the regression analyses

3.2.1. Time-based WFC

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses for time-based WFC. Both one's own and spouses' working hours were related to time-based WFC ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$, respectively). None of the social support variables were significantly related to time-based WFC. Hypothesis 3a, proposing that social support from the work domain relates more strongly to time-based WFC than social support from the home domain, was not supported.

The interaction effect between social support from supervisor and gender was marginally significant ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .018$). That is, men's time-based WFC tended to decrease when they received more social support from their supervisor, whereas women's time-based WFC tended to increase when they received more supervisory support. The regression equation is $Y = 1.88 + (-0.09)(\text{Gender}) + 0.11 (\text{Sup supervisor}) + (-0.19) (\text{Gender} \times \text{Sup supervisor})$ with female = 0 and male = 1. Hypothesis 5a, proposing that the sources of social support from the work domain are more strongly negatively related to men's WFC than to women's WFC, was supported. Hypothesis 6a, proposing that the sources of social support from the home domain are more strongly negatively related to women's WFC than to men's WFC, was not supported.

The background variables explained the largest part of the variability in time-based WFC ($\Delta R^2 = .27$, $p < .001$). The social support variables did not explain a significant portion of the variability associated with time-based WFC ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, ns). The proportion of

Table 2
Sources of social support as predictors of time-based WFC ($N = 444$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1									
Gender (0 = F, 1 = M)	-0.11	0.11	-0.06	-0.08	0.11	-0.05	-0.09	0.11	-0.05
Age	-0.01	0.00	-0.06	-0.01	0.00	-0.07	-0.01	0.00	-0.08
Education	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02
Working hours	0.04	0.00	0.45***	0.04	0.00	0.45***	0.04	0.00	0.45***
Spouse's working hours	-0.01	0.00	-0.24***	-0.01	0.00	-0.23***	-0.01	0.00	-0.24***
Step 2									
Support from spouse				-0.13	0.06	-0.10	-0.13	0.06	-0.10
Support from relatives and friends				0.02	0.06	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.01
Support from colleagues				-0.10	0.06	-0.08	-0.11	0.06	-0.09
Support from supervisor				0.01	0.05	0.01	0.11	0.07	0.12
Step 3									
Gender \times support from supervisor							-0.19	0.08	-0.15*
R^2	0.27			0.29			0.30		
Adjusted R^2	0.26			0.28			0.28		
<i>F</i> for change in R^2	32.49***			2.91			5.69		

Note: All support variables were centered at their means. Nonsignificant interactions are not displayed.

* $p = .018$.

*** $p < .001$.

additional variance explained by the interaction effect, after controlling for the background and social support variables was not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, ns).

3.2.2. Strain-based WFC

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses for strain-based WFC. Women reported more strain-based WFC than men ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$). Strain-based WFC was also affected by working hours ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), indicating that working more hours leads to more experienced conflict. None of the social support variables were significantly related to this form of WFC. Therefore hypothesis 3b, proposing that social support from the work domain relates more strongly to strain-based WFC than social support from the home domain, was not supported.

There were no significant interaction effects, indicating that social support does not affect men and women's strain-based WFC differently. Thus, for strain-based WFC, both hypothesis 5a and 6a were not supported.

The background variables explained the largest part of the variability in strain-based WFC ($\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$). After controlling for the background variables, the social support variables explained 4% of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$) in strain-based WFC.

3.2.3. Time-based FWC

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses for time-based FWC. None of the background variables were significantly related to time-based FWC. Of the social support variables, both social support from spouse and from colleagues were related negatively to time-based FWC ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = -.21$, $p < .001$, respectively). An additional test comparing these two beta-weights showed that social support from spouse was not related more strongly to time-based FWC than social support from colleagues, $F(1, 434) = .21$, ns.

Table 3
Sources of social support as predictors of strain-based WFC ($N = 444$)

	Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1	Gender (0 = F, 1 = M)	-0.36	0.12	-0.21**	-0.32	0.12	-0.18**
	Age	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	-0.01	0.01	-0.11
	Education	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.06
	Working hours	0.03	0.00	0.32***	0.02	0.00	0.30***
	Spouse's working hours	-0.00	0.00	-0.05	-0.00	0.00	-0.05
Step 2	Support from spouse				-0.12	0.06	-0.11
	Support from relatives and friends				0.03	0.06	0.02
	Support from colleagues				-0.14	0.07	-0.12
	Support from supervisor				-0.08	0.05	0.09
Step 3	(No significant interactions)						
	R^2		0.09		0.13		
	Adjusted R^2		0.08		0.11		
	<i>F</i> for change in R^2		8.21***		5.55***		

Note: All support variables were centered at their means. As there were no significant interactions, the results of step 2 are displayed.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 4
Sources of social support as predictors of time-based FWC ($N = 444$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1						
Gender (0 = F, 1 = M)	−0.21	0.11	−0.13	−0.18	0.11	−0.11
Age	−0.00	0.01	−0.01	−0.00	0.01	−0.01
Education	0.05	0.03	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.09
Working hours	0.01	0.00	0.12	0.01	0.00	0.13
Spouse's working hours	−0.00	0.00	−0.02	−0.00	0.00	−0.01
Step 2						
Support from spouse				−0.28	0.06	−0.25***
Support from relatives and friends				0.07	0.06	0.05
Support from colleagues				−0.23	0.06	−0.21***
Support from supervisor				0.08	0.05	0.09
Step 3						
(No significant interactions)						
R^2		0.02			0.12	
Adjusted R^2		0.01			0.10	
F for change in R^2		1.95			11.71***	

Note: All support variables were centered at their means. As there were no significant interactions, the results of step 2 are displayed.

