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## Antecedents and consequences of work-family conflicts: Italian women entrepreneurs' experiences

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at unveiling the work-family conflict construct experienced by women entrepreneurs, by testing an all-inclusive model that considers work and family antecedents and consequences of WFC. The study is grounded on Europe and data from 511 Italian women entrepreneurs have been collected mailing a survey of 45 multiple choice questions. Opposing arguments either for the within and cross-domain hypotheses in relation to antecedents, or for the matching and cross-domain hypotheses in relation to the WFC consequences faced by women entrepreneurs have been tested. Findings show that the within-domain hypothesis is supported in relation to the antecedents as well as the matching and the cross-domain hypothesis in relation to the consequences. The contribution of this work is twofold: it enhances the understanding of women entrepreneurs' WFC; and it enriches the still limited and 'US centric' academic literature on the issue by analysing data collected in South Europe.

**Keywords:** work-family conflict; WFC; work antecedents; family antecedents; women entrepreneurs; satisfaction.

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## 1 Introduction

The work-family conflict (WFC, also known as work-family interference), defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p.77) as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”, has become a ‘hot topic’ in the work-family literature (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011) because of an increase worldwide in both dual-earner couples and in the amount of time individuals devote to work. Therefore, in the past decades, research on the topic has constantly increased and WFC related issues have become well recognised within the employment literature (e.g., Eby et al., 2005; Michel et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). Conversely, the studies that analyse, either theoretically or empirically, WFCs among entrepreneurs are still very few, and in addition, their results are not convergent yet.

On the one hand, some scholars verify that being self-employed often means working longer hours, being exposed to greater demands, as well as having a heavier workload than employees (Parasuraman et al., 1996; Shelton, 2006), thus leading to higher WFC. As explained by Parasuraman and Simmers (2001, p.566), “business ownership has both costs and benefits and is not a panacea for the role pressures and constraints encountered in traditional organizational employment”; accordingly, the two authors are among the first to show that self-employers experience more WFC than employees.

On the other hand, other scholars’ show that being self-employed often means having greater flexibility, control and autonomy over working time and conditions than employees (Gimenez-Nadal et al., 2012; Loscocco, 1997), thus leading to lower WFC. Also, Beutell (2007) tests that self-employed people experience lower levels of WFC than employees.

Interestingly, among these few and conflicting papers, still scarcely investigated is the issue of WFC experienced by women entrepreneurs, although the role of the family is frequently used to explain either, for example, the reasons why women decide to become entrepreneurs or the way in which women manage their businesses (e.g., Jennings and McDougald, 2007; Rehman and Roomi, 2012; Jennings and Brush, 2013; Nikina et al., 2015).

Accordingly, the aim of this work is to test an all-inclusive model able to analyse women entrepreneurs' WFC, which integrates the previous academic results by considering either selected work and family antecedents or selected consequences.

In order to test the cited inclusive model of WFC, we use data from Italy, a country characterised by one of the lowest women labour force participation rates in the Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD, 2017c) and one of the highest rates of women entrepreneurship in Europe. However, Italy mirrors the situation in the European Mediterranean countries (e.g., Spain, Greece) where, generally, the career opportunities for women as well as their labour force participation are still limited than those of men due to the either cultural conditions or structural barriers.

Therefore, with this work, we aim at increasing the understanding of women entrepreneurs' WFC, and in doing so, we also aim to enrich the 'US centric' academic literature by providing a perspective from a European and well representative country of the south of Europe, Italy.

Results show that the within-domain hypothesis is supported in relation to the antecedents as well as the matching and the cross-domain hypothesis in relation to the consequences.

The organisation of the paper is hereafter underlined: after this introduction, the theoretical framework is highlighted, the institutional context of the study is analysed, the methodology as well as the results are then shown, and finally, discussion and future research avenues are presented.

## **2 Antecedents and consequences of WFC**

Originating in the breakthrough paper by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), according to whom WFC refers to "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect", today scholars agree with the idea that the WFC can occur along two directions:

- a work-family conflict (WIF) in which work interferes with family life
- b family-work conflict (FIW) in which family life interferes with work (e.g., Frone et al., 1992a).

