

Work-Family Interface: A Study with Municipal Public Servants

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Abstract: This study investigated the work-family interface in public servants from an upcountry city northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, theoretically characterizing the perspectives of conciliation and conflict present in the phenomenon, as well as the characteristics of bidirectional interference. A quantitative survey was carried out with 58 municipal civil servants. To characterize the sample, a sociodemographic data questionnaire was applied, followed by the Work-Family Conflict Interface (WFCI) and Work-Family Positive Interface (WFPI) scales. Data were submitted to descriptive statistical analysis and comparison of group means. The findings reinforced the importance of the family as the primary sphere of recognition and support in reconciling the interface. It was also noted that in home-office and with higher family income, older workers demonstrate an increase in the scores of the positive interface of work- family.

Keywords: Work-Family, Conflict, Conciliation.

Interface trabalho–família: um estudo com servidores públicos municipais

Resumo: O presente estudo investigou a interface trabalho-família em Servidores Públicos de um município do noroeste do estado do Rio Grande do Sul, caracterizando teoricamente as perspectivas de conciliação e de conflito presentes no fenômeno, bem como as características de interferência bidirecional. Foi realizada uma pesquisa quantitativa, com 58 servidores públicos municipais, em que se aplicou um questionário de dados sociodemográficos, para caracterização da amostra, e as escalas Interface Conflito Trabalho-Família (ICTF) e Interface Positiva Trabalho-Família (IPTF). Os dados foram submetidos à análise estatística descritiva e de comparação de médias de grupos. Os achados reforçaram a importância da família como esfera primária de reconhecimento e apoio na conciliação da interface, bem como notou-se que trabalhadores com mais idade, em home-office e com maior renda familiar, demonstram aumento nos escores da interface positiva do trabalho-família.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho-Família, Conflito, Conciliação.

Introduction

It is in the different social dimensions - such as the family, group of friends, work, school, institutions, and the community - that individuals get organized and relate to each other from the moment they are born until their death. These dimensions have their own functioning and require different attitudes and feelings (Walsh, 2016). The patterns of behavior established in these contexts constitute the social roles played throughout life (Hahn & Strücker, 2019; Maia, Alloufa & Araújo, 2015; Novaes, 2018), which interact in constituting and allowing the manifestation of social identity (Goulart

Júnior, Feijó, Cunha, Corrêa, & Gouveia, 2013). The balance between the requirements of each role is fundamental, and, when achieved, it allows for maintaining a productive pattern in the various social dimensions in which the individual circulates (Goulart Júnior et al., 2013; Teixeira & Nascimento, 2011). This balance is achieved when there is a high level of involvement and a low level of conflict between the roles adopted, such as professional and personal ones (Medeiros, Aguiar, & Barham, 2017; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Two social dimensions that influence the formation of subjectivity, identity, and social constitution and are studied by different areas of knowledge are family and work (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018b; Borsa, & Nunes, 2011; Maia e al., 2015; Neves, Nascimento, Felix Junior, Silva & Andrad, 2018). Work is characterized as a practice of material and intellectual production of human beings (Neves et al., 2018). The perspective of the centrality of the work considers it an important area in the lives of individuals, since, through it, personal, professional, and financial needs are met.

In turn, family - the primary dimension - was understood as a group of people related by blood or alliance until the mid-1960s when historical, sociocultural, demographic, and economic changes emerged in society (Borsa & Nunes, 2011; Feijó, Goulart Junior, Nascimento, & Nascimento, 2017; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2016). Thus, the term “families” is used to define couples with the same biological sex and new family configurations, characterized by divorces, remarriages, couples with or without children, single parenthood, and increased participation of grandparents in raising grandchildren, among other realities (Walsh, 2016).

The work-family interface phenomenon comprises the relationships between these two dimensions – work and family – and has two perspectives of understanding: as a conflict, it refers to factors that cause an imbalance between professional and family life; the conciliation approach (or positive interface) corresponds to the positive influences of work on the family or of the family on work (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018a). An important aspect of these approaches is the understanding of the bi-directionality of the phenomenon, i.e., individual/family experiences affect work activities and vice versa (Aguiar & Bastos, 2017).

