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Combination Pressure

The Paid Work–Family Balance of Men and Women in European Countries

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abstract: People today lead busy, hurried lives with competing time claims between the spheres of paid work and the household. The aim of this article is to provide more insight into the way men and women experience the multiple claims on their time and to attempt to understand the differences between European countries in this respect. Are we able to draw a sharp line in the work–family balance experienced in eastern and western Europe? Expectations are formulated at the individual level (work and home-related factors) and at the contextual level (gender culture and family policy). Data were gathered in 2001 within the international research programme ‘Households, Work and Flexibility’, financed by the European Union. The eight countries included in the analyses are Sweden, the Netherlands, UK, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria, and hypotheses are tested using multivariate regression analyses. At the contextual level, results reflect more support for the gender culture hypothesis than for the family friendly policy hypothesis. The multiplicity of options in western European countries due to the emancipation process causes time pressure. Individual factors are especially important in explaining combination pressure in the three western European countries: long working hours, overtime work, demanding job and having young children all add to the pressure men and women experience.

keywords: care ♦ European countries ♦ family friendly policy ♦ households ♦ paid work ♦ work–family balance

Introduction

Today, all kinds of people are busy and feel hurried (Gleick, 1999). Because in many households both partners have a paid job, even though they have young children, they are in a continual process of balancing work and family life. Employers seem to be demanding increasing commitment from their employees, and working overtime has become a common phenomenon in a number of professions. In her study entitled ‘The Overworked American’, Schor (1992) demonstrates that citizens of the United States face serious distortions in the

allocation of time between paid work and the private sphere. Hochschild (1997) argues that in the US work has become home and home has become work. But it is also believed that the 'stress' society is no longer a truly US phenomenon (Schor, 1998).

In western parts of Europe at least, men and women are increasingly experiencing time pressure (Peters, 2000; Allan and Grow, 2001; Garhammer, 2002). Although Gershuny (2000) argues that over the past 50 years there has been an increase in the amount of time spent on leisure in western societies, it feels as if we are actually running out of time. Working partners have to make the most they can from their time and more and more time pressure is the result (Lewis and Cooper, 1989; White et al., 1992): some feel tired, stressed and complain about burn out. When the job cannot be finished at the office, and work has to be taken home, feelings of this nature may be the result. It is argued here that the combination of two structurally conflicting spheres causes time pressure (Beck, 1992; Schor, 1998).

We do not know whether the same story is true for the eastern part of Europe. It might be that we are witnessing a typical western phenomenon; feeling stressed might be related to the fact that men and women explicitly strive for double career families. It is true, however, that in the former communist regimes women had full-time paid jobs and, because of the household's obligations, were at least as busy as their western counterparts (Van der Lippe, 2001). Still, women were in paid work more out of economic necessity than on the grounds of ideology, which was a situation unlikely to have led to conflicting options. Nowadays, many eastern European women continue to have full-time paid jobs. Men, although little involved with household tasks, still have full-time jobs. However, we do not know whether some kind of combination pressure is also actually being felt by men and women in eastern parts of Europe. It is interesting to compare eastern with western Europe because the differences between them have narrowed in the past decade. Moreover, according to Orloff (1996), a comparative dimension with cross-national variation is needed if we are to understand the relation between gender and welfare states.

The focus of this contribution is on explaining the work–family balance experienced by men and women in eastern and western European countries. How do men and women assess the possibility to combine work with private life? In this article, a negative work–family balance is also referred to as combination pressure, which is a form of stress (Karasek et al., 1987). It is our aim to provide more insight into the way men and women experience the multiple claims on their time, and to come to an understanding of the differences between European countries in this respect. The data gathered in eight European countries (the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania) enable us to study the differences between countries. First of all, expectations are formulated based on the individual level: to what extent do work-related and home-related factors influence the balance in work and care? Is it true that the conflicting options result in more time pressure? Next, expectations are formulated at the institutional level. The different cultures, policies and backgrounds of countries influence the way men and women experience the balancing of work and care. The work–family balance is studied here only for heterosexual couples with at least one of the partners in a paid job. In the following, we refer to the male and the female partner in both married and cohabiting couples as the 'husband' and the 'wife'.

Theory and hypotheses

Individual level

Late modern negotiated family life is characterized by a de-traditionalism of gender positions, or, as Beck (1992: 89) formulates it: 'families (. . .) become the scene of continuous juggling of diverging multiple ambitions among occupational necessities, educational constraints, parental duties and the monotony of housework'. Consequences of these multiple ambitions

are assumed to be different between men and women. Does the double combination influence the time pressure of men as much as it does the time pressure of women? Although we are studying work–family balance, it is important to unravel home-related and work-related factors, since these will influence the work–home interference in a different way (Moen and Han, 2001; Voydanoff, 2002). Both job characteristics and characteristics within the non-work situation are said to influence stress (Karasek et al., 1987).