Although the two constructs are related (e.g., Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005), their unique variance allows the development of independent examinations. And it is precisely this independent examination that has contributed to the identification of different patterns of associations of WIF and FIW with both antecedents and consequences.

Specifically, for the antecedents, the 'within-domain hypothesis' and the 'cross-domain hypothesis' have been studied over the years by scholars. The 'within-domain hypothesis' states that work-related antecedents (also labelled as work

stressors) are generally associated with more WIF than FIW while family related antecedents (also labelled family stressors) are generally related to more FIW than WIF. Although this hypothesis has been strongly supported over the years, the most current meta-analyses show different results. For example, Byron (2005, p.191) verified that “nonwork domain variables ... were nearly as related to FIW as to WIF”, thus introducing the ‘cross-domain hypothesis’, according to which work-related antecedents are associated with FIW while family-related antecedents are linked to WIF (Michel et al., 2011).

Regarding the consequences, the ‘cross-domain hypothesis’ and the ‘matching hypothesis’ have been proposed. For what concerns the ‘cross-domain hypothesis’, it argues that the conflict originating in one domain can have an impact on the other domain (i.e., FIW on work related outcomes) (e.g., Bellavia and Frone, 2005; Frone et al., 1992a). Although this hypothesis has been verified over the years, also in this case, the most current meta-analyses show different results. For example, evidences from Shockley and Singla’s (2011) study show that the stronger associations are between job (marital) satisfaction and WIF (FIW) rather than between job (marital) satisfaction and FIW (WIF), thus supporting the ‘matching hypothesis’, assuming that “the primary effect of work-family conflict lies in the domain where the conflict originates” [Amstad et al., (2011), p.152].

Within this framework, our goal in this paper is that of considering, in the case of women entrepreneurs’ WFC, the opposing arguments either for the within and cross-domain hypotheses in relation to antecedents, or for the matching and cross-domain hypotheses in relation to the consequences.

### **3 Hypotheses**

Specific antecedents and consequences have been chosen to run the analysis. Regarding the former, following the most well-known theoretical analysis of antecedents of WFC (Byron, 2005; Ford et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2011) and WFC empirical papers (e.g., Michel and Clark, 2009), time spent at work, job involvement, flexibility, family involvement, and time devoted to family were chosen. Regarding the latter, satisfaction was chosen as it is one of the most often analysed consequence of WFC in the employee literature (Allen et al., 2000; Grandey et al., 2005), and specifically, job, family, and life satisfaction have been considered. In so doing, we benefited from the theoretical support provided by Parasuraman and Simmers’ (2001) study, one of the few studies that underline the need to devote attention to the analysis of WFCs experienced by women self-employed and entrepreneurs.

#### *3.1 Job involvement*

*Job involvement* pertains how much an individual perceives as important – and is psychologically involved in – his/her job (Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001). It is usually classified as a WIF antecedent as employees with high levels of involvement in their job may devote more energy, both psychological and physical, to the work role than to the family one, thus affecting WIF (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Recent meta-analyses by Byron (2005) and Michel et al. (2011) support such results. Though, in the case of entrepreneurs, Parasuraman et al. (1996) yield opposite

results, being job involvement positively associated to FIW and not to WIF both for male and female entrepreneurs.

Accordingly, our hypotheses are:

- Hp 1a A positive relationship between high levels of job involvement and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 1b A positive relationship between high levels of job involvement and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.2 *Time devoted to work*

*Time devoted to work* is considered the most reliable antecedent of WIF (e.g., Voydanoff, 2004) as a larger amount of time one dedicates to work generates less time available for family. However, a cross-domain relationship between such a predictor and FIW has also been postulated (e.g., Luk and Shaffer, 2005) and empirically confirmed (e.g., Lingard et al., 2012).

In the case of entrepreneurs, Parasuraman et al. (1996) show that the quantity of time spent on work is positively related to WIF and Parasuraman and Simmers' (2001) results underline that such a predictor causes WFC to increase more for entrepreneurs than for employees.