Some of the factors that contribute to the balance or imbalance in the work-family interface are the demands for an investment of time and physical and emotional resources at work, the (in)compatibility of professional and family values, the

time dedicated to personal responsibilities and marital and/or parental stress (Bandeira, Ferreira & Cabral, 2019; Mendonça & Matos, 2015). The imbalance in family and professional roles can cause conflicts in these dimensions (Matias, Andrade, & Fontaine, 2011; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

The management of the demands and demands from work and family is common to various professional collectives, such as public servants, who work at public institutions which, by the nature of their functions, meet social demands (Albrecht & Krawulsk, 2011; Ribeiro & Mancebo, 2013). The Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil states that public servants are individuals who occupy public positions, whether of effective attribution, commission positions, political agents, or temporary contracts, under a Consolidation of Labor Laws (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho - CLT) regime (Brasil, 1990). The work regime is based on a statute that defines the attributions to be performed within the public service or with its own law to regulate its work (Albrecht & Krawulsk, 2011).

Understanding the perceptions of civil servants about the work-family interface contributes to the identification of conciliation strategies and the minimization of conflicts for these workers. Also, studying the processes and characteristics of individuals' life dimensions means contributing to the development of knowledge about human beings, based on the assumption that work and family have complex and specific forms of manifestation. Through research, it becomes possible to generate information that subsidizes new forms of work organization that value the balance between those spheres, thus generating benefits to the researched public. Therefore, this study investigated the work-family interface among public servants of an upcountry city northwest of Rio Grande do Sul, theoretically characterizing the perspectives of conciliation and conflict present in the phenomenon and the characteristics of bidirectional interference.

Method

This is a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research, with the participation of 58 municipal public servants from an upcountry city northwest of Rio Grande do Sul. The requirements for participation were that these workers should be municipal public servants, have been working in the public sector for at least six months, have an employment contract that is characterized as a public service, have an

active family bond or relationship that configures a family system, and accept to participate spontaneously and voluntarily in the study. Exclusion criteria were retired servants, on leave or discharged from their positions, underage, and participants without access to the internet and electronic means. The non-probabilistic sample was obtained by convenience and using the Snowball technique.

Instruments

To collect data, we used three instruments: (1) a *socio-demographic data questionnaire* - built for this research to collect information about the participants, containing questions about personal, socioeconomic, and professional data; (2) a *Work-Family Conflict Scale - WFCS* (Aguiar, 2016) consisting of 16 items divided into two factors (work in the family - $\alpha= 0.85$ and family at work - $\alpha=0.80$) that bidirectionally assess conflict through understanding the dimensions of time, behavior and tension; (3) *Work and Family Positive Interface Scale – WFPTS*: (Aguiar, 2016), consisting of 19 items divided into two factors (family at work - $\alpha=0.87$ and work in the family - $\alpha=0.90$) which bidirectionally assess the interfaces of work and family. The options for answering both scales were of the Likert type and assessed the degree of compliance with the item, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree.

Procedures

Complying with resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council, data collection began after approval of the project by the Committee of Ethics and Research with Human Beings - n. 4.201.804 -, from an invitation sent by email and social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram) to municipal public servants known to the researchers. Data collection was done in 2020, marked by the beginning of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), had its first case confirmed in Brazil on February 26, 2020 (Croda & Garcia, 2020). Data collection started on August 20, 2020, when, clicking on the invitation, the participant was directed to a page on the Google Forms platform, which contained all the information about the research and the Informed Consent Form (ICF), in addition to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only after accepting the ICF and checking each inclusion and exclusion criteria was the participant directed to the instruments. The collected data were submitted to descriptive statistical analysis and comparison between the means of the variables with non-parametric tests (significance level of 95%) to

verify the results of the factors that influence the work-family interface in the levels of conciliation and of conflict.

Results and Discussion

Initially, it is important to present the characterization of the participants of this study, illustrated in Table 1. The participants worked for the city's municipality. Our research included employees of the executive branches (city hall) and the legislative branch (city chamber).

Table 1
Descriptive analysis of sociodemographic variables obtained in the questionnaire.

