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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

How Does Work-Life Conflict Influence Wellbeing Outcomes? A Test of a Mediating Mechanism Using Data from 33 European Countries

M. Joseph Sirgy[1,2] · **Mohsen Joshanloo**[3] · **Grace B. Yu**[4]

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Abstract

Reflecting a recent guideline for operationalizing subjective wellbeing (OECD, 2023), this study tested a model that shows how work-life conflict, one of the key dimensions that detracts from wellbeing outcomes. It does so through a mediating mechanism involving domain satisfaction (i.e., family and work wellbeing), subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing. Specifically, we theorize that work-life conflict detracts from both family and work wellbeing, which in turn decreases subjective wellbeing. In turn, decreases in subjective wellbeing serve to decrease eudaimonic wellbeing. We also argue that work-life conflict has direct adverse effects on both subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing. Data collected from the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey were used to test the model; the sample included 18,137 respondents from 33 European countries. The results from multi-level modeling were supportive of our hypotheses. Policy implications were discussed, along with study limitations and suggestions for future research.

Keywords Work-life conflict · Subjective wellbeing · Eudaimonic wellbeing · Family wellbeing · Work wellbeing

✉ M. Joseph Sirgy
sirgy@vt.edu
https://sites.google.com/a/vt.edu/joe-sirgy-personal-website/

Mohsen Joshanloo
mjoshanloo@gmail.com

Grace B. Yu
byungheeyu@duksung.ac.kr

[1] Pamplin College of Business, Department of Marketing, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech), 6020 Lyons Rd, Dublin, VA 24084, USA

[2] WorkWell Research Unit, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Potchefstroom, South Africa

[3] Department of Psychology, Keimyung University, Daegu, South Korea

[4] Duksung Women's University, Seoul, South Korea

Background

One's work-family experience at the intersection of these work life and family life, two important life domains, has a lasting impact on personal wellbeing. According to the OECD's wellbeing framework (OECD, 2020), work-life balance is one of the eleven key dimensions that constitutes personal wellbeing. The other dimensions include income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, knowledge and skills, environmental quality, safety, social connections, civic engagement, and subjective wellbeing. Quality-of-life scholars have been searching for ways to mitigate work-life conflict (or to facilitate work-life balance) through various personal and organizational interventions (Allen & French, 2023; Bakker et al., 2023; Du et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2014; Sirgy & Lee, 2018a, b, 2023; Sirgy et al., 2020a, b).

Reflecting a recent guideline for operationalizing subjective wellbeing (OECD, 2023), the purpose of this study is to test the impact of work-life conflict, one of the key dimensions that constitute personal wellbeing, on three dimensions of wellbeing namely domain satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing. Despite the fact that much research on work-life conflict/balance demonstrates an impact on wellbeing, a key question remains, namely what is exactly the mediating mechanism that can explain the impact of work-life conflict on the three dimensions of wellbeing? Based on well-established theories of work-life balance, we hypothesize that work-life conflict does indeed play a significant role in the three dimensions of wellbeing, and that the wellbeing effects are mediated by work and family wellbeing. We will try to answer this question and test our hypotheses using social data collected from 33 European countries, European Quality of Life Surveys (EQLS) (https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/surveys/european-quality-life-surveys-eqls). EQLS takes a multidimensional approach to measure one's quality of life and covers life domains related to one's quality of life issues. In other words, EQLS follows OECD's general guidelines to measure one's wellbeing by three groups of indicators: evaluative wellbeing (life satisfaction and satisfaction with domains of life), positive and negative affect (i.e., happiness), and eudaimonic wellbeing. To understand correlations and mediating mechanism among these constructs, this study focused on the two important life domains (family life and work life), subjective wellbeing and edudaimonic wellbeing. Supportive results from our study will not only reinforce the importance of work-life balance in society but also reinforce the need to further develop public and organizational policies to enhance both work and family wellbeing through interventions that can effectively reduce work-life conflict.

Our Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

The theoretical model is shown in Fig. 1. As shown in the figure, the model involves four major sets of constructs: (1) work-life conflict, (2) domain satisfaction (i.e., family and work wellbeing), (3) subjective wellbeing, (3) eudaimonic

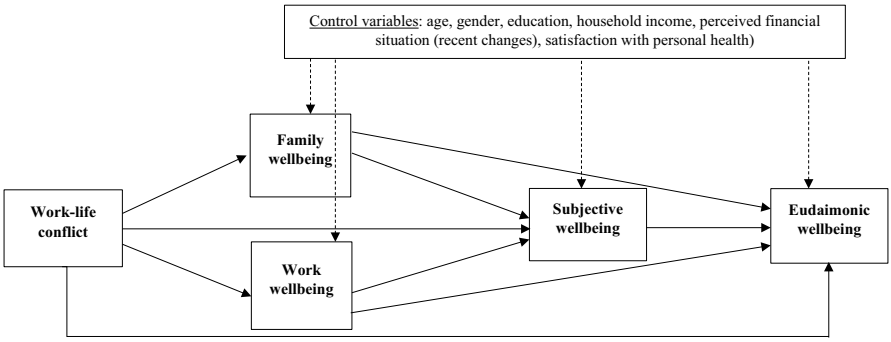


Fig. 1 How does work-life conflict influence wellbeing outcomes?

wellbeing, and (4) control variables (i.e., age, gender, education, household income, perceived financial situation, and satisfaction with personal health. The model involves a mediating mechanism indicating that work-life conflict adversely influences domain satisfaction (i.e., decreases work and family wellbeing), which in turn decreases subjective wellbeing. Decreases in subjective wellbeing causes decreases in eudaimonic wellbeing. That is, work-life conflict adversely influences work and family wellbeing, which in turn, influence the three dimensions of wellbeing in a hierarchical fashion.