Accordingly, our hypotheses are:

- Hp 1c A positive relationship between time devoted to work and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 1d A positive relationship between time devoted to work and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.3 *Flexibility*

*Flexibility* pertains to the availability of flexible options in terms of 'when' and/or 'where' to work (Shockley and Allen, 2007).

Results concerning the association between flexibility and WFC are still mixed. According to some scholars (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Kinman and Jones, 2008), employees who have more flexibility with their schedule generally show lower levels of WIF. According to others (e.g., Hammer et al., 2005; Schieman et al., 2009), no significant associations emerge from empirical analyses. Finally, according to Byron's (2005) results, flexibility negatively relates to WIF and FIW and such results have been recently supported by Beutell and Schneer (2014).

Also in the case of entrepreneurs, the limited results are not convergent yet. Some scholars have, indeed, verified a negative relation between flexibility and WFC (e.g., McNall et al., 2010), suggesting that increased flexibility can allow entrepreneurs to mould their work schedule to work around their family duties, consequently eliminating/reducing WFC. Other scholars have instead verified that the absence of flexibility does not have a positive correlation both with WIF and FIW (Parasuraman et al., 1996). Moreover, according to Parasuraman and Simmers (2001), flexibility does not have a negative correlation with WFC.

Thus:

- Hp 1e A negative relationship between time devoted to work and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 1f A negative relationship between time devoted to work and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.4 Family involvement

*Family involvement* traditionally refers to how much a person is absorbed by his/her family needs (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000).

Research over the years has considered such a variable to be an antecedent of FIW (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Bakker et al., 2008) as employees who show high levels of emotional involvement in the family may devote more energy, both psychological and physical, to the family role than to the job role, thus affecting FIW. However, recent empirical papers investigating employees' experiences (e.g., Hargis et al., 2011), along with updated meta-analyses (Byron, 2005; Michel et al., 2011), have shown the cross-domain effects of family involvement on WFC – being the former in these studies a positive predictor of WIF.

In the case of entrepreneurs, few empirical analyses have been undertaken on this issue, finding that family involvement is related to WIF and not to FIW (Parasuraman et al., 1996).

Therefore, we suggest:

- Hp 2a A positive relationship between higher levels of family involvement and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 2b A positive relationship between Higher levels of family involvement and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.5 Parental demand

*Parental demand* refers to the demands placed on parents by their children and can be influenced by, for example, the number of children and their age. Over the years, parental demand has been considered as a predictor of FIW (e.g., Bakker et al., 2008; Kim and Ling, 2001), whose level reaches its maximum with children under three years old (e.g., Beigi et al., 2012; Hargis et al., 2011; Vieira et al., 2016), it declines as school age increases, reaching its lowest level when children leave the parents' house. However, some competing results have been verified by Frone and Yardley (1996) and Luk and Shaffer (2005). According to them, indeed, parental demand represents a key predictor of either FIW or WIF and these results are supported by Michel et al.'s (2011) and Byron's (2005) meta-analyses.

Also in the case of entrepreneurs, Parasuraman et al. (1996) show that parental demand is not associated to FIW but, positively, to WIF.

Therefore:

- Hp 2c A positive relationship between parental demand and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 2d A positive relationship between parental demand and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.6 *Time devoted to family*

*Time devoted to family* is considered to be one of most reliable antecedents of FIW (e.g., Byron, 2005; Calvo-Salguero et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2006). Despite the within-domain hypothesis being the more often verified, many studies advocate a cross-domain hypothesis (see, for example, Luk and Shaffer, 2005) although no significant link between time devoted to family and WIF has yet been verified (Luk and Shaffer, 2005).

In the case of entrepreneurs, Parasuraman et al.'s (1996) analysis show that the time dedicated to family is negatively associated to WIF and is unlinked to FIW.

Therefore, we hypothesise:

- Hp 2e A positive relationship between time devoted to family and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 2f A positive relationship between time devoted to family and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.7 *Job satisfaction*

*Job satisfaction* is traditionally considered as the satisfaction an individual has with his/her success and career development (Parasuraman et al., 1996).