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Biological sex	Male	17	29.3
	Female	41	70.7
Age	18 to 37 years old	22	38
	38 to 47 years old	23	39.7
	48 to 67 years old	13	22.4
Marital Status	Stable relationship	44	75.9
	No stable relationship	14	24.1
Education	Completed High School	11	19
	Higher Education/Technical School	23	39.6
	Postgraduation	24	41.4
Children	He/she has children	37	63.8
	He/she does not have children	21	36.2
Monthly Family Income	Up to BRL 4,000.00	18	25.9
	From BRL 5,000.00 to BRL 8,000.00	19	32.8
	More than BRL 9,000.00	21	36.2
Actuation power	Executive Branch (City Hall)	44	75.9
	Legislative Branch (City Chamber)	14	24.1
Work Contract	Effective	46	79.3
	Non-effective	12	20.6
Workload	Up to 39 hours per week	32	55
	40 hours per week	26	44.8
Current work method	Work from home	11	19
	In-person	47	81.1

Note: the categories with a frequency equal to 0 were deleted from the table.

Research and interventions on the work-family interface consider the possibilities of relationship and interaction between these individuals' vital dimensions. This phenomenon evaluates the influence of these areas in a bidirectional way (both work in the family and family at work), and a relationship of conflict or conciliation can be established between them (Aguiar & Bastos, 2017; 2018a; Teixeira & Nascimento, 2011). Among the factors of the two scales applied - which measure conflicts and positive interface -, the one that obtained the highest degree of agreement in the sample was the Family-Work Positive Interface - FWPI (M=4.74; SD=1.26), which describes the positive impacts that the family has on work and its influences on the behavior of individuals regarding the role played at work (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018b; Moser & Dal Prá, 2016) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of conflict factors and positive interface

Scale	Factors	Min	Max	M	SD
Work-Family Conflict Scale (WFCS)	Family-work conflict FWCI	1	3	1.84	0.68
	Work-family conflict WFCI	1	5	2.86	1.20
Work-Family Positive Interface Scale (WFPIS)	Work-family positive WFPI	1	6	4.07	1.31
	Family-work positive FWPI	1	6	4.74	1.26

Note: Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Similar results were found in the research by Aguiar and Bastos (2017) with 446 workers from different occupations and organizations in which the FWPI factors obtained a higher mean than the Work-Family Positive Interface (WFPI). These results reinforced the importance of adequate family and occupational insertion, and feeling engaged within the family improves work balance and enables the development of behaviors and feelings capable of dealing with conflict. Regarding the positive items, the one with the highest score was the family-work factor (M = 4.74) and the one with the lowest score was work-family (M = 4.07).

The result that the FWPI factor obtained is strengthened when evaluating that the lowest average was in the Family-Work Conflict factor (M=1.84; SD= 0.68), which also presented the three (disagree a little) as the maximum value among the participants' answers, indicating homogeneity in the answers to its items, which remained at some level of disagreement. This factor has statements that point out that aspects of the family are capable of generating incompatibilities at work (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018b).

The items that make up the WFPI factor describe the positive influence that the work plays on the family, demonstrating that some behaviors adopted by individuals in their work context can lead to the reconciliation of these spheres (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018a; Moser & Dal Prá, 2016). Factors such as compliance with responsibilities, mood, values, skills, and involvement at work are responsible for enabling the positive interference of work on the family (Fiorini, Moré, & Bardagi, 2017; Walsh, 2016).

Specifically, *item 5* of this factor, referent to the use of behaviors learned at work capable of helping with family responsibilities, obtained the lowest average ($M=3.79$; $SD= 1.39$). On the other hand, *item 6* had a higher average ($M=4.66$; $SD= 1.39$) and refers, in particular, to the help that the use of professional skills can bring to the family environment. Skills such as teamwork, the perception of the others as different, engagement with the organization, and values learned at work can contribute to family issues (Aguiar, 2016; Goulart Júnior et al., 2013). The report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2016) on the future of work states that knowing how to work with people, problem solving, emotional intelligence, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility are among the important skills today to develop work activities within organizations.

The items that make up the factor called Family-Work Positive Interface (FWPI) refer to behaviors, beliefs, levels of involvement, attitudes and moods, which positively influence the family role in work (Aguiar & Bastos, 2018a). The influence of family in one's professional life starts from an early age. The professional insertion of young people in the labor market suffers a positive influence when they have the support of their family, providing more confidence and consequently more independence. This helps them in the future in the development of reconciliation strategies between family and work (Fiorini et al., 2017; Teixeira, & Nascimento, 2011).