*** $p < .001$.

Hence hypothesis 4a, proposing that social support from the home domain relates more strongly to time-based FWC than support from the work domain was not supported.

Furthermore, social support was not related to men and women's time-based FWC differently, as we found no significant interaction effect between each of the sources of social support and gender. Thus, for time-based FWC hypothesis 5a and 6a were not supported.

The sources of social support explained the largest part of the variability in time-based FWC ($\Delta R^2 = .10, p < .001$).

3.2.4. Strain-based FWC

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analyses for strain-based FWC. Working hours was positive related to strain-based FWC ($\beta = .17, p < .01$). Of the support variables, social support from spouse was related negatively to strain-based FWC ($\beta = -.22, p < .001$). As none of the support sources from the work domain were related significantly to strain-based-FWC, hypothesis 4b, proposing that social support from the home domain relates more strongly to strain-based FWC than support from the work domain was supported.

Social support from colleagues was related differently to men and women's strain-based FWC, as the interaction effect between social support from colleagues and gender was significant ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$). Women's strain-based FWC was hardly affected by social support from colleagues, whereas men's strain-based FWC decreased when they received more social support from their colleagues. The regression equation is $Y = 1.67 + (-0.11)(\text{Gender}) + (-0.03)(\text{Sup colleagues}) + (-0.23)(\text{Gender} \times \text{Sup colleagues})$ with female = 0 and male = 1. This implies that, for strain-based FWC, hypothesis 5b, proposing that the sources of social support from the work domain are more strongly negatively related to men's FWC than to women's FWC, is supported. Hypothesis 6b, proposing that

Table 5

Sources of social support as predictors of strain-based FWC ($N = 444$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1 Gender (0 = F, 1 = M)	-0.16	0.10	-0.12	-0.12	0.10	-0.09	-0.11	0.09	-0.08
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.04	-0.00	0.00	-0.04	-0.01	0.00	-0.05
Education	-0.01	0.03	-0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.02	-0.00
Working hours	0.01	0.00	0.17**	0.01	0.00	0.17**	0.01	0.00	0.17**
Spouse's working hours	-0.01	0.00	-0.12	-0.01	0.00	-0.11	-0.01	0.00	-0.10
Step 2 Support from spouse				-0.21	0.05	-0.22***	-0.21	0.05	-0.22***
Support from relatives and friends				0.04	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.04
Support from colleagues				-0.14	0.05	-0.15	-0.03	0.07	-0.03
Support from supervisor				0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.04
Step 3 Gender \times support from colleagues							-0.23	0.09	-0.17**
R^2		0.03			0.10			0.12	
Adjusted R^2		0.02			0.08			0.09	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		2.60			8.04***			6.84**	

Note: All social support variables were centered at their means. Nonsignificant interactions are not displayed.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

the sources of social support from the home domain are more strongly negatively related to women's FWC than to men's FWC, was not supported.

After controlling for the background variables, the sources of social support explained 7% of the variability in strain-based FWC ($\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$). The interaction effect explained only a small portion of the variability in strain-based FWC ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$).

4. Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of the present study was threefold. First, to examine gender differences in both time- and strain-based WFC and family-to-work conflict FWC. Second, to examine the relationship between work and non-work related sources of social support and time and strain-based WFC and FWC. And finally, to uncover gender differences regarding the relationship between sources of social support and work–family conflict.

Our findings revealed that, contrary to those reported by Carlson et al. (2000), men and women did not differ with regard to experienced time and strain-based FWC. Women only reported more strain-based WFC than men. This finding is in line with Wallace (1999) and Carlson et al. (2000). The difference in strain-based WFC may be related to the fact that men's and women's job performance is not valued alike. Heilman and Haynes (2005) showed that, despite clear evidence of women's prior work competence, when compared to men, women are devalued. Hence a woman may have to work harder in order to be valued the same as her male colleague, leading to more strain-based WFC.