Over the years, strong evidence of the negative relation between WIF and job satisfaction has emerged in the employee literature (e.g., Byron, 2005; Judge et al., 1994; Netemeyer et al., 1996), although, according to Ford et al. (2007), family domain variables can contribute to explain an important degree of variability in job satisfaction. Accordingly, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) show that job satisfaction is negatively associated to WFC, WIF, and FIW, thus supporting either the matching or the cross-domain relationships. Conversely, Amstad et al. (2011) show that WIF is strongly connected to work results, and FIW is more related to family rather than with work results.

In the case of entrepreneurs, the only paper that empirically verifies such relationships is by Parasuraman et al. (1996) whose results show that a correlation exists between FIW and job satisfaction and not between WIF and job satisfaction

Accordingly, we hypothesise:

- Hp 3a A negative relationship between job satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 3b A negative relationship between job satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### 3.8 *Family satisfaction*

Family satisfaction is traditionally considered as the satisfaction an individual has with his/her overall family condition (Beutell, 2007).

As in the case of job satisfaction, non-converging results emerge. Stemming from the awareness that the FIW-family satisfaction relationship is less investigated than the WIF-family satisfaction relationship, several papers show that a negative relationship between WIF and family satisfaction exists (e.g., Allen et al., 2000) and in particular, Ford et al. (2007) point out that work domain variables can contribute to explain an important amount of family satisfaction' variability. Conversely, other papers' results

show that a negative relation between FIW and family satisfaction exists (e.g., Amstad et al., 2011; Boyar and Mosley, 2007).

In the entrepreneurship literature, Parasuraman et al. (1996) do not verify any relationships between WIF/FIW and family satisfaction.

Accordingly, we hypothesise:

- Hp 3c A negative relationship between family satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 3d A negative relationship between family satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

### *3.9 Life satisfaction*

Life satisfaction “reflects an individual’s quality of life including physical and material well-being, interpersonal relations, social activities, personal development, and fulfilment and recreation” (Johansson and Bernspång, 2003).

Still few are the works having analysing the relation between WIF/FIW and life satisfaction, and the results are still mixed. As in the case of job satisfaction, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) support both the matching and the cross-domain relationships, and Perrewe et al. (1999) show that either WIF or FIW are significantly and negatively related to hotel managers’ life satisfaction. In contrast, Karatepe and Baddar’s (2006) results show that neither WIF nor FIW is related to frontline hotel employees’ life satisfaction.

Interestingly, in the entrepreneurship literature, no relevant studies have been conducted on these relationships. Accordingly:

- Hp 3e A negative relationship between life satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' WIF exists.
- Hp 3f A negative relationship between life satisfaction and women entrepreneurs' FIW exists.

## **4 Institutional context of the analysis**

We developed the analysis in Italy whose data on self-employed women (with or without employees) lie significantly above the OECD (2016) average and women-owned firms constitute 21.93% of the country’s overall population of firms (Unioncamere, 2019).

However, although these data on the one hand shed light on a vital context and on growing trends for Italian women, on the other hand, they mirror the existence of substantial difficulties for women in finding employment opportunities, pushing them towards entrepreneurship. Indeed, the decision to become an entrepreneur seems a solution often chosen in order to overtake the difficulties in finding a job or related to the well-known ‘glass-ceiling’. Italy has, indeed, one of the lowest women employment rates in the European Union, i.e., 53.8%, against a EU-28 rate of 68.7% (Eurostat, 2019). To the above defined economic situation, several interrelated cultural and structural factors must be considered. On the one hand, Italy still faces an unequal gender distribution of unpaid care work due to a stereotyped role model for gender. Italian women are often in charge of the responsibility for children and older family members while men are still considered the principal bread winners (the so-called ‘male breadwinner family’



stereotype). Although this gender division of labour is common all over the world, in Italy it assumes distinctive characteristics. According to OECD data (OECD Stat, 2017), Italian women (15–64 years) spend 5 hours and 10 minutes per day in unpaid work against the 2 hours and 18 minutes devoted by men. Worse than Italy, among EU countries, performs Portugal.