The items that make up the Work-Family Conflict Interference (WFCI) factor indicate the influence of conflict when performed from work to the family, which demonstrates that some behaviors performed at work do not contribute to being a better family member. Excessive time invested in work activities and physical and mental fatigue are examples of aspects that generate conflict between the interface. The conflict originated at work may be associated with the lack of help from the immediate superior and this has repercussions on the professional career. The feeling of lack of support reflects on behavior within the family environment, as it involves concerns and insecurities with

work that end up influencing the individual in the family (Medeiros et al., 2017; Aguiar, 2016; Bandeira et al., 2019; Fiorini et al., 2017).

Dalcin and Carlotto's (2018) study with civil servants in the education sector reinforces that occupational stress is one of the elements that generate damage in the various aspects of these individuals' lives, directly impacting the quality of family relationships. This aspect is corroborated with data obtained in this study that indicate that respondents perceive that, at times, the pressures suffered in the work environment produce stress and interfere with the performance of activities they like when they are at home.

The items of the Family-Work Conflict Interference (FWCI) factor have statements that discuss the lack of investment in work and the centralization of attention in the family, making it difficult to fulfil work tasks. Family stress and unsuccessful attempts to solve problems at work are seen as factors that cause conflict (Bandeira et al., 2019; Feijó et al., 2017). Data from this study inform that participants do not fail to fulfil their work assignments and tasks due to family responsibilities (*Item 7* $M=1.43$), and participants disagree that behaviors used in their family environment do not contribute to their work performance (*Item 15* $M= 2.29$).

Variables such as gender, age, children, family adequacy, position, organizational support, and workload need to be taken into account, as they have direct interference in behavior and attribution of labor meanings (Aguiar & Bastos, 2017; Neves et al., 2018). By relating the results to the sociodemographic variables of the sample, some inferences are possible. The analyses performed to compare averages between the groups considering biological sex, marital status, workload, employment contract, education, acting power, and having or not having dependents and children did not present statistically significant differences.

Literature generally reveals that women present greater work-family and family-work conflicts as they usually have double (or triple) working hours. It also happens due to several other sociocultural factors, such as difficulties of insertion in the labor market, the hierarchical position within organizations (administration, management, leadership, etc.) and the decentralization of the role of the family provider in relation to biological sex (Borsa, & Nunes, 2011; Hahn & Strücker, 2019; Matias et al., 2011). The counterpoint on the difference in influences in relation to biological sex is reinforced by the idea that married men and men with children are more inclined to

commitment and conciliation at work and in the family, while for women, marriage and children often end up causing difficulties in conciling the two dimensions (Borsa & Nunes, 2011). Despite social changes in relation to sex, it is still possible to identify attributions of domestic tasks to the role of the woman and mother, such as child care and home. On the other hand, the man's role is expected socially as the provider for the family, which strongly connects with the patriarchal model of society (Borsa & Nunes, 2011; Moser & Dal Prá, 2016).

Despite the literature data, this relationship was not perceived in this research (work-family conflict, $U=247.0$; family-work conflict, $U=313.5$; work-family conciliation, $U=342.0$; family-work conciliation, $U=250.0$; $p>.05$), in which the sample was predominantly composed of women (70.7%). One of the possible explanations is that the stability of an effective public servant (79.3%) gives them greater job security and permanence at work, being organized differently from other segments, especially when compared to the reality and requirements of private companies, which have more rigid organizational processes (Matias et al., 2011; Novaes, 2018; Ribeiro & Mancebo, 2013), for example, about compliance with fixed schedules. People interested in joining the public service highlight security and stability issues guaranteed by law (Brazil, 1990) as one of the preference factors, considering the instability of a position in a private company and the context of uncertainties of the current labor market (Albrecht & Krawulsk, 2011).

Another data was related to marital status. Most of the sample declared to be in a stable relationship (75.9%). Although this was not statistically significant in the analyses performed (work-family conflict, $U=282.0$; family-work conflict, $U=289.0$; work-family conciliation, $U=296.5$; family-work conciliation, $U=272.0$; $p>.05$), this result allows us to think that having a partner can facilitate the conciliation of family and work demands, i.e., providing support with family demands contributes to the balance of responsibilities at work. The research by Mendonça and Matos (2015) brings the testimony of eight couples who claimed to better conciliate personal and professional demands from the moment they built an idea of growth as a couple, investing in the family and children.