Wellbeing Outcomes

Wellbeing outcomes involve three constructs, namely domain satisfaction (satisfaction with work and family life), subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing. These wellbeing constructs are consistent with the OECD's recommendations for measuring personal wellbeing (OECD, 2023).

Much research in the psychology of quality of life has focused on conceptualizing and measuring wellbeing in terms of *domain satisfaction* (Sirgy, 2021, pp. 16–17). That is, high wellbeing is defined as satisfaction in salient life domains. Consider the work of Robert Cummins, a renowned wellbeing researcher. Cummins and his colleagues developed a measure of wellbeing based on domain satisfaction (Cummins, 1993, 1996, 1997a, b; Cummins et al., 1994, 2003; Jovanovic et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2010a, b; Renn et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2010; Tiliouine et al., 2006). Quality of life is captured subjectively through reports of satisfaction in various life domains (e.g., material wellbeing, health, and safety). Wellbeing is then captured as a composite score of these satisfaction scores in the specified life domains weighted by the perceived importance of each domain. Our focus here is two important life domains that are highly pertinent to work-life conflict, namely work life and family life.

In this study, family wellbeing refers to one's overall satisfaction with family life in general, while work wellbeing refers to one's overall satisfaction with work life in general. Although not all life domains are perceived as equally important and the relative importance of each life domain changes as one ages (Hsieh, 2022; Nakamura et al., 2022), both family life and work life have been considered the most

important among various life domains for working adults (Aw et al., 2021; Bakker et al., 2023; Du et al., 2020). Recently, quality-of-life scholars have paid special attention to these life domains given the Covid-19 epidemic and the problems caused by blurred boundaries between the two life domains, especially for women (e.g., Adisa et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2021). As such, much has been reported about the resurgence of work-life conflict during the pandemic (Elahi et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022).

Subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing are constructs that capture prominent components of wellbeing (Ryff et al., 2021). *Subjective wellbeing*, also known as hedonic wellbeing, has traditionally been operationalized as having three dimensions: positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, and absence of depression (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Diener & Ryan, 2009). *Eudaimonic wellbeing*, on the other hand, has much deeper theoretical foundations and has been traditionally composed of six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Although they are interrelated to each other, they hold differential patterns with sociodemographic correlates (e.g., age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status) showing the distinctive nature of the two constructs. For example, hedonic wellbeing increases as one ages while purpose in life and personal growth dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing rather decrease (Ryff et al., 2021).

Work-life Conflict and Its Adverse Wellbeing Effects

Work-life conflict occurs when the demands of work life interfere with meeting demands in other life domains such as family life (e.g., Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In relation to family life, work-life conflict translates into two constructs, namely work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. Work-to-family conflict reflects the interference of work demands in meeting family demands; and conversely, family-to-work conflict involves interference of family demands in meeting work demands. This distinction is consistent with the perspective that focuses on the horizontal spillover among life domains and identifies two types of negative spillover between work and family life domains known as negative spillover from work to family and from family to work (e.g., Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Research has consistently highlighted the detrimental effects of work-family conflict on work performance, as well as satisfaction with important life domains and life in general (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Specifically, the research shows that work-life conflict leads to a host of adverse effects in work life (therefore undermining work wellbeing). Evidence suggests that work-life conflict is associated with decreases in:

- job performance (e.g., Blazovich et al., 2014; Carlson et al., 2010; Frone et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 2004; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015).
- job satisfaction (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Anaton, 2013; Carlson et al., 2006; De Simone et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2009; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- organizational commitment (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),

- intentions to leave the organization decrease (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; McNall et al., 2010),
- career development (e.g., Konrad & Yang, 2012; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015), and.
- career success (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Conversely, work-life conflict is associated with increases in:

- job malfunction (e.g., Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- job burnout (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Frone et al., 1997; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Wayne et al., 2004),
- work alienation (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- absenteeism (e.g., Frone et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 2004), and.
- turnover intentions (e.g., Frone et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 2004).

With respect to *family wellbeing*, the research also shows that work-life conflict is associated with decreases in:

- marital adjustment and marital satisfaction (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- family performance (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Carlson et al., 2010; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- family satisfaction (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Carlson et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2009; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- parental satisfaction (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), and
- conflict with other family members (e.g., Westman & Etzion, 2005).