On the other hand, Italian public spending on social services – including elderly, disabled, child care – is low (OECD, 2017a). In 2015, this value, as a percentage of GDP, was indeed 7.8 against 8.3 in OECD (2017b). As a consequence, for example, the availability of childcare facilities is limited: according to OECD (2017a, p.8) data, only 24% of Italian under three years children are enrolled in formal childcare versus the OECD average of 33%. To these data, one must consider that leave periods are often granted only to mothers. The Italian elderly care situation cannot be ignored. As public services in this area are really low, according to Naldini et al. (2014), in about the 14% of cases, working women with elderly care responsibilities have made the choice to reduce their level of job involvement, or even quit their job because of their need to handle their parents' informal care (European Union, 2016).

In this scenario, entrepreneurship is perceived as a way to better manage work and family life. Thus, a specific study of the impact that work characteristics and family characteristics may have on the overall WFC plays a crucial role to better understanding the multifaceted reality and dynamics of female entrepreneurship in Italy.

## 5 Methodology

In order to reach the goal of this research, in the time period July 2017–November 2017, a survey of 45 answers was sent to 1,500 women entrepreneurs belonging to an important Italian women entrepreneurship association (see also Poggesi et al., 2015, 2019; De Vita et al., 2019). The surveyed women entrepreneurs hold no less than 51% of the firm's ownership; they are actively involved in the business; and at least one person, is employed in their firm.

The obtained responses are 511 with a response rate of 28.3%.

Hereafter, the research variables are illustrated.

### 5.1 *Work-family conflicts*

Following Gutek et al.'s (1991), WFC is measured by using two Likert-type scales, rated from 1 'strongly disagree' to 6 'strongly agree'. Specifically, WIF and FIW are measured by four items which have been then averaged. The coefficient alpha of WIF is equal to .84 while the coefficient alpha of FIW is .81.

### 5.2 *Work and family antecedents*

- **Job involvement:** Four six-point Likert-type items were used to measure this variable, rated from '1 = strongly disagree' to '6 = strongly agree'<sup>1</sup> (Frone et al., 1992a, 1992b; Kanungo, 1982a, 1982b). The four items were averaged and employed as a measure of overall job involvement. The coefficient alpha is equal to .69.

- Time devoted to work: This was measured by asking women entrepreneurs: 'How many hours per week do you spend working in your company?'. Six response categories, ranging from (1) less than 30 hours to (6) more than 70 hours, were used.
- Flexibility: This was measured by two six-point Likert-type items. The two items were averaged and used as a measure of flexibility. The coefficient alpha is equal to .895.
- Family involvement: This was measured stemming from the items used for job involvement. Thus, also in this case, four six-point Likert-type items have been used. The four items were averaged and employed as a measure of overall family involvement. The coefficient alpha is equal to .77.
- Parental demand: This variable takes into consideration if children are present, their number and age.
- Time devoted to family: This was measured by asking women entrepreneurs: 'In a working day, how much time do you spend on childcare?' and 'In a working day, how much time do you spend on housework?' In both cases, seven response categories, ranging from (1) 'less than 1 hour' to (7) 'more than 6 hours', were used.

### *5.3 Satisfaction as outcome*

Job, family and life satisfaction have been considered in this work.

- Job satisfaction: Following Jennings et al. (2016), three six-point Likert-type items were used to measure this variable. The mean of the three items was employed as a measure of job satisfaction. The coefficient alpha is equal to .68.
- Family satisfaction: Following Jennings et al. (2016), three six-point Likert-type items were used. The mean of the three items was employed as a measure of family satisfaction. The coefficient alpha is equal to .87.
- Life satisfaction: Also in this case, following Jennings et al. (2016), five six-point Likert-type items were used. The mean of the three items was employed as a measure of life satisfaction. The coefficient alpha is equal to .765.

### *5.4 Control variables*

We decided to adopt the age of the entrepreneur, the marital status, the education background and the partner's activity as control variables.