The fact that most women were employed on a part-time basis (83% of the women in our sample work less than 38 h per week), may explain why women did not report more FWC than men. Working part-time probably enables these women to combine family responsibilities with work, as the majority of these part-time working women (77%) indicated that they worked part-time to combine work and family responsibilities. Carlson et al. (2000), who studied men and women employed on a full-time basis, did in fact find that women report

more FWC than men, which strengthens our argument that working part-time seems to help women to combine work and family responsibilities and therefore to reduce FWC. Data on the task division in Dutch two-earner households (SCP, 2004, p. 94) show that in all types of households the husband's participation in household work never exceeds 35%, demonstrating that women always do the largest part of household work. Our own data contain no information on the division of household work or home related responsibilities.

With regard to the relation between the sources of social support and work–family conflict, contrary to our expectations, we found that social support from colleagues relates to men and women's time-based FWC. Despite the general assumption that social support from the work domain is related to WFC, our findings do not support this. A possible explanation is that colleagues may stand in for each other when time is lacking, for example, by taking over some tasks to enable the other to leave earlier, knowing that the other will return a favor if needed. Moreover, social support from spouse was related to time and strain-based FWC, however, it was not related more strongly to time-based FWC than social support from colleagues. Given these results, it is important for future research to further investigate how social support from one domain relates to work–family conflict in the other domain.

Findings also revealed that the relationship between social support and work–family conflict differs for men and women. Surprisingly, women did not benefit from social support from their supervisor and colleagues. On the contrary, their time-based WFC increased when they received social support from their supervisor. Their strain-based FWC was hardly affected by support from their colleagues. Men, on the other hand, did benefit from social support from both their supervisor and colleagues. Social support from colleagues decreased men's strain-based FWC. Support from supervisor decreased their time-based WFC.

A possible reason why women's time based WFC increased when they received social support from their supervisor may be that employees feel that they have to do something in return for being supported by their supervisor. This may lead to more time-based WFC for women, as most women work part-time which leaves hardly any room for additional tasks or for catching up on tasks that still need to be done.

Contrary to other studies (Elliott, 2003; Perrewé & Carlson, 2002), we did not find any gender differences regarding the relationship between social support from one's spouse or relatives and friends and work–family conflict. As Elliott (2003) found spousal support to correlate negatively with the amount of household chores one does, she concludes that “at least part of the effect of spousal support comes in the form of participation in housework” (p. 176). As the majority of women in our sample worked part-time in order to be able to combine work and family tasks, they probably received less spousal support in the form of household work simply because they perform most tasks within the home domain.

Finally, it seems that different variables are important in relation to time and strain-based WFC and FWC. Working hours and working hours of the spouse were related to both forms of WFC, and not (or only marginally) to FWC. Regarding time and strain-based FWC, social support variables seemed most important, while the support variables were not related to time or strain-based WFC. A possible explanation for this difference may lie in the nature of the stressor. Recall that someone who experiences WFC may need more time to get all the work done on the job or may worry about getting the work done. Someone who experiences FWC may be missing work activities due to the amount of time spent on family responsibilities or may worry about family matters. In the case of FWC, we believe someone is more likely to ask for help, for example to look after a sick child, or to take over some of the family responsibilities than in case of WFC.

4.1. *Strengths and limitations of the study*

There are two major strengths of this study. First, our study provides a comprehensive picture of the relationship between social support and work–family conflict as it includes both directions of work–family conflict, i.e., WFC and FWC, and distinguishes between time and strain-based conflict as well as between home and work-related sources of social support. Second, as this study was carried out among respondents with different jobs across various organizations, our data are not specific to a single occupation, but provide insight about the relationship between social support and work–family conflict, applicable to the working population in general.

Despite these advantages, our study has several limitations that are important to note. First, we incorporated different types of social support in our study, but did not distinguish between them. Friendman and Greenhaus (2000), however, found the effect of emotional and practical support on work–family conflict to differ, making it advisable to distinguish between the sources as well as the types of support in future research. Second, since our data were cross-sectional, it is not possible to draw any causal conclusions between the social support and work–family conflict variables, even if some cause-effect sequences appear theoretically more plausible than others. Third, we used self-report data, which may lead to data contamination due to common method variance. However, several studies have shown common method variance not to be as problematic as once thought (Spector, 1992). Finally, in The Netherlands, where this study was performed, it is common for women to work part-time (SCP, 2004). Consequently, it is unlikely that the women in our study resemble (part-time) employed women in other countries, making it difficult to generalize our results to studies performed in other countries.

4.2. *Practical implications*

We found that social support was only important with respect to reducing time and strain-based FWC, whereas one's own and one's spouse's working hours were important with respect to WFC. Therefore, for dual-earner policies to be successful, even more than emphasizing the different forms of work–family conflict, it is important to keep in mind that the relationship between various sources of social support and work–family conflict may vary. Most organizations focus on work-related variables in relation to WFC, while it seems worthwhile to consider home-related variables as well.

Moreover, it should be noted that, within the work domain, giving support to a male colleague or subordinate has other consequences than giving support to a female colleague or subordinate. Supervisors should not only be aware of these gender differences and diversity among their employees in general, but also be able to act in ways that are supportive without being counterproductive. It will be worthwhile for future research to examine these gender differences in more detail.

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