It can be argued that in relation to the work situation the more time spent in the labour market, the less time available for care and leisure. This assumption is based on a scarcity argument (Hiller, 1984; Van der Lippe et al., 2004). Because the day has ‘only’ 24 hours, time on one activity obviously implies less time on another activity. Such a scarcity argument, which has to do with actual time, can also be applied to the experienced time. The more time spent by men and women in the labour market, the less time they will have available for family obligations. The consequence is increased combination pressure. According to some, work/family conflicts are becoming increasingly similar between mothers and fathers (Coltrane and Adams, 2001). However, it is well known that time spent in the labour market is a factor that is more often constant for men than it is for women, especially in western European countries. We therefore assume that working longer hours increases combination pressure more for women than for men, and especially for women in western European countries. Not only is the time spent in the labour market important, but also the time spent on overtime. Flexible work schedules can threaten a stable relationship at home (Presser, 2000). Working in the evening or at the weekend and/or working non-standard hours generally can cause stress and tension. ‘Business as usual’ at home is no longer the norm, e.g. eating together or spending leisure time with the family. Overtime working thus increases combination pressure in the case of both men and women. Next in importance to the hours men and women spend on their jobs is the content of the job. According to Karasek et al. (1987), job factors are the strongest predictors of stress: a heavy workload promotes job dissatisfaction and feelings of exhaustion. So the more demanding the job, in terms of responsibility and supervision, the more likely it is that combination pressure will occur. In managerial jobs, but also to some extent in professional jobs, a fairly common complaint is that work is never finished. Although there is a maximum with respect to the time spent on the job, jobs of these kind continue to burden people.

According to the demand hypothesis (Coverman, 1985), the more care that is needed in the home, the more time invested in the household. The demand for care is mainly dependent on the ages of any children. The younger the children, the more time that is needed for care. It can be assumed that this will imply more combination pressure as well. The parent who has most to do in the household will experience more combination pressure. It is well known that it is often the woman who fills the extra time needed in the household, and this can be explained using the exchange perspective. The division of tasks can be seen as a result of implicit negotiations between spouses about input (financial resources) and output (who takes care of the household) (Greenstein, 2000). Groenendijk (1998) has shown that the unequal division of household tasks in combination with a paid job is stressful for women. Extra hands in the household, a grandmother or an older daughter or son, might imply more help and less combination pressure. Next to the division of household tasks, the demand also depends on the number of working hours of the partner. The longer hours the partner works, the less time s/he has available for domestic duties; these duties are taken care of by the wife or husband and can result in more combination pressure. In this respect we do not expect any difference between men and women.

Finally, a different factor that has proved to be important in feelings about the balance between work and private life is included (Kluwer et al., 2002). When there is more agreement between the partners on important but also daily household issues, the balance of work and

care is found as less of a problem. When partners have busy lives, but in mutual acceptance, attitudes will be less negative. However, when one spouse is continuously in conflict with the other, pressure will be perceived much more negatively (Voydanoff, 2002).

Contextual level

Combination pressure is likely to depend not just on household and work-related factors, but also on the country in which men and women live. Countries may differ in the way social policy is institutionalized. Also main differences prevail in the ideology, functioning and outcomes between welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1998; Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1996). We distinguish between two contextual level factors in the study of combination pressure: the gender cultural attitudes within a country and the extent to which a family friendly policy exists.

First of all, gender cultural attitudes towards the combination of the two possibly conflicting life spheres of work and family are assumed to vary between the countries under study. In the industrial era of capitalism, people were organized in male-headed nuclear families that lived principally from the husband's labour market earnings (Fraser, 1994). The husband was paid a family wage sufficient to support his children and his wife and mother, who performed unpaid domestic labour. However, this family-wage assumption is no longer tenable. Although differences exist between countries, gender norms and family forms are highly contested nowadays (Lewis, 1992; Duncan, 1996). The ideology of the male breadwinner was and still is powerful and tends to be associated with a set of beliefs expressive of relatively conventional gender relations (Crompton, 2002). The progressive gender culture increases conflicting options available at the individual level, since both partners are expected to have a paid job and to care for their family. We assume that in more progressive gender cultures, such as in Sweden, feelings of combination pressure are high because of these conflicting options (Beck, 1992). While the term gender culture has usefully been applied to comparative analyses of several western European countries, it has been much less developed in eastern European countries. The low level of wages has meant that average living standards have been premised on families with both spouses as full-time earners. However, the concept of equality has not spilled over into the home and women's responsibility for child care and domestic tasks remains unchallenged. In the transition to a market economy, family policies have been under threat as cuts in public expenditure have taken place. There are still strong traditional roles (Strandh and Nordenmark, 2002). In Bulgaria and Romania, for example, many families have returned to a family economic gender model (Pfau-Effinger, 1998) in which both genders contribute to the survival of the family economy. The need to earn more money and concerns about family and individual survival strategies are more important than work and family balance. Combination pressure will not be experienced in these countries. We assume this to be the case also for the other three eastern European countries, although Slovenia already has a higher proportion of egalitarian families (Cousins and Tang, 2003). Overall, we expect a clear east-west divide in gender culture leading to differences in combination pressure (Strandh and Nordenmark, 2002). The gender culture hypothesis can be summarized as follows: the progressive gender cultures in the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands will positively influence combination pressure more than the more traditional gender culture in Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria.