## **6 Data analysis technique**

The hypotheses have been testing by running two regression models. Specifically, using SPSS® Statistics 21, a moderated hierarchical regression analysis was run on each model separately.

**Table 1** The correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1 Age	1																
2 Marital status	-.075	1															
3 Education	.252**	-.110*	1														
4 Self-employed partner	-.103*	.451**	-.082	1													
5 Unemployed partner	-.204**	.152**	-.023	-.191**	1												
6 No partner	.054	-.934**	.066	-.483**	-.163**	1											
7 WIF	.018	.097*	-.145**	-.009	.005	-.059	1										
8 FIW	-.090*	.094*	-.151**	.042	-.009	-.067	.372**	1									
9 Job involvement	-.097*	-.127**	.012	-.048	.077	.107*	.220**	.114*	1								
10 Time devoted to work	-.039	-.084	-.106*	-.044	.006	.071	.335**	-.011	.272**	1							
11 Flexibility	-.082	.023	.015	.049	.034	-.022	-.325**	-.042	-.088*	-.298**	1						
12 Family involvement	.149**	.234**	-.068	.100*	.008	-.223**	.037	.125**	-.258**	-.180**	.093*	1					
13 Parental demand	-.447**	.241**	-.230**	.269**	.098*	-.257**	.030	.114*	-.050	-.064	.091*	.138**	1				
14 Time devoted to family	-.165**	.267**	-.068	.117**	.046	-.263**	-.002	.265**	-.063	-.202**	.153**	.210**	.345**	1			
15 Job satisfaction	-.162**	.059	-.146**	-.035	.019	-.047	.153**	-.047	.140**	.181**	-.073	.001	.065	-.065	1		
16 Family satisfaction	-.021	.096*	.097*	.071	.038	-.100*	-.351**	-.262**	-.074	-.127**	.296**	.143**	.069	.011	.190**	1	
17 Life satisfaction	.138**	.175**	-.026	.085	-.037	-.146**	.058	-.027	.058	.052	.034	.230**	.104*	.064	.178**	.255**	1

Two two-step models were implemented by means of regression analyses. First, in model 1, WIF and FIW were considered as dependent variables. So, in performing the analysis, we included the control variables (Step 1); we then entered the work domain and family domain stressors (Step 2) (Table 1).

Second, in model 2 (Table 2) job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction were considered as dependent variables. After including control variables (Step 1), we entered the WIF and FIW standardised constructs as independent variables.

**Table 2** Betas ( $\beta$ ) for dependent variables: job and family stressors

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>WIF</i>	<i>FIW</i>
<i>Step 1: control</i>		
Age	0.058	-0.059
Marital status	0.284**	0.185
Education	-0.146***	-0.125***
Self-employed partner	-0.056	-0.016
Unemployed partner	-0.010	-0.039
No partner	0.184	0.103
R <sup>2</sup>	0.028	0.023
<i>Step 2</i>		
Age	0.069	-0.038
Marital status	0.355	0.160
Education	-0.096	-0.117
Self-employed partner	-0.049	-0.005
Unemployed partner	-0.021	-0.041
No partner	0.251	0.154
Job involvement	0.188***	0.161***
Time devoted to work	0.242***	-0.020
Flexibility	-0.249**	-0.081*
Family involvement	0.098**	0.115**
Parental demand	0.052	-0.012
Time devoted to family	0.041	0.249***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.225	0.106

## 7 Findings

Regarding the sample, 48.5% of the women are 50 years old or older. Only 18.8% of the dataset is made up of women aged under 40. Moreover, 52.1% have a secondary education, while 30.3% have an academic degree and 9.6% a master's or PhD. When considering the marital status, the vast majority of the sampled women is made up of married women (73.6%) with children (72.2% of the sampled women has one child or more).

In Table 1, the correlations among the variables adopted in this analysis are shown, highlighting that many of the identified correlations among variables confirm the direction theoretically conjectured before.

We then ran the regression analysis as no problem of multicollinearity emerged.

Table 2 reports the standardised regression coefficients of work and family antecedents as predictors of WIF and FIW.