The research literature also documented the adverse effects of work-life conflict on many markers of *subjective wellbeing* (Sirgy & Lee, 2018a, b). Specifically, the research shows that work-life is associated with increases in:

- psychological distress (e.g., Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- general life stress – being upset and frustrated, or tense (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- emotional exhaustion (e.g., Lee & Kim, 2013),
- emotional ill-being (e.g., Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- anxiety (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- irritability and hostility (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- hypertension (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- depression (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),
- in manifestation of illness symptoms (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- in somatic complaints (e.g., loss of appetite, fatigue, and nervous tension) (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015),

- in blood pressure and cholesterol (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998),
- in incidence of alcohol abuse (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Whiston & Cinamon, 2015), and
- in incidence of cigarette consumption (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

The research shows that work-life conflict is associated with decreases in *life satisfaction* (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Anaton, 2013; Carlson et al., 2006; De Simone et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2009; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The research literature also documented the adverse effects of work-life conflict on elements of eudaimonic wellbeing. Evidence suggests that work-life conflict is associated with decreases in:

- mindfulness (e.g., Lawrie et al., 2018; Pacheco et al., 2021; Reb et al., 2015),
- psychological wellbeing (e.g., Munir et al., 2012; Obrenovic et al., 2020; Saraswati, & Lie, 2020),
- environmental mastery (perceived control) (e.g., Li et al., 2021),
- self-esteem (e.g., Li et al. 2021), and
- social (family) support (e.g., Li et al., 2021).

It should be noted that the evidence related to the adverse effects of work-life conflict remains somewhat controversial. For example, Matthews et al. (2014) have distinguished the long-term effects from the short-term effects of work-life conflict using a longitudinal study design. Their study demonstrated the negative impact of work-life conflict on wellbeing only in the short term but not in the long term. The authors used the *stress reduction theory* (Frese & Zapf, 1988) to explain the short-term effects. Specifically, in the short-term work-life conflict causes adverse wellbeing outcomes because it reflects stress caused by failure to meet work demands due to interference from duties and obligations related to family demands (and/or failure to meet family demands due to interference from duties and obligations related to work demands). However, these adverse effects arising from work-life conflict dissipate over time. In other words, in the long term, people adapt to the stress caused by work-life conflict. As such, the negative wellbeing effects of work-life conflict become weaker and weaker over time. Research using the *adaptation theory* (Diener & Diener, 1996) supports this long-term effect. In other words, despite personally threatening experiences (e.g., work-life conflicts), individuals adapt to stressors over time and their wellbeing reverts to their original set points (Brickman et al., 1978).

Research has also demonstrated that satisfaction with each life domain accounts for varying amounts of variance in subjective wellbeing. Satisfaction with both work life and family life registered a significant and prominent effect on subjective wellbeing (Hsieh, 2022). Other research has further demonstrated the wellbeing effects of both work wellbeing and family wellbeing on various dimensions of wellbeing at large (e.g., Nakamura et al., 2022).

Furthermore, research has shown that subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic well-being are associated. Specifically, factor analytic research consistently demonstrates that subjective (hedonic) well-being and eudaimonic well-being represent distinct, yet correlated, dimensions of overall well-being (Gallagher et al., 2009; Joshanloo, 2015, 2021). Building on this empirical foundation, the present study posits that subjective well-being functions as a predictor of eudaimonic well-being, drawing theoretical support from the *broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions* (Fredrickson, 2013) and Sirgy's (2019, 2020) *positive balance theory*. The broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive affective states associated with hedonic well-being may facilitate the pursuit and attainment of meaningful goals and personal growth characteristics of eudaimonic well-being. Sirgy's (2019) positive balance theory makes the case that the various wellbeing constructs can be organized as a hierarchy from the very micro to the very macro. At the physiological level wellbeing can be characterized as neurotransmitters in the form of dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and other neurotransmitters associated with the reward center in the brain; wellbeing is achieved when there are more reward-type neurotransmitters than the nonrewarding type. At the emotional level, wellbeing can be characterized as positive and negative affect; wellbeing is achieved when there is more positive than negative affect. At the cognitive level, we have domain satisfaction; wellbeing is achieved when multiple salient life domains are evaluated more positively than negatively. At the meta-cognitive level, wellbeing can be characterized in terms of life satisfaction; wellbeing is achieved when evaluations of life are more positive than negative using various social comparisons and other standards of comparison. At the developmental level, wellbeing is characterized as eudaimonia which involves dispositional traits such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others; wellbeing is achieved when the individual has more positive dispositional traits than negative ones (e.g., pessimism, hopelessness, depression, neuroticism, impulsiveness). The most macro level of the wellbeing hierarchy is the social-ecological level (or what is referred to "socio-eudaimonia"). At that level, wellbeing is characterized in terms of positive social resources (e.g., social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social integration, social harmony, social belonginess, and social attachment); wellbeing is achieved when the individual is characterized as having more social resources relative to social constraints (e.g., social alienation, social discord, social exclusion, ostracism). In Chap. 6 of Sirgy's book (Sirgy, 2020) on positive balance, he argues that life satisfaction (at the meta-cognitive level) serves as a building block for eudaimonia (at the developmental level). Specifically, high levels of life satisfaction at the meta-cognitive level are mediated by a process involving high personal growth and intrinsic motivation. That is, life satisfaction at the meta-cognitive level, mediated by a process involving high personal growth, results in high levels of eudaimonia at the developmental level; and conversely, life dissatisfaction, mediated by a process involving low personal growth, results in low levels of eudaimonia.

