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Exploring Work-Family Conflict and Perceived Burden among Female University Teachers

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study examines work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC), and perceived burden among female faculty at the University of the Punjab. Using a quantitative survey and simple random sampling from a roster of female teachers across five faculties, 100 respondents completed a questionnaire covering WFC, FWC, burden, and demographics. Items were rated on a five-point frequency scale and, for prevalence estimates, recoded into negation (never/rarely) versus affirmation (occasionally/often/always). Guided by role conflict theory, time, strain, and behavior-based forms of interference were also distinguished and examined. Results show a clear dissymmetry: WFC is present, while FWC is largely absent. Participants reported all three forms of work-family conflict compressed family time, spillover of fatigue and stress, and carryover of work-related behaviors at home, whereas the same forms did not emerge in the family-to-work direction. Despite this unidirectional pattern, perceived burden was high, indicating that family-work conflict alone is sufficient to create a sustained sense of overload and loss of personal time. Demographic patterns and prior scholarship help explain this configuration, with work-side scheduling and task demands appearing to be the primary drivers. The findings highlight the value of institutional remedies that target timing and workload design, such as reducing back-to-back teaching blocks, clustering of assessments, and inflexible meeting times, rather than relying solely on individual coping. The study offers a baseline for evaluating family-responsive policies in public universities.

Keywords: citizenship behavior, family-work conflict, organization perceived burden, strain-based conflict, work-family conflict

Introduction

Universities are quintessentially bureaucratic organizations: they rely on

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clearly bounded roles, codified procedures, and tiered decision-making to coordinate complex academic and administrative work. In Weber's terms, authority is "rational-legal," embedded in rules rather than persons, and enacted through formal hierarchies, specialization, and merit-based appointment. In such settings, information and control generally cascade downward from senior leadership to middle management and finally to frontline academic staff; consistency and fairness are pursued through rules and standardized processes, even as these same features can generate rigidity when individual circumstances fall outside the norm (Weber).

This institutional backdrop matters for the everyday lives of university teachers, especially women, because bureaucratic routines shape schedules, performance expectations, and avenues for support. Teaching in higher education extends far beyond classroom hours to include preparation, assessment, student advising, committee work, research obligations, and service to the institution. The temporal intensity and cognitive load of these tasks often spill over into nonwork hours, compressing the time and energy available for family roles. Where on-campus supports (e.g., reliable childcare, flexible scheduling) are thin or unevenly accessible, routine organizational demands can be experienced as chronic pressure at the boundary of work and home (Simunic & Grego, 2012).

These pressures intersect with broader social change. Across the world and in Pakistan in particular, the participation of women in paid work has risen over recent decades (Cerrutti, 2000; George, 2011). Explanations highlight shifting technologies, institutional reforms, and evolving cultural norms (Fogli, 2011). National statistics similarly point to a steady increase in women's participation in education-sector employment, including at college and university levels, over the 2000s and early 2010s, with Punjab recording comparatively high female employment shares within the country's provincial landscape (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, various years). Yet participation gains have not erased the gendered division of labour in many households. In Pakistan's predominantly patriarchal context, women continue to shoulder primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving work even as they enter or remain in paid employment (Arsoy, 2012; Kandiyoti, 1988; Pampel, 1986). The result is a persistent "double presence": women are expected to perform as committed professionals and as primary caregivers, often with limited institutional flexibility or social support to reconcile the two.

The work-family literature captures this tension with two related constructs. Work-to-family conflict denotes interference that flows from job demands into the home domain, when time pressure, strain, or behavioural expectations at work hinder family roles. Family-to-work conflict captures the reverse dynamic when family responsibilities constrain performance or availability at work (Grzywacz, 2006; Voydanoff, 1988). Decades of research show these conflicts are bidirectional and mutually reinforcing: overload or unpredictability in one sphere increases strain in the other, and vice versa. For women academics, the combination of teaching loads, student-facing responsibilities, and performance metrics (publishing, service, and administrative duties) can heighten the likelihood of such cross-domain interference, particularly in the absence of institutional supports such as childcare, flexible timetabling, and equitable workload allocation.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the everyday experience of work-family and family-work conflict among female university teachers at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. Focusing on a large, bureaucratically organized public institution allows us to foreground how rule-bound procedures and hierarchical decision pathways shape time use, predictability, and perceived control, key mechanisms through which conflict arises. Specifically, the study pursues three aims:

- To map the prevalence and forms of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict reported by female faculty members across departments.