The analysis of Table 2 shows that, by regressing WIF on the four control variables, the marital status is significantly and positively related to WIF while the education level of the women entrepreneurs is significantly and negatively related to WIF. If regression on FIW is taken into consideration, results show that only the education level of the women entrepreneurs is significantly and negatively related to FIW.

With regard to the work antecedents, results support Hp 1a, Hp 1c and Hp 1e, as job involvement and time devoted to work are significantly and positively related to WIF and flexibility is significantly and negatively related to WIF. Also, Hp 1b and Hp 1f are supported, as job involvement is significantly and positively related to FIW and flexibility is significantly and negatively related to FIW, while Hp 1d is not supported as time devoted to work is not significantly related to WIF.

Regarding the family antecedents, results support Hp 2a as family involvement is significantly and positively related to WIF while Hp 2c and Hp 2e are not supported. Hp 2b and Hp 2f are also supported as a significant and positive relationship exists between family involvement and time devoted to family and FIW. Contrary to our hypothesis (Hp 2d), parental demand is not significantly related to FIW.

**Table 3** Betas ( $\beta$ ) for dependent variables: WIF and FIW

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Job satisfaction</i>	<i>Family satisfaction</i>	<i>Life satisfaction</i>
<i>Step 1: control</i>			
Age	-0.150***	-0.035	0.161***
Marital status	0.052	0.061	0.319***
Education	-0.110***	-0.119***	-0.040
Self-employed partner	-0.115**	0.044	0.024
Unemployed partner	-0.052	0.029	-0.024
No partner	-0.047	-0.023	0.154
R <sup>2</sup>	0.037	0.013	0.048
<i>Step 2</i>			
Age	-0.170	-0.027	0.155
Marital status	0.026	0.175	0.316
Education	-0.102	0.055	-0.040
Self-employed partner	-0.107	0.025	0.026
Unemployed partner	-0.056	0.020	-0.025
No partner	-0.066	0.048	0.151
WIF	-0.190***	-0.297***	0.050
FIW	-0.151***	-0.159***	-0.059
R <sup>2</sup>	0.071	0.153	0.048

Table 3 shows the standardised regression coefficients of WIF and FIW as predictors of job, family and life satisfaction.

Regarding the control variables, results show that the age of the woman entrepreneur is significantly and negatively related to job satisfaction while, in contrast, it is significantly and positively related to the overall life satisfaction. The marital status variable is significantly and positively related only to life satisfaction. Finally, looking at the control variable 'education', results from Table 3 show that it significantly and negatively affects both job satisfaction and family satisfaction. Finally, having a self-employed partner seems to significantly and negatively affect the sampled women's job satisfaction.

Regarding the research hypotheses considered here, the results show strong support for Hp 3a, Hp 3b, Hp 3c and Hp 3d as either WIF or FIW are negatively related to job and family satisfaction, while Hp 3e and Hp 3f are not supported as WIF and FIW are not significantly related to life satisfaction.

## **8 Discussion and conclusions**

By analysing data from 511 Italian women entrepreneurs, the goal of this work was to empirically test an all-inclusive model which includes selected work and family antecedents, selected consequences and which considers both women entrepreneurs' WIF and FIW.

This paper has two merits. Firstly, it is among the first to enhance the understanding of women entrepreneurs' WFC. If we consider that about 46% of all the businesses in the world are led by women (GEM, 2017/2018) and that their entrepreneurial activity is strongly influenced by their family (e.g., Verheul et al., 2006), WFC is clearly an issue worth studying. Accordingly, understanding the antecedents and consequences of women entrepreneurs' WFC can contribute to shedding light on female firms' dynamics in terms of sector, size, profitability, and as a consequence, on their impact in the socio-economic environment (Jennings and McDougald, 2007). According to our results, it emerges that both the within-domain and the cross-domain hypotheses related to work and family antecedents on women entrepreneurs' WIF and FIW and the within-domain and the matching-domain hypotheses related to the effects of WIF and FIW on women entrepreneurs' satisfaction have been analysed in this paper, making this work one of the few papers dealing with this issue.