With respect to family friendly policies, it is clear that extensive programmes such as the presence of childcare facilities and rights of paid leave facilitate the combination of work and care (Strandh and Nordenmark, 2002; Strandh and Boje, 2002). This implies that the more a family friendly policy is elaborated in a country, the more likely that households will experience less combination pressure. How can we assess the 'friendliness' of family policies in the countries under study? Sweden is an example of a welfare model that uses strong state

intervention aimed at enhancing the individual's independence from the market and the family. The state has taken an interventionist and regulatory approach to the labour market and to gender-related policies in order to facilitate the successful combination of work with family responsibilities. Programmes include rights such as full-time paid parental leave for 480 days, the right to paid leave when the children are ill, the right to go down to a 6-hour day while the children are under 8 years of age and the public provision of full-time day care facilities for both young and school-age children (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Strandh and Boje, 2002). These policies form part of deliberate measures directed at providing conditions ripe for increased gender equality, and are very much aimed towards making it possible for wives and mothers to remain in the labour market (Lewis, 1992; Sommestad, 2001). Nevertheless, in practice, it is predominantly Swedish women who make use of the right to extensive parental leave and the universal right to work part-time during the first seven years of a child's life. In the Netherlands, still relatively few interventionist programmes are directed at enhancing the possibility to combine work and family. Rights allow for only six months unpaid parental leave. Moreover, there is little provision of full-time childcare facilities outside the family (Jager, 2002). In the UK, with a largely deregulated labour market and little public provision of services, parental leave regulations introduced in 1999 are mostly limited to the directive's minimum requirement of 13 weeks unpaid leave. Childcare is viewed as a private responsibility to be resolved through market mechanisms. Although there is a commitment to equal opportunity in the UK, the model can be seen as a remnant of the family wage's model (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Cousins and Tang, 2002). Mitigating these gendered effects to some extent has been the rising availability of part-time work over the past 15 years in both these countries. These short-hour jobs entail the same employment protection and many of the same social rights as full-time jobs and have principally been directed towards wives and mothers (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Jager, 2002).

The five eastern European countries face a different situation. They are in a situation of rapid change in the labour market and in the institutions surrounding it. During the socialist regime, all citizens of working age were guaranteed a job, and comprehensive social insurance systems were available (Zemfir, 1997). In general, in eastern European countries the priority has been, and still is, the labour market restructured in the interests of economic efficiency. The family friendly policies that helped women in eastern Europe into the labour market under the former regime are dissolving. Still, there may be continuities in public support for the previous regimes. Now, in many studies, welfare state development in eastern Europe is over-generalized because it was thought to be uniform throughout eastern Europe (Makkai, 1994; see, for a critical review, Fodor et al., 2002). In the eastern European countries studied here, a distinction can be made between at least two countries, based on the speed of the transformation of state socialist planned economies towards a capitalist model. Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic changed their economy much more quickly than Romania and Bulgaria. The related economic development in the latter two countries is still not on a level comparable with the other three (Deacon, 1992, 2000). Slovenia, in particular, recovered rather well from the recession in the 1990s (Sicherl and Remec, 2003).

In Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, family friendly policies are much more developed than in Bulgaria and Romania, which has probably led to less combination pressure. For Slovenia, the share of women in employment is one of the highest in Europe, and most women work full time. Their situation is helped by generous benefits, maternity leave, kindergartens and employment regulations that support working mothers. Unlike other former socialist regimes, these facilities have not been cut (Sicherl and Remec, 2002). Slovenia is seen as a 'Sweden of the south' (Cousins and Tang, 2002). In the Czech Republic, a series of reforms is going on into the direction western European countries are taking. Childcare facilities and maternity leaves are still in place, but job security and earnings are increasingly based

on profits and job performance (Vecernik and Stepankova, 2002). Some women no longer employed in undemanding jobs are finding it more difficult to combine work and family (Heitlinger, 1996). In Hungary, leave facilities for women in particular are still extensive; all women with children benefit and they can work part-time after the first birthday of their child. However, only 10 per cent of all employed women appear to work less than 40 hours a week. Childcare facilities come into play only after the child reaches the age of three–four; before that, women are expected to be on paid maternity leave (Medgyesi, 2002).