On the other hand, we verified differences in relation to the participants' family income, indicating that those with higher monthly income tend to perceive a greater positive influence of the family at work ($p 0.009$). This result differs from those found in the

literature in general (Hahn & Strücker, 2019; Walsh, 2016), which suggests that one of the determining factors of family-work conciliation would not be gender, but rather the wage disparity, since studies relate the wage differences between genders and the impacts of this difference on various aspects of life (Borsa & Nunes, 2011; Hahn & Strücker, 2019).

The modality of working from home has been around for a long time. Despite this, many people have had to quickly adapt to this form of work due to the security context in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, we observed the effects of the current form of work - face-to-face or working from home - on the Work-Family Conflict factor ($U=124.00$; $p < 0.05$) - workers who work from home perceive higher levels of work-family conflict than in face-to-face work -, but this relationship did not affect the other elements. Working from home requires distinct patterns of behavior and organization from those required in conventional, face-to-face work because, in this modality, new external stimuli are inserted to work, such as family members, the environment, and the differentiated routine (Bohler, 2019; Feijó et al., 2017). When individuals cannot reconcile these new stimuli, there are conflicts within the social dimensions - work and family - as verified in the results of this research.

Even though working from home is a form of work organization that precedes the pandemic, this modality has been associated with current events. As a result of adapting to a new structure of life in society, knowledge about new forms of work organization emerges (Rocha & Amador, 2018). Previously, “teleworking” had as an objective to reduce the tension of the work environment and generate more productivity for the worker, and today, it was adopted by many institutions as a social protection measure, seeking to reduce the number of people affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic (Lizote, Teston, Régis & Monteiro, 2021). However, despite having plausible justifications for this choice, this type of work organization may aggravate conflicts in the work-family interface, as evidenced by this study.

Age effects on Work-Family Conflict ($X^2(2) = 10.333$; $p < 0.05$) and Family-Work Conflict ($X^2(2) = 7.728$; $p < 0.05$) were identified. The *post-hoc* comparisons showed that younger people (ages 18-37) perceive more conflict between work and family spheres in a bidirectional way. This result corroborates the idea that the greater the age and experience, the better developed the coping strategies that enable the individual to better reconcile their dimensions and social roles (WEF, 2016). In

addition, this result can be interpreted from generational studies, since individuals from generations Y and Z – corresponding to ages 18 to 37 in this study – find it more difficult to reconcile work and family, since they tend to question more values and social and/or family rules (Novaes, 2018).

Final considerations

This research investigated the positive and conflicting perspectives of the work and family interface of public servants from an upcountry city northwest of Rio Grande do Sul. The findings reinforced the importance of the family as the primary sphere of recognition and support to reconcile the interface between work and family. We expected that the perspective of conflict would be more evident and, possibly, obtained higher scores in the instruments used, mainly due to the indications of the literature review carried out and the current scenario of the new Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), but the results indicated that the behaviors learned in the family and their role as support contributed to professional development and work performance. In this study, two aspects stand out. First, it suggests that having a partner (based on the idea of mutual help as a couple) and, second, being a public servant (with a differentiated work regime in terms of organization, structure, and functioning) seem to facilitate the conciliation between the dimensions. It was evident that the possible differences between genders found in other studies may be linked to the lower income of the female share, more than the difference between genders in fact.

The research had theoretical, practical, and social implications. For Psychology, it enabled a greater understanding of aspects related to the positive and conflict perspectives present in the work-family interface, in particular, with empirical subsidies referring to the work context of municipal public servants. With that, it allowed reflections on the possible interventions and actions of Psychology, as a science and profession, to minimize the probable repercussions of the conflict between those spheres and boost the positive factors. For the servants, as participants, the research enabled a reflection on the theme, fostering knowledge and the construction of behavioral practices to maintain conciliation in the interface of work and family.

Among the limitations, we noticed that there was little participation of public servants, a factor that may be directly related to the current moment experienced – the

pandemic -, thinking that many were working from home, making it impossible to go to the working place for an in-person collection. There is also a second point to be considered. The study was carried out during an election year and therefore, there was no direct contact with the institutions (city hall and city chamber). Finally, we suggest further studies to compare effective public servants with commissioned positions and other types of contracts, and comparisons with employees of private institutions and the public service to investigate the specificities of the organization of work and actions that can be carried out to facilitate reconciliation for the worker.

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