- To identify organizational antecedents linked to the university's bureaucratic design (e.g., scheduling rigidity, rule-driven processes, administrative load, availability of supports) that are associated with conflict.

- To situate these experiences within Pakistan's gendered division of labour, clarifying how household expectations and caregiving responsibilities interact with institutional demands.

The study contributes in three ways. First, it centres a population—female university teachers in Pakistan that remains under-represented in quantitative and mixed-methods analyses of work–family dynamics, which have been dominated by Western and private-sector samples. Second, it links classic organizational theory on bureaucracy to contemporary debates on gender, labour, and care, showing how formal structures condition the

direction and intensity of cross-domain interference. Third, it generates implications for policy and practice ranging from workload design and scheduling protocols to childcare provision and family-responsive governance, which are actionable in public-sector universities operating under tight procedural constraints.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Researcher's first review of scholarship on bureaucratic organization and work-family dynamics, with attention to evidence from South Asia. The researcher then describes the study context, sampling, and measures. Next, the researcher presents results on the patterns and predictors of bidirectional conflict. The researcher concludes by discussing implications for institutional policy and gender-equitable academic work in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

- Gauge the prevalence of cross-domain conflict by measuring the levels of work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC) among female faculty at the University of the Punjab.

- Identify the dominant forms of interference: time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based experienced by university teachers.

- Explain variation in conflict by exploring plausible antecedents and conditions associated with the presence or absence of WFC and FWC.

- Assess perceived role burden, documenting how female academics appraise workload and competing responsibilities.

Sociological Significance of the Research

Work-family and family-work tensions sit at the intersection of several foundational social domains, making the topic analytically rich and practically important.

Family

As a primary site of socialization, the family inculcates obligations, transmits cultural and moral values, and provides emotional and material support. The routine structure of daily life shapes how members, especially women, allocate time and care. Because family responsibilities are ongoing and relational, pressures at home can readily spill over into the workplace, and vice versa.

Gender

Gender refers to socially constructed roles and expectations for women and men that vary across cultures and historical periods. In many developing contexts, including Pakistan, social life remains strongly patriarchal: men are typically positioned as household heads, while women are expected to manage domestic labour and caregiving. Even as norms evolve, these expectations continue to pattern opportunities and constraints, rendering employed women especially vulnerable to cross-role conflict.

Economy

The economy organizes production, distribution, and consumption, and thus conditions labour demand, job quality, and social protection. Economic development and policy choices shape women's labour-force participation alongside demographic and cultural factors. Pakistan's commitments under the MDGs and SDGs have included reserved job quotas, targeted budget lines, and programs aimed at women's economic inclusion (e.g., microfinance initiatives and the Benazir Income Support Programme). Such measures can expand access to paid work but may also expose women to intensified role strain if workplace supports lag behind.

Education

Education transmits knowledge, skills, and dispositions across generations through formal institutions (from preschool to university) and informal learning. It is widely recognized as a driver of social change and development: when existing arrangements fail to meet emerging needs, education can catalyse new aspirations, competencies, and social relations. Universities, as apex institutions in this system, demand substantial cognitive and emotional labour from faculty teaching, mentoring, assessment, administration, and research, making them critical sites for studying WFC and FWC. Taken together, these domains underscore why examining work-family dynamics among female university teachers is sociologically significant. The findings can illuminate how household expectations, organizational design, and policy environments interact to produce or mitigate conflict insights that matter for gender equity, institutional effectiveness, and the well-being of academic staff.