In Bulgaria and Romania, many families have returned to the family economic gender model (Pfau-Effinger, 1996) in which both genders contribute to the survival of the family economy. Family and individual survival strategies are more important than work and family balance. Owing to its underdeveloped economy, Romania does not have the financial resources to create extensive programmes for the combination of work and care; most of the financial resources are for economic development. In Romania, state support for families has dropped significantly since 1989 (Stanculescu and Berevoescu, 2002). Maternity benefits are among the lowest in these five eastern European countries. Bulgaria can be understood as an example of a late modern market economy; more facilities have helped to keep the balance between work and care (Kovacheva, 2002).

In conclusion, based on family friendly policies it can be assumed that in Sweden and Slovenia, in particular, and to a lesser extent in Hungary and the Czech Republic, the extensive family friendly policy will lead to less combination pressure than in the Netherlands, the UK, Bulgaria and Romania.

Data and methods

Our analysis is based on a large comparative data set collected within the 'Households, Work and Flexibility' project (HWF) financed through the European Union's fifth framework programme (Wallace, 2000). The HWF survey used a common questionnaire on random samples in eight participant EU and transition countries (the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Sweden, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania). It was designed to cover the combinations of paid and unpaid labour among household members, and included forms of work such as housework, voluntary work, casual work, along with the various kinds of regular employment, as well as attitudes and perceived imbalances between work and the private sphere. The survey was conducted in 2001 in the form of face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews with men and women aged between 18 and 65. The response rates vary between countries, i.e. being particularly low in the Netherlands but high in eastern European countries (22–87 per cent). However, the samples are representative for all countries (Wallace, 2003).

For our analyses, we make use only of couples in which at least the respondent has a paid job. A total of 4622 men and women were included in our analyses and are given by country in Table 1.

Dependent variable

We constructed a scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$ for the whole sample) measuring the balance experienced between paid work and family life – in the previous three months – from four items. These consider the influence of work on family life and vice versa. It is important to acknowledge that the balance experienced may vary with time, and even from day to day (Pittman et al., 2001). The question reads: how often have you experienced the following in the last three months (ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (always))? 1. My work makes it difficult for me to do some of the household's tasks that need to be done. 2. My work makes it difficult to fulfil my responsibilities towards my family and other important persons in my life. 3. My

Table 1 Means of the independent variables used in the analysis

	Netherlands		United Kingdom		Sweden		Slovenia		Czech Republic		Hungary		Bulgaria		Romania	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Paid hours	41.13	24.40	45.28	27.39	43.07	37.02	45.54	40.39	45.96	40.98	47.31	42.07	40.99	39.51	47.41	41.62
Overtime evening	3.12	2.23	3.13	2.59	3.27	2.60	2.24	1.71	2.39	1.73	3.20	2.72	2.39	1.84	1.69	2.15
Overtime weekend	2.20	1.74	2.52	2.00	2.36	2.14	2.48	2.19	2.41	1.95	2.84	2.16	2.59	2.06	1.80	2.01
Managers	0.23	0.07	0.21	0.09	0.22	0.09	0.08	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.18	0.10	0.08	0.04	0.05	0.04
Professionals	0.25	0.21	0.15	0.13	0.31	0.27	0.12	0.16	0.09	0.16	0.10	0.15	0.08	0.20	0.11	0.12
Higher grade administrative	0.32	0.45	0.19	0.39	0.21	0.33	0.24	0.32	0.25	0.42	0.10	0.30	0.17	0.25	0.09	0.29
Manual workers	0.20	0.27	0.45	0.39	0.26	0.30	0.55	0.48	0.55	0.37	0.62	0.44	0.68	0.51	0.75	0.55
Employment spouse	0.65	0.94	0.73	0.84	0.88	0.90	0.79	0.80	0.73	0.93	0.65	0.75	0.60	0.70	0.47	0.72
Paid hours spouse	16.80	38.31	23.50	37.14	32.31	38.14	32.35	35.19	29.34	45.14	28.54	37.23	24.33	29.24	17.72	33.03
Responsible domestic tasks	1.14	3.00	0.99	3.25	1.07	2.88	0.76	3.43	0.40	3.54	0.39	3.68	0.50	3.33	0.36	3.37
Youngest child 0–6	0.33	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.27	0.23	0.20	0.29	0.23	0.17	0.23	0.14	0.23	0.14	0.26	0.15
Youngest child 7–14	0.27	0.30	0.36	0.35	0.36	0.28	0.34	0.39	0.36	0.36	0.29	0.35	0.27	0.35	0.39	0.35
Other members older than 14 years	0.29	0.30	0.39	0.34	0.35	0.34	1.05	1.03	0.50	0.62	0.92	0.92	1.08	1.12	1.08	1.10
Agreement	16.53	16.31	16.15	15.70	16.55	16.67	15.42	14.78	15.13	15.25	15.13	16.01	18.56	18.37	18.44	18.03
Education	3.71	3.57	3.14	2.56	4.04	4.02	3.24	3.27	3.00	2.95	2.96	2.97	3.26	3.61	3.43	3.54
Age	42.18	39.49	42.13	41.75	42.54	40.77	43.88	39.68	42.51	39.90	44.96	41.78	41.99	41.22	43.46	40.20
N	297	277	170	222	459	450	194	164	377	296	242	221	357	338	297	261