Secondly, it is among the first that analyses data collected in Europe, precisely in Italy. With the aim to enrich the still limited but strongly 'US centric' academic literature on the issue, this paper is focused on a context that mirrors those of the other European Mediterranean countries where the male breadwinner family is still the typical family model.

Turning to the results, with regard to the antecedents of women entrepreneurs' WFC, the present work finds strong support for the within-domain hypothesis; regarding the effects on satisfaction, WIF emerges as the stronger predictor, thus supporting the matching hypothesis for job satisfaction and the cross-domain hypothesis for family satisfaction.

In particular, regarding work antecedents, they predict WIF, and two of them (i.e., job involvement and flexibility) also affect FIW. However, the within-domain relationships are stronger than the cross-domain ones. With regard to the family antecedents, family

involvement and time devoted to family are linked to FIW; however, family involvement is also linked to WIF but with a weaker relationship.

From these results, a clear picture of the woman entrepreneur seems to emerge: an entrepreneur that does not consider the family and work domains to be completely separate, that lives a strong intertwined life between the two spheres and whose responsibilities do not run out at the end of the standard daily activity. Results regarding the family antecedents seem to confirm, once again, the key role of the woman in the family.

With regard to the consequences, although the statistical significance of the models is not high, results show that both WIF and FIW negatively affect job and family satisfaction. If the betas are analysed, it emerges that the relationship between WIF and both job and family satisfaction is slightly stronger than the relationship between FIW and both job and family satisfaction. An explanation can be found by considering that the family role is part of the self-identity of the women entrepreneurs and it seems strongly related to the socio-economic context on which the research is grounded.

Stemming from these results, future research avenues can be identified as follows. Worth implementing are longitudinal analyses on WFC as women entrepreneurs' WFC changes over the life cycle of both the women and the firms. Specifically, interesting findings could stem from investigations aimed at estimating the specific weights associated with the family workloads (e.g., distinguishing for example elderly people care from childcare, etc.). These analyses could provide interesting information about the way in which WFC may change over the years, and how it may change in relationship to different generations of women entrepreneurs. Another aspect worth being deepened by future research on WFC issues concerns the role of the social supports (e.g., partner, family members, etc.). Specifically, future analyses could deepen if and how an increase in the help received from these supports, in order to accomplish domestic work, and consequently, a rebalance in terms of care-loads within the family, could reduce women WFC. Another way to foster future research on this issue is to base the analyses on women led firms' characteristics and activity sectors (Poggesi et al., 2020). Results could, in this way, highlight if WIF is influenced, for example, by firms' dimensions, firms' competitiveness, firms' activity sector (more or less innovation-oriented), etc.

Regarding the possible policy interventions, policy makers should work to develop specific actions which really consider the uniqueness of female entrepreneurship as, to date, WFC' policies are largely devoted to employees. If the Italian situation is taken into account, where recently the obligation to take time off from work after birth for self-employed women has been eliminated, strong weaknesses are still present and are mostly related to the lack of both public and private services. For this reason, policy makers should act to promote networking activities, not only among those female firms grounded on the same local environment, but also by empowering the network linking female firms and public authorities, in order to promote the development of public services able to meet work-family balance needs in a more customised way. What just said is going to be further exacerbated due to Covid-19's effects, that have suddenly generated increased levels of workloads, especially for women. Recent surveys have indeed shown that the 68% of Italian working women with partner have spent more time on housework than before during the lockdown period – and this is an ongoing tendency of the post-lockdown period (InGenere, 2020). This is actually not only the case of Italy, but a global tendency that policy makers should promptly consider in order to develop targeted and sustainable policies, especially for women. Finally, the use of a

non-quantitative ethnographic strategy (Dana and Dana, 2005) could be useful to advance our knowledge on this topic. This approach allows researchers to better stress the role of the context in which the female entrepreneurs and firms are grounded.

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## **Notes**

- 1 Every Likert scale adopted in this paper is a six-point likert scale, rated from '1 = strongly disagree' to '6 = strongly agree'.