Based on the preceding discussion, we will test the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1 (H1): Work-life Conflict → Family Wellbeing and Work Well-being

H1a: Perceived family wellbeing is a negative function of work-life conflict.
H1b: Perceived work wellbeing is a negative function of work-life conflict.

Hypotheses 2 (H2): Work-life Conflict → Subjective Wellbeing

H2a: Subjective wellbeing is a negative function of work-life conflict.
H2b: Eudaimonic wellbeing is a negative function of work-life conflict.

Hypotheses 3 (H3): Serial Mediation Effects of Family Wellbeing (Work-life Conflict → Family Wellbeing → Subjective Wellbeing → Eudaimonic Wellbeing)

H3: Perceived family wellbeing significantly mediates the effect of work-life conflict on subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing.

Hypotheses 4 (H4): Serial Mediation Effects of Work Wellbeing (Work-life Conflict → Work Wellbeing → Subjective Wellbeing → Eudaimonic Wellbeing)

H4: Perceived work wellbeing significantly mediates the effect of work-life conflict on subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing.

Hypotheses 5 (H5): Subjective Wellbeing → Eudaimonic Wellbeing

H5: Eudaimonic wellbeing is a positive function of subjective wellbeing.

Methods

Participants

In this study, the most recent version of the European Quality of Life Surveys, EQLS 2016, was used to test the model (Ahrendt, 2018). EQLS 2016 was conducted by Eurofound between September 2016 and March 2017, encompassing 33 countries, including the 28 EU Member States and 5 candidate countries (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey). The survey targeted residents aged 18 and older living in private households, using a multi-stage, stratified, random sampling method to ensure a representative cross-section of the adult population. Sample sizes vary by country, with most countries having a target sample size of 1,000 respondents, while larger populations in the UK, Germany, and Turkey warranted larger samples of 1,300, 1,600, and 2,000, respectively. The total sample size was 36,908 interviews. However, we excluded non-working individuals from our sample (e.g., unemployed, unable to work due to long-term illness or disability, retired, and students). The final sample size of the study included 18,137 participants. Data collection was executed by Kantar Public through face-to-face interviews using

computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) in the respondents' homes. The comprehensive questionnaire addressed quality of life, societal conditions, and public services. To ensure data quality and reliability, extensive quality checks were applied, adhering to the European Statistical System's criteria. This methodological rigor provides a robust dataset for analyzing various aspects of life across Europe.

Measures

The variables in this study were assessed with varying numbers of items, reflecting the availability of relevant items in the survey instrument (see Table 1 and 2 for actual measurement items used). Single-item measures were used for family and work wellbeing, specifically measuring participants' satisfaction with their family life and work life, respectively ("Could you please tell me on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied you are with each of the following items, where 1 means you are very dissatisfied and 10 means you are very satisfied?", "Your family life" and "Your present job". For the remaining focal variables (work-life conflict, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing), multiple items were used. The work-life conflit construct was measured by four items including "It has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on the job" and "I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities" as a latent variable. Subjective wellbeing was measured by ten items including "How happy would you say you are?" and "All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days?" (Cronbach alpha = 0.848). Eudaimonic wellbeing was measured by six items including "I generally fell that what I do in life is worthwhile" and "I feel I am free to decide how to live my life" (Cronbach alpha = 0.736).

To assess the psychometric properties of these multi-item measures, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted for each construct (with principal axis factoring extraction method). The results of these unidimensional factor analyses are presented in Table 2. The factor structures showed satisfactory support for the hypothesized constructs, with all factor loadings exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.30. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales exceeding the widely accepted criterion of 0.70, indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency. Following the factor analyses, factor scores were extracted using the regression method (DiStefano et al., 2009). These factor scores, representing the latent constructs derived from the EFA, were then used in our main analysis. Latent variables are, by their very nature, zero-centered.

Control Variables

Control variables involved a set of constructs that would be held constant because of prior established relationships: age, gender, education, household income, perceived financial situation (recent changes), and satisfaction with personal health. These factors (age and gender being basic demographics, satisfaction with standard of living and household income being socioeconomic status, and satisfaction with personal