Source: HWF, 2000.

responsibilities towards my family and other important persons in my life prevent me from doing my work adequately. 4. I have to take work from my employment home to finish.¹

Independent variables

The working situation comprises several features. The actual number of hours in paid work,² the overtime people do in their job, and whether a job is demanding or not. In our analyses, two items are included for overtime, namely working (overtime) at the weekend and during the evening, to find out at what moments of the day–week working overtime is causing combination pressure.³ The jobs men and women have are divided into four categories based on the expectation of how demanding the job is. Using the EGP scheme, the four categories are: 1. managers, 2. professionals, 3. higher administrative, technicians and clerks (higher grade), 4. all other jobs, mainly lower administrative and manual workers (lower grade). The household situation also consists of various items. As has already been said, only respondents with one partner from the opposite sex are included. The household situation is measured using the following variables: the presence of children below 7 years of age, the presence of children between 7 and 14 years of age and the number of other household members older than 14 years of age, since these might help with household duties. Other family variables include whether the spouse has a paid job, the hours of paid work by the partners as well as the person responsible for domestic work in the household. This variable is based on who mainly takes care of the cooking, cleaning the house, doing the laundry and the daily shopping.⁴ Furthermore, a scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$) added to the model representing the (dis)agreement within the household (ranging from 1 'always disagree' to 5 'always agree') consists of items on household finances, allocation of household (domestic) tasks, the amount of time spent together and the amount of time spent at work (in employment). These questions were not directed specifically at the partner, so answers could refer to other members in the household. In our analysis we assume that answers mainly concern the partner. Finally, age and educational level are included as control variables.

First, we show some descriptive figures. Table 1 indicates that there is a large difference in the working hours of women in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom compared to the other six countries. In these two countries, women spend on average fewer than 30 hours in their paid job, whereas in the five eastern European countries women spend on average 40 hours per week in their paid job. In Sweden the rate lies between these two, with women working 37 hours per week. Although in the three western European countries part-time work is an option, the differences between men in paid working hours per week are less significant between the countries under study. Another remarkable but perhaps well-known value is that men in all countries, with the exception of Romania, work more overtime at the weekend and during evenings than women do. In western European countries in particular, men are more likely to have a managerial job than women; differences in the eastern European countries are smaller. In total, there are fewer jobs on the professional and managerial level in these eastern European countries, but many more lower-grade jobs. This is a relic from the communist era.

With respect to the household situation, Table 1 indicates that the labour market participation of wives is much lower in Bulgaria and Romania. This is mainly the result of the high unemployment rate in these countries. Economic necessity would otherwise force these women into the labour force. Note that in the average paid working hours of the spouse, spouses without a paid job are included. Furthermore, women are still responsible for the domestic tasks. The division of household tasks is unequal especially in eastern European countries; taking into account that women in these countries work on average 40 hours per week in a paid job as well. Eastern Europe is known for its unequal division of household tasks (Van der Lippe and Fodor, 1998). Equal gender policies in the former socialist regimes aimed only at gender equality in the labour market. The total paid and domestic workload is

greater for women in the five eastern European countries than in the UK and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Sweden. We still have to examine whether these figures correlate with more combination pressure in eastern European countries. Furthermore, it can be noted from this table that older children in eastern Europe live more with their parents than older children in western countries.

Testing the hypotheses at the contextual and individual level

To test the two contextual hypotheses, we start by analysing the differences between countries in the work–family balance. We do that by performing a bivariate analysis. Next we explain the balance for both men and women in the countries under study to test the hypotheses at the individual level. Whenever possible we relate the findings of the second step to further confirmation or rejection of the two hypotheses at the contextual level.

Differences in combination pressure between countries

Table 2 presents the evaluation of husbands and wives of the items with respect to combination pressure over the previous three months. People are busy, in paid work, carrying out domestic tasks and participating in social events. However, Table 2 indicates that the respondents do not experience a severe violation of their paid work obligations by family responsibilities or vice versa. One way or the other, most people are able to reconcile both life spheres. However, we cannot conclude that these people do not experience time pressure at all. Our items are specifically focused on the interferences of both life spheres and stated quite firmly. Looking in greater detail at the figures, a larger percentage of men and women in all countries agree to the items with respect to paid work obligations influencing home obligations than the other way round. If there is any work–home pressure, the direction is from work to home and not vice versa. The situation can be such that the home situation is not adjusted to unexpected but important deadlines at work. The interference of work to home is experienced more for domestic tasks than for responsibilities to family members.