Literature Review

A central insight in the field is that interference between work and home is

bidirectional but not unitary. A meta-analysis of 25 studies demonstrated that WFC and FWC are empirically distinct, with partly overlapping yet domain-specific antecedents and outcomes (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Pressures originating in the work domain demands, long hours, organizational culture, and role overload more reliably predict conflict in family (WFC), whereas pressures emanating from the family domain, childcare, eldercare, and spousal expectations more often produce conflict in work (FWC). This distinction underpins much of the subsequent evidence.

Role Salience, Gender, and Anticipated Conflict

How individuals prioritize work and family roles shapes the form and intensity of conflict they report. Using the Life Role Salience Scale, Cinamon and Rich (2002) identified three profiles: work-salient, family-salient, and dual-salient among 213 married participants across professions. Women were over-represented in the family-salient profile, men in the work-salient profile, while dual salience was gender-neutral. Family-salient employed women reported higher WFC, consistent with the tension created when strong family priorities confront non-negotiable job demands. Extending this line, Cinamon and Rich (2005) showed that, among Israeli teachers, teaching level and tenure matter: high-school teachers reported the greatest WFC, and those with less experience were more prone to FWC, suggesting that both job structure and career stage condition conflict. Anticipations also matter: among unmarried, childless university students, women expected more future conflict than men, and higher self-efficacy predicted lower anticipated WFC and FWC; egalitarian (dual-earner/dual-career) parenting models were perceived as less conflict-laden than traditional arrangements (Cinamon & Rich, 2005).

Evidence from Education and Public-Facing Occupations

Several studies focus on teachers and care-intensive work. In Malaysia, a survey of 100 school teachers (both genders) found that WFC was more prevalent than FWC; unmarried teachers reported taking more work home and thus showed higher WFC, and overall WFC was linked to poorer psychological well-being (Afzal et al., 2014). In North American samples of police officers and nurses, conflict varied with role commitments: stronger commitment to spouse and to job was associated with lower work spouse conflict, whereas higher parental commitment coincided with

greater work-parent conflict, highlighting trade-offs between role centrality and strain (Day & Chamberlain, 2006). Among U.S. teachers in New York and New Jersey, a supportive work-family culture and higher organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) were associated with reduced WFC; having children increased unpredictability and thus conflict, and there appeared to be a reciprocal association between a strong WF culture and job commitment (Bragger et al., 2005).

Job Level, Hours, and Organizational Conditions

Job structure is consequential. In a study differentiating higher-level (salaried/managerial) and lower-level roles, employees at higher levels reported more WFC and FWC, with working hours a key driver; notably, some FWC at higher levels appeared to be rooted in work dynamics rather than family alone, underscoring complex cross-domain pathways (DiRenzo et al., 2011). Organizational enablers can moderate these effects: supervisor support, family-friendly policies, and reasonable hours were each associated with lower conflict, and test-retest evidence suggested stable perceptions over time; WFC, but not FWC, related to job satisfaction, while family satisfaction was more weakly connected to conflict (Frye & Breaugh, 2004). In Turkey's banking sector, social-support variables-childcare availability, spousal support, and organizational support significantly reduced conflict among dual-earner families with a child under six, pointing to policy levers at work and home (Aycan & Eskin, 2005).

Consequences: Satisfaction, Turnover, and Withdrawal Behaviour

Conflict has measurable consequences for attitudes and behavior. Among U.S. furniture-factory employees, WFC (especially under strong kinship responsibilities) was associated with leaving work early rather than full-day absenteeism for women; tardiness was unrelated, and intriguingly, women with heavier kin obligations reported less FWC, suggesting compensatory strategies oriented toward family first (Boyar et al., 2005). In a Veterans Affairs hospital sample, composite (facet-level) job satisfaction correlated more consistently with WFC/FWC than did global satisfaction; across the conflict types, only behavior-based WFC/FWC showed reliable links to satisfaction, whereas time- and strain-based measures were weaker correlates (Bruck et al., 2002). Coping strategies matter too: avoidance/resignation correlated with higher WFC and FWC; help-seeking related to lower time-based FWC; and direct action/problem-focused

strategies were useful for family-side time/strain stressors, with no single style reliably reducing work-to-family interference (Rotondo et al., 2002).