Table 1 Descriptives

Nation	*N*	Female%	Age	Conflict	Family WB	Work WB	SWB	EWB
Austria	788	60.3	41.18	−0.27	8.57	7.95	0.20	0.35
Belgium	441	43.8	42.52	−0.11	7.66	7.48	0.06	−0.13
Bulgaria	527	50.7	43.86	0.12	7.78	7.45	0.15	−0.05
Cyprus	443	52.8	43.21	0.12	8.33	7.29	−0.08	−0.31
Czech Republic	593	53.0	43.55	0.14	7.63	7.33	−0.14	−0.25
Germany	1027	55.2	46.35	−0.32	7.96	7.55	0.07	−0.01
Denmark	558	46.2	45.93	−0.48	8.82	8.10	0.50	0.52
Estonia	534	60.5	46.31	−0.18	8.12	7.68	0.00	0.22
Greece	462	47.0	43.68	0.28	7.79	6.47	−0.41	-1.00
Spain	474	49.4	42.63	0.14	8.08	6.98	0.20	0.10
Finland	478	50.6	47.33	−0.28	8.54	8.05	0.35	0.42
France	617	53.3	41.76	−0.09	7.93	7.26	0.06	−0.20
Croatia	500	57.6	41.61	0.63	7.74	7.05	−0.26	−0.19
Hungary	515	55.1	43.10	0.18	7.95	7.39	0.05	−0.18
Ireland	446	50.0	43.48	−0.30	8.55	7.87	0.39	0.28
Italy	999	53.8	45.13	0.01	7.54	7.09	−0.24	−0.22
Lithuania	471	57.5	43.17	−0.20	8.06	7.44	−0.09	−0.11
Luxembourg	590	53.9	41.82	−0.24	8.59	7.62	0.08	0.05
Latvia	469	59.7	45.14	0.03	7.64	7.60	−0.09	0.13
Malta	436	45.9	41.17	0.04	8.62	7.77	−0.06	0.10
Netherlands	515	51.1	44.96	−0.50	8.01	7.66	0.23	0.24
Poland	484	59.5	42.45	0.11	8.17	7.30	0.03	0.19
Portugal	546	52.2	43.28	−0.09	8.37	7.52	0.33	−0.07
Romania	378	51.9	41.84	0.11	8.25	7.66	−0.09	−0.05
Sweden	565	45.5	46.51	−0.43	8.48	7.89	0.15	0.75
Slovenia	468	49.6	43.99	−0.22	8.34	7.34	0.04	−0.09
Slovakia	525	54.3	44.56	−0.18	7.96	7.53	0.05	−0.10
United Kingdom	670	49.4	43.05	−0.05	8.50	7.39	0.13	0.14
Albania	255	49.4	43.18	0.37	8.51	6.92	−0.11	−0.11
Montenegro	485	46.8	39.80	0.38	7.70	6.66	−0.12	0.00
FYR of Macedonia	377	39.8	43.10	0.34	7.88	6.65	0.01	−0.19
Serbia	519	49.9	42.25	0.60	7.73	6.91	−0.54	−0.11
Turkey	982	32.3	33.82	0.68	7.22	6.79	−0.53	−0.46

SWB = subjective well-being, *EWB* = eudaimonic wellbeing, *Work WB* = work wellbeing, *Family WB* = family wellbeing, *Conflict* = work-life conflict

health being health and functioning) have been demonstrated to be significant correlates of subjective wellbeing (e.g., Das et al., 2020). Despite the debate on the nature of the impact of age on one's subjective wellbeing, it is common to control for its impact on one's subjective wellbeing in survey research (e.g., Blanchflower, 2021). Studies have shown that household income has a positive impact on subjective wellbeing through satisfaction with the standard of living (e.g., Pleeging et al.,

Table 2 Constructs and measures

Item No.	Work-life conflict		Subjective wellbeing		Eudaimonic wellbeing	
	Item wording	Loading	Item wording	Loading	Item wording	Loading
1	It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on the job.	0.888	I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	0.782	Optimism about own future	0.752
2	I have come home from work too tired to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.	0.785	I have felt calm and relaxed	0.750	I generally feel that what I do in life is worthwhile	0.650
3	I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities.	0.754	I have felt active and vigorous	0.683	Optimism about children's or grandchildren's future	0.618
4	In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?	0.638	My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	0.660	I feel I am free to decide how to live my life	0.595
5			I woke up feeling fresh and rested	0.641	When things go wrong in my life, it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal.	0.407
6			I have felt downhearted and depressed (reverse coded)	0.590	I find it difficult to deal with important problems that come up in my life.	0.396
7			I have felt particularly tense (reverse coded)	0.551		
8			I have felt lonely.	0.493		
9			Taking all things together on a scale of 1 to 10, how happy would you say you are?	0.537		
10			All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days?	0.505		

Table 2 (continued)

Item No.	Work-life conflict		Subjective wellbeing		Eudaimonic wellbeing	
	Item wording	Loading	Item wording	Loading	Item wording	Loading
Eigenvalue	2.380		3.925		2.046	
% Variance	59.510		39.252		34.099	
Alpha	0.766		0.848		0.736	

2021; Yu et al., 2020). Furthermore, satisfaction with personal health has long been understood as a prerequisite for subjective wellbeing (e.g., Mouratidis, 2021).

These covariates were operationalized using single-item measures. The demographic variables included age (measured in years) and gender (binary-coded). Educational achievement was captured through two dummy-coded variables, categorized as upper secondary or post-secondary education, and tertiary education, with the "lower secondary or below" category serving as the reference category. Economic circumstances were represented by equivalised household income quintiles. To account for recent financial changes, we incorporated a binary indicator denoting respondents who reported a deterioration in their financial situation over the preceding 12 months. Lastly, we used a single Likert-type item to measure subjective health.

Given the fact that we are using the EQOLS survey, the inclusion of selected dimensions of the constructs involved in our model was restricted by data availability. We address this issue in Study Limitations in the Discussion section.