The differences between countries in combination pressure are significant and more in support of the gender culture hypothesis than the family friendly policy hypothesis. In Sweden, combination pressure for both men and women is high. When we calculate the total combination pressure based on the four indicators, the highest percentage of all respondents facing combination pressure is found in Sweden. Since combining work with family life is an issue, feeling stressed and hurried seems to have become part of the culture,⁵ which confirms the gender culture hypothesis. The extensive programmes for child care facilities and parental leaves do not help in diminishing combination pressure, they might even increase it. Also men and women in the other two western European countries face combination pressure. However, in the Netherlands this is less than in Sweden, especially with respect to statements where paid work is said to make it difficult to perform duties at home. This is even more the case for women. Women in the Netherlands spend less time in the labour market than women in Sweden, which might explain the difference. The UK is in between these two countries in this respect. Compared to other countries, responsibilities towards the family appear to be heavy in the UK. In the eastern European countries, with the exception of Slovenia, combination pressure seems to be less than in the western European countries under study, further confirming the gender culture hypothesis. In eastern European countries the largest percentage of respondents facing combination pressure is found for Slovenian women. In Slovenia, many women state that their paid work often makes it difficult to fulfil responsibilities towards the family.

There are not many significant differences between men and women in the countries under study. We do not know yet whether work–family conflicts are becoming increasingly similar for men and women, as stated at the beginning (Coltrane and Adams, 2001), but we do know

Table 2 A comparison of the work–family balance of men and women in eight European countries (in percentages, with ‘often’ as the answer category)

		NL	UK	SW	SLO	CZR	HUN	BUL	ROE	Significant difference between countries
My work makes it difficult for me to do some of the household tasks that need to be done	Men	17.0	23.5	22.9	11.5	14.7	12.9	10.4	17.5	**
	Women	18.8	19.1	27.9	20.8	13.3	15.3	14.7	10.0	**
My work makes it difficult to fulfil my responsibilities towards my family	Men	8.4	11.8	15.3	13.7	12.3	11.2	6.6	15.4	**
	Women	5.4	12.4	16.2	18.9	7.9	7.4	10.4	7.9	**
My responsibilities towards my family prevent me from doing my work adequately	Men	0.9	5.2	1.8	1.6	1.5	2.6	0.7	1.1	**
	Women	1.8	*	1.3	0.7	1.8	1.4	1.4	2.1	**
I have to take work from my employment home to finish	Men	13.9	15.0	16.8	6.7	9.5	6.7	1.7	5.2	**
	Women	15.7	11.6	*	11.8	11.2	**	**	9.5	**
				12.4			11.3	6.5		

+ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: HWE, 2000.

now that there are not many differences in the experienced balance between the sexes. Only in Slovenia and Bulgaria are women more likely than men to experience that their paid work makes it difficult for them to do some of the household tasks that need to be done. And, remarkably, Romanian men are more likely than women to report that their paid work makes it difficult to do some of the household tasks that need to be done to fulfil their responsibilities towards their family. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that it is usually the case that women are more likely to take work home than men.

Explaining combination pressure in eight European countries

To test the influence of the work and home situation on combination pressure, we performed separate regression analyses for men and women in the respective countries (Table 3). Combining the results for the separate countries shows that the formulated expectations on the individual level explain more of the combination pressure in the three western European countries than in the eastern European countries.

We can find ample evidence supporting the availability hypothesis. For the western European countries, in particular, paid working long hours is a stable factor in explaining combination pressure and overtime working. With respect to paid working hours, the results are unexpectedly not very different for men and women. For the eastern European countries the results are mixed, but in general appear to have the expected effects. In the Czech Republic, the working situation is as important as in the three western countries. In Bulgaria, the working situation appears to be especially important for women: working long hours of overtime in the evenings and at the weekends leads to more combination pressure. In Romania, the paid working situation is less important. Paid working hours of the spouse have an effect on the work–family balance for men though. The more hours the spouse is working for pay, the more likely that the husband faces combination pressure.

Also, demanding jobs appear to be more important in explaining combination pressure in western Europe than in eastern Europe. In the UK and the Netherlands, this is more the case for men than for women. Men appear to be working in more demanding jobs, or at least they feel more stressed due to their jobs. Sweden is an exception here, since this country is the most gender neutral of the three western European countries, women might react more like men in their jobs. Again the results for eastern European countries are mixed. Working overtime appears to increase combination pressure mostly for women in eastern European countries. Under the socialist regime, both men and women had a full-time paid job and next to that the man had a secondary job and the woman did all the domestic duties. Given this situation, working overtime at present implies combination pressure especially for women, since gender roles are still rather traditionally formulated.