Analysis Strategy

We used multi-level modeling to account for the nested structure of the dataset, which is appropriate for situations where data points are grouped, such as within countries. This method allows for the analysis of variable relationships while accounting for the clustered nature of the data (Finch et al., 2019). Our analysis was conducted using Bayesian estimation in Mplus, with uninformative priors to reflect the lack of prior definitive parameter values, ensuring that the results are largely data-driven (Depaoli & van de Schoot, 2017). We ran two Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulations, each consisting of 20,000 iterations using the GIBBS (PX1) algorithm, with the first 10,000 iterations discarded as burn-in. A thinning interval of 10 was used. A random intercept model without group-level covariates was used, with predictor variables centered around their group means, except for binary variables (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). The Bayesian estimator uses all available information to optimize data use and statistical power, similar to full information maximum likelihood estimation, thus including cases with partially missing data.

To assess model convergence, we applied the potential scale reduction factor (PSRF) and reviewed trace and autocorrelation plots (Brooks & Gelman, 1998). The largest PSRF across all parameters of the model was 1.001, indicating that convergence was achieved. Trace and autocorrelation plots confirmed proper chain mixing, indicating that the MCMC samples adequately represented the posterior distribution. Model fit was assessed using the posterior predictive p-value, which was 0.514, indicating an adequate fit (Kruschke & Liddell, 2018). In the Bayesian framework, credible intervals are used to infer statistical significance, which encompass the range of likely values for an effect based on the posterior distribution. An effect is considered significant if its credible interval excludes zero. This method calculates the posterior distribution of indirect effects, eliminating the need for bootstrapping procedures common in frequentist approaches (Miočević et al., 2018). The MCMC simulations

generate samples from the joint posterior distribution of model parameters, allowing for the calculation of indirect effects and their credible intervals as well.

Results

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for the study's focal variables, all of which demonstrated significant associations in the expected directions. To examine the relationships between our primary predictor (work-life conflict), the serial mediators of family wellbeing, work wellbeing, and subjective well-being, controlling for the covariates (age, gender, education, income, financial situation, and personal health), we employed Bayesian random intercept multi-level modeling. Table 4 presents both standardized and unstandardized parameter estimates of interest. The correlation between work and family wellbeing was 0.303 (credible interval: 0.290–0.316).

H1 states that individuals' perceived family wellbeing and work wellbeing is a negative function of their perception of work-life conflict (H1a: effect of work-life conflict on one's family wellbeing; H1b: effect of work-life conflict on one's work wellbeing). The results reveal that work-life conflict exhibited significant negative associations with both family (R^2 for family wellbeing = 6%) and work wellbeing (R^2 for work wellbeing = 12%), supporting H1.

H2 states that individuals' subjective wellbeing outcomes are a negative function of their perception of work-life conflict (H2a: effect of work-life conflict on one's subjective wellbeing; H2b: effect of work-life conflict on one's eudaimonic wellbeing). The results reveal that work-life conflict exhibited significant negative associations with both subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing, supporting H2.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 focus on the mediation effects: how individuals' perceived family wellbeing mediates the effect of work-life conflict on their subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing (H3), and how individuals' perceived work wellbeing mediates the effect of work-life conflict on their subjective wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing (H4). The results also reveal that both mediators significantly and positively predicted subjective wellbeing (R^2 for subjective wellbeing = 36%) and eudaimonic wellbeing (R^2 for eudaimonic wellbeing = 32%). Several covariates also emerged as significant predictors of both outcomes and mediators, as shown in Table 4. To assess the hypothesized serial mediation effects, we conducted analyses of two indirect pathways, the results of which are presented in Table 5. Both indirect

Table 3 Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Work-life conflict	1				
2. Family wellbeing	−0.213	1			
3. Work wellbeing	−0.296	0.373	1		
4. Subjective wellbeing	−0.400	0.403	0.395	1	
5. Eudaimonic wellbeing	−0.317	0.344	0.377	0.507	1