For both men and women in the Netherlands, working long hours causes much combination pressure. For men it is working overtime in the evening that gives them pressure, whereas for women it is overtime at the weekend. That women in the Netherlands in general face more combination pressure when they are working overtime at the weekend, might be an indication that the balance in jeopardy for men is mainly a balance between paid work and leisure or social activities and less between paid work and care at home. Working overtime at the weekends puts the time spent with the partner and/or children under pressure. Perhaps men view weekend work as personal time, knowing that family life continues without their active interference. Jobs prove to be causing only combination pressure for men. Men are more likely to have demanding jobs, or at least they feel more stressed due to their jobs.

With respect to the demand hypothesis, having children is an important factor in explaining combination pressure in a number of cases. The level of education is also important in many countries under study. Higher educated people always experience more combination pressure. In Sweden the results are contrary to our expectations of the family friendly hypothesis.

Table 3 Regression analysis to explain combination pressure of men and women in eight European countries (standardized coefficients)

	Netherlands		United Kingdom		Sweden		Slovenia		Czech Republic		Hungary		Bulgaria		Romania	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Paid hours	0.17**	0.18**	0.28**	0.14**	0.15**	0.24**	0.12	0.10	0.18**	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.05	0.21**	0.02	0.07
Overtime evening	0.15*	-0.05	0.01	0.16*	0.13*	0.06	0.10	0.12	0.26**	0.18**	0.02	0.23**	-0.01	0.15*	0.07	-0.09
Overtime weekend	0.08	0.28**	0.14	0.11+	0.09+	0.12*	0.12	0.01	-0.01	0.20**	0.01	0.01	0.23**	0.13*	0.11	0.19**
Managers	0.14+	0.04	0.25**	0.11	0.19**	0.16**	0.15+	0.05	0.08	0.01	0.16*	0.15*	0.09	0.01	-0.01	0.05
Professionals	0.24**	0.11	0.25**	0.09	0.14*	0.18**	0.04	0.23	0.08	0.22**	0.11	0.36**	0.05	0.18*	0.11	0.02
Higher grade	0.15*	0.07	0.17*	0.07	0.09+	0.10+	-0.03	0.12	0.15**	0.04	-0.03	0.13+	0.07	0.02	0.00	0.06
Employment spouse	0.12	0.06	0.11	-0.08	0.13+	0.07	-0.09	0.02	0.09	0.01	-0.23	0.06	0.10	0.05	-0.14	0.03
Paid hours spouse	0.04	-0.04	-0.17	-0.01	-0.15+	-0.10	0.06	0.00	-0.11	0.04	0.16	-0.08	-0.14	-0.14	0.30**	-0.01
Responsible domestic tasks	-0.04	-0.06	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	-0.02	-0.17*	0.07	-0.11*	-0.06	0.07	0.07	-0.09+	0.05	-0.13*
Youngest child 0–6	0.10+	0.16**	0.13	-0.01	0.09*	0.07	-0.00	0.10	0.01	-0.16**	0.08	-0.03	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	-0.09
Youngest child 7–14	0.02	-0.06	0.18*	0.17**	0.10*	0.10*	0.08	0.03	0.11*	0.07	0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.12*	0.07	0.04
Other members older than >14 years	-0.06	0.09+	0.04	0.26**	-0.02	0.05	-0.15+	-0.00	-0.08	-0.07	0.07	0.11+	0.05	0.06	0.06	-0.05
Agreement	-0.25**	-0.20**	-0.06	0.04	-0.23**	-0.20**	-0.18*	-0.20*	-0.08	-0.21**	-0.20**	-0.24**	-0.16**	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.25**
Education	0.08	0.20**	-0.00	0.25**	0.09+	0.15**	0.19+	0.12	0.10	0.12	0.21**	0.11	-0.02	-0.01	0.08	0.23**
Age	0.04	0.03	0.01	-0.11	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.03	-0.07	-0.08	-0.12	-0.19**	-0.16**	-0.16*	-0.09	-0.04
Adjusted R-square	0.24	0.31	0.23	0.30	0.27	0.30	0.17	0.14	0.20	0.31	0.16	0.28	0.09	0.21	0.16	0.16

+ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: HWE, 2000.

Having children of all ages implies more combination pressure for both men and women although there are many child care facilities. This again stresses the importance of the gender culture hypothesis at the contextual level. In the UK, older children are often the cause of combination pressure. Maybe receiving informal care is more likely when children are young, implying more combination pressure when children become older. In the Czech Republic, too, young children give women less combination pressure, and older children more. When children are young, childcare facilities are still very well arranged, implying even less pressure for women with children compared to women without children. In Hungary, on the other hand, no effect is found for children. Women have the opportunity to work part time when the child is young and this will definitely facilitate the combination of work and care.