All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$

Table 4 Parameter estimates

Predictor	Outcome	Unstandardized	95% Credible interval			Standardized
			Low	Up	Sig	
SWB →	EWB	0.286	0.268	0.303	*	0.309
Family wellbeing →	EWB	0.048	0.040	0.055	*	0.108
Work wellbeing →	EWB	0.057	0.050	0.064	*	0.139
Work-life conflict →	EWB	−0.071	−0.087	−0.056	*	−0.081
Female →	EWB	0.048	0.021	0.074	*	0.029
Age →	EWB	−0.007	−0.008	−0.005	*	−0.093
Health →	EWB	0.074	0.055	0.093	*	0.068
Upper secondary →	EWB	0.054	0.017	0.093	*	0.033
Tertiary →	EWB	0.141	0.101	0.183	*	0.081
Financial situation →	EWB	−0.120	−0.154	−0.086	*	−0.055
Income →	EWB	0.029	0.015	0.043	*	0.036
Family wellbeing →	SWB	0.108	0.102	0.114	*	0.227
Work wellbeing →	SWB	0.075	0.069	0.081	*	0.168
Work-life conflict →	SWB	−0.208	−0.220	−0.196	*	−0.218
Female →	SWB	−0.072	−0.094	−0.050	*	−0.040
Age →	SWB	0.000	−0.001	0.001		−0.006
Health →	SWB	0.320	0.304	0.335	*	0.269
Upper secondary →	SWB	0.049	0.018	0.080	*	0.027
Tertiary →	SWB	0.015	−0.019	0.048		0.008
Financial situation →	SWB	−0.170	−0.199	−0.141	*	−0.072
Income →	SWB	0.024	0.013	0.036	*	0.028
Work-life conflict →	FWB	−0.306	−0.336	−0.276	*	−0.153
Female →	FWB	0.114	0.059	0.168	*	0.030
Age →	FWB	−0.002	−0.004	0.001		−0.010
Health →	FWB	0.323	0.284	0.360	*	0.129
Upper secondary →	FWB	0.055	−0.024	0.133		0.014
Tertiary →	FWB	0.171	0.086	0.255	*	0.043
Financial situation →	FWB	−0.247	−0.319	−0.173	*	−0.050
Income →	FWB	0.059	0.029	0.089	*	0.033
Work-life conflict →	WWB	−0.459	−0.490	−0.428	*	−0.214
Female →	WWB	0.084	0.027	0.140	*	0.021
Age →	WWB	0.006	0.003	0.008	*	0.032
Health →	WWB	0.371	0.331	0.412	*	0.139
Upper secondary →	WWB	0.194	0.114	0.275	*	0.048
Tertiary →	WWB	0.471	0.383	0.559	*	0.111
Financial situation →	WWB	−0.524	−0.600	−0.448	*	−0.098
Income →	WWB	0.131	0.100	0.163	*	0.067

SWB = subjective wellbeing, *EWB* = eudaimonic wellbeing, *FWB* = family wellbeing. *WWB* = work wellbeing, Point estimate = median

The presence of an asterisk for an effect denotes that the associated 95% credible interval does not contain zero, thereby signifying a statistically significant effect

Table 5 Indirect effects from work-family conflict to eudaimonic wellbeing

	Indirect effect	95% Credible interval		
		Low	Up	Sig
Work-life conflict → Family wellbeing → Subjective wellbeing → Eudaimonic wellbeing	−0.009	−0.011	−0.008	*
Work-life conflict → Work wellbeing → Subjective wellbeing → Eudaimonic wellbeing	−0.010	−0.011	−0.009	*

Significant indirect effects are indicated with an asterisk

effects were statistically significant, indicating that work-life conflict has a negative impact on eudaimonic well-being by adversely affecting both family and work well-being, leading to reduced subjective well-being. These findings provide support for hypotheses H3 and H4.

H5 states that one's eudaimonic wellbeing is a positive function of their subjective wellbeing. The results reveal that one's subjective wellbeing significantly contributes to eudaimonic wellbeing.

Sensitivity Analyses

To validate the robustness of our findings, we randomly split the sample into two subsets of approximately equal sizes, with each subset containing about 50% of the participants within each nation. By testing our model separately in each subset, we aimed to ensure that the results were not driven by sample-specific characteristics or biases, and that our results are generalizable. The parameter estimates for each subset are reported in the supplementary material. The results across the two subsets were remarkably consistent with each other and with the main analysis, providing strong evidence for the reliability of our findings. Notably, the indirect effects were significant in both subsets.

In addition, we conducted a separate analysis to investigate the impact of extreme scores on our results. We excluded 403 participants who had a work-life conflict score higher than 2 standard deviations above the mean, as these outliers may have influenced the estimates. The results are shown in the supplementary material, and were almost identical to the main model, with the indirect effects remaining significant. This suggests that our findings are robust to the presence of extreme scores on conflict. Table 6 presents the R-squared values from all models tested in this study, which are highly similar across the different analyses. This consistency provides further evidence for the stability and generalizability of our results. Notably, while the overall patterns were consistent, there were some minor differences, primarily related to small demographic effects, rather than the focal variables of the study. The consistent results across the different analyses suggest that our conclusions are not driven by sample-specific characteristics or biases, but rather reflect a general pattern in the data.

Table 6 R-Squared values across models

Variable	Whole sample	Subset 1	Subset 2	Extreme scores on work-life conflict removed
Family wellbeing	0.062	0.055	0.072	0.059
Work wellbeing	0.122	0.112	0.135	0.110
Subjective wellbeing	0.358	0.348	0.370	0.346
Eudaimonic wellbeing	0.317	0.304	0.334	0.312

Discussion

Our analysis yielded several key findings that shed light on the relationships between work-life conflict and various dimensions of well-being. First, we observed significant negative correlations between work-life conflict and both family and work well-being. Second, work-life conflict showed direct negative associations with subjective and eudaimonic well-being, supporting our hypotheses about its broad impact on overall quality of life. Third, our mediation analyses revealed that family and work well-being serve as significant intermediaries in the relationship between work-life conflict and broader well-being outcomes. Specifically, work-life conflict indirectly affected eudaimonic well-being through its effects on domain-specific satisfaction and subjective well-being. The model accounted for 36% of the variance in subjective well-being and 32% of the variance in eudaimonic well-being. Finally, we found a strong positive relationship between subjective well-being and eudaimonic well-being, suggesting a strong link between life satisfaction and a sense of purpose or self-actualization. These results were held even after controlling for various demographic and socioeconomic factors, indicating the robustness of the observed relationships across different population segments. Our study provides compelling evidence for the complex relationships between work-life conflict and multiple dimensions of well-being (cf. Allen & French, 2023; Allen et al., 2000). The findings underscore the pervasive impact of work-life conflict on individuals' overall quality of life, which extends beyond the immediate domains of work and family. Our results show that work-life conflict not only directly reduces domain-specific satisfaction (family and work well-being), but also exerts a broader influence on subjective and eudaimonic well-being. The serial mediation model we proposed and tested provides a nuanced understanding of how these effects unfold. Specifically, work-life conflict appears to undermine both family and work well-being, which in turn leads to lower subjective well-being. This adverse effect ultimately impacts eudaimonic well-being, suggesting that the effects of work-life conflict extend to individuals' sense of purpose, personal growth, and self-actualization. These findings are consistent with and extend previous research on the far-reaching consequences of work-life imbalance, emphasizing the interconnectedness of different facets of well-being. In addition, our study highlights the critical role of subjective well-being as a bridge between domain-specific satisfaction and eudaimonic well-being, reinforcing

the idea that overall life satisfaction is instrumental in achieving a sense of meaning and fulfillment (e.g., Joshanloo, 2015, 2021; Sirgy, 2019, 2020).

Policy Implications

As such, our study findings highlight the importance of work-life conflict on three major wellbeing outcomes, namely satisfaction in both family and work life, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing. Because of the significant effects of work-life conflict on personal wellbeing, organizations should take these findings to heart and assess the extent to which their work-life balance policies and programs are effective in reducing work-life conflict. Organizational assessment of work-life conflict can identify policies and programs that are effective and those that are not effective. As such, effective policies and programs should be strengthened, while ineffective ones should be revised or revisited. This assessment should be conducted periodically to monitor the health and safety of employees. Furthermore, public policy officials should do the same. That is, social surveys should be conducted periodically to assess work-life conflict of various population segments in each country (women employees, parents with small children, employees who take care of their elderly parents, employees who provide care for disabled family members, etc.). Specific policies can be developed to address organizational strengths and weaknesses in reducing employee work-life conflict (Sirgy & Lee, 2018, 2023). Policies that can reduce work-life conflict may include organizational programs related to workload management practices, flextime practices, flexplace practices, alternative job arrangements, and family care practices (Lee & Sirgy, 2024).

Study Limitations and Future Research

With respect to study limitations and future research, we have to acknowledge that the measures used have limitations. We know very little about the reliability and validity of the measures. Future research should be conducted to test the reliability and validity of all the measures pertaining to the constructs we used in our theoretical model, namely work-life conflict, family wellbeing, work wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonia.

Of course, the issue of causality must be addressed. Our model is based on the theoretical notion of bottom-up spillover, a theory well-established in quality-of-life studies (e.g., Andrew & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Diener, 1984). The basic premise of the theory is the trickle of affect from concrete state of affairs to more abstract states. This abstract concept, in turn, influences the most abstract concepts of life satisfaction and affective wellbeing (i.e., bottom-up spillover). In other words, events related to work-life conflict can be viewed as concrete situations causing dissatisfaction in both work life and family life. The negative feelings associated with these events adversely influence overall feelings in both work life and family life (i.e., domain satisfaction). Satisfaction of both work life and family life, in turn, influence subjective wellbeing overall. Subjective wellbeing, a state that is

not micro, neither macro (i.e., meso state), influences the most macro state of eudaimonia in a bottom-up process chain.

Contrary to the bottom-up spillover theory, one could also argue that wellbeing outcomes (domain satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing) could affect individuals' perceptions of work-life conflict based on the top-down theory of wellbeing (Brief et al., 1993; Feist et al., 1995; Headey et al., 1991; Nakazato et al., 2011). For example, one's subjective wellbeing can influence one's evaluations of events perceived as work-life conflict. Despite the possibility of reverse causation, we have to keep in mind that the bottom-up model is much more conducive to identifying means of interventions to reduce work-life conflict. The top-down model fails to help in suggesting strategies to reduce work-life conflict. With this said, future studies could compare the relative predictive power of the two models in relation to work-life conflict.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex interplay between work-life conflict and multidimensional wellbeing outcomes. By empirically validating a comprehensive model that links work-life conflict to family wellbeing, work wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, and eudaimonic wellbeing, we have shed light on the far-reaching consequences of work-life imbalance. Our findings underscore the critical importance of addressing work-life conflict not only as an organizational issue, but also as a matter of public health and societal wellbeing. The negative effects resulting from work-life conflict highlight the need for holistic approaches in both organizational policies and public initiatives. Future research should explore interventions aimed at mitigating work-life conflict and their potential to enhance different aspects of wellbeing. In addition, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of persistent work-life conflict on individual and societal outcomes. As the work environment continues to evolve, particularly in the wake of global changes in work structures, understanding and addressing work-life conflict remains critical to fostering a healthier, more satisfied and productive workforce. Ultimately, our study calls for a renewed focus on creating work environments and societal structures that support the harmonious integration of work and personal life, thereby promoting comprehensive wellbeing across multiple life domains.

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Data Availability The data used in this study are publicly available and can be obtained from https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-Series-200013.

Declarations

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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