For eastern European countries, being responsible for the household is important in explaining combination pressure. Being responsible implies less combination pressure. The clearly set separate gender roles in the eastern European countries are agreed upon by both men and women, such that women do not feel pressured by the household tasks, which again confirms the gender culture hypothesis. This is the case for example in Slovenia. Women might feel independent because they are managing the household and can organize everything the way they want.

A strong factor in the experience of work–family balance is the level of agreement between partners about household matters. In cases of agreement, couples are more able to cope with combination pressure. It is interesting to note that agreement does not play any role for English couples in reducing combination pressure, although it does in all other countries.

So far we have assumed that work and home-related factors are additional in their explanation of the work–family balance. In the final instance we have analysed, as Voydanoff (2002) argues, interaction effects between work and home-related factors. However, no systematic picture emerges and so we will be brief with the results; for Dutch and Swedish women, agreement with their spouse decreases the effect on combination pressure of working long hours per week; having young children appears to be important in interaction with paid working hours for Swedish men and Slovenian women.

Conclusion and discussion

We started our article by describing some typical dilemmas of modern life, pressure and misbalance. In assessing combination pressure as a feature of modern society in which life spheres of work and private life are more and more interwoven, one might expect to find greater pressure in the case of all western European countries, or at least lower pressure in the case of the eastern European countries.

Our results generally support the gender culture hypothesis. Combination pressure is found most in Sweden, but also in the UK and the Netherlands. Men and women in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania are least pressured. The prevailing ideology towards combining paid work and family life is important. When the combination of paid work and family and the accompanying organizing is present in society, feeling stressed and experiencing work home interference becomes part of normal life (Strandh and Nordenmark, 2002). In the former socialist regimes, policies were aimed more at getting women into paid employment and less at combining work and care. In other words, the multiplicity of options was not so much an issue in the former socialist regimes. Ever since the velvet revolution, more attention has been paid to the economic restructuring of society than to making the combination of work and private life easier. Provisions are not so much motivated from an emancipatory view; instead they build on old communist policy (Van der Lippe and Fodor, 1998).

Does a social policy context that facilitates the balance between work and care via family friendly policies lead to less combination pressure? We were inclined to think so. However, to

the contrary, analyses show a number one position for Sweden on combination pressure; Swedish couples are relatively most stressed. So the presence of a family friendly policy is not a guarantee for a better combination of work and care. Again, the culture proves to be more important. In this article, we were able to study culture only in a very general sense. It could be that the more specific work culture in the countries under study provides an explanation here. Although we have included work-related factors such as job demands and working hours, more research is needed into the work culture as such. This is also stressed by the conclusion that in all countries the paid work situation seems to be interfering more with the household situation than vice versa. Working long hours and overtime clearly leads to combination pressure for both men and women. The household situation contains elements which, especially for women, lead to more combination pressure. In conclusion, although men and women do not suffer from a severe violation of their work obligations by family responsibilities or vice versa, combination pressure is present in Europe today.

This does not imply though that people with more combination pressure feel less happy in life. Garhammer (2002) speaks about the time-pressure-happiness paradox as a feature of modern western European societies. The feeling of being rushed through simultaneous tasks and role overload, as well as the sense of stimulation associated with novel experiences, is common in the lives of people in western Europe. According to Garhammer, the Dutch and the Swedish, along with the Danish, are the happiest people in the world. Progress in life, generating flow, mobilizing resources, being active as features of modern society, all generate happiness. Time pressure is the other side of this. Further research is needed to study if people in modern societies really learn to cope with time pressure.

Notes

1. In order to confirm the existence of one underlying concept, a factor analysis has been performed. Indeed, one factor results.
2. For Hungary, travelling time is also counted in people's working hours.
3. There are differences between countries in the way working overtime is asked about. In the Dutch questionnaire, people were asked whether they occasionally worked overtime (overtime is working more hours than usual, deviant from the work schedule). Subsequently those who answered affirmatively were asked how often they worked overtime in the afternoon, the evening and the weekend. In Sweden, only people in employment were asked how often they worked overtime. The Slovenian survey questioned how often people worked in their main activity in the afternoon, in the evening, at night and at the weekend. For those who were employed, the questions related to working overtime. In the Czech survey, all who claimed to have an income earning activity were asked how often they worked overtime. The overtime expression was not used in the Hungarian version of the questionnaire. People who reported having income from employment were asked how often they performed their main activity in the late afternoon or evening (merged into one), during the night and at the weekend.
4. For the Netherlands, the option not equally shared was also included.
5. Performing the analyses only for full-time working couples in all the countries under study produces even more significant differences in the work-family balance between Sweden and the other European countries. The idea that men and women feel more pressured because they both have a near to full-time job in Sweden therefore proves not to be true.

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