Evidence from Pakistan and the Region

Several studies foreground South Asian contexts. In Pakistan's higher-education sector, a multi-university survey of 518 female faculty found that greater WFC was associated with lower job satisfaction and stronger turnover intentions, with clear implications for retention and educational quality (Ahmad et al., 2011). A cross-gender study of 146 university teachers reported that women experienced greater strain in balancing roles, were less satisfied with colleague support, and were more affected by childcare, household, and eldercare responsibilities; men, in contrast, more often reported supportive spouses (Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012). In the banking industry, married women employees reported that flexible routines and supportive supervisors mitigated WFC, whereas financial strain and non-supportive spouses amplified time-based conflict and psychological distress; peer relations reduced perceived workload but did not offset time imbalance or strain (Ahmad et al., 2011). Outside academia, female entrepreneurs in Singapore reported that long/rigid hours heightened spousal and household conflict, while spousal emotional support alleviated WFC; domestic help reduced housework load but did not resolve parental conflict, particularly with adolescents or larger families (Kim & Ling, 2001). Importantly, employer biases can translate conflict stereotypes into career barriers: supervisors who presumed women faced higher WFC rated them as poorer person-job and person-organization fits, making them less likely to be nominated for promotion, even when women's self-reported conflict was lower (Hoobler et al., 2009).

Directionality and Forms of Conflict

Building on Greenhaus and Beutell's typology, studies consistently parse WFC/FWC into time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based forms. Teachers and other professionals frequently report time pressure and emotional labor that spill into home life (Afzal et al., 2014; Cinamon & Rich, 2005). Behavior-based conflict when norms from one role are incompatible with the other, emerges as the subtype most reliably linked to job satisfaction (Bruck et al., 2002). Experience and career stage also shape which direction dominates: less experienced workers report more FWC, while more senior or higher-level staff often report more WFC (Cinamon &

Rich, 2005; DiRenzo et al., 2011).

Gap and Rationale for the Present Study

Despite a growing corpus on South Asia, public-sector universities in Pakistan, with their formal, bureaucratic procedures, fixed timetables, and evaluation regimes, remain under-examined. Existing studies document elevated WFC among female academics and identify promising levers (supervisor support, flexibility, childcare), but few link these findings explicitly to the organizational logic of bureaucracy or parse conflict by time, strain, and behavior within a single institution. The present study addresses this gap by measuring WFC and FWC among female faculty at the University of the Punjab, mapping conflict subtypes, and identifying organizational and household correlates that can inform actionable policy and practice.

Methodology

This study investigates the extent of work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC), and perceived role burden among female university teachers currently employed at the University of the Punjab (Quaid-e-Azam Campus). Data were gathered across 11 faculties, with in-person outreach to female faculty members.

Research Design

A quantitative design was adopted. Quantitative methods allow standardized measurement of constructs and facilitate statistical analysis of relationships between variables. Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to produce numerical summaries suitable for interpretation.

Sampling Frame and Technique

A simple random sampling approach was used. The sampling frame was compiled from the University's official website, which lists faculty members by department, institute, and college. From these listings, a roster of female faculty was prepared and used to draw a random sample. Simple random sampling gives each eligible case an equal chance of selection, thereby improving representativeness and reducing clustering bias.

Population, Coverage, and Departments Reached

The target population comprised female faculty across the following 11

faculties:

- Arts and Humanities

- Behavioral and Social Sciences

- Commerce

- Economics and Management Sciences

- Islamic Studies

- Education

- Engineering and Technology

- Law

- Life Sciences

- Oriental Learning

- Science

In total, 54 constituent units (institutes, departments, schools, and colleges) fall under these faculties. Field teams visited units across this structure; responses were ultimately obtained from 24 departments.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire administered face-to-face. Given the literacy and language proficiency of the target group, the instrument was provided in English. Researchers approached potential participants in their departments, briefly introduced the study, and invited them to participate.

A total of 113 questionnaires were distributed. 101 were returned; 1 was excluded due to missing information, yielding 100 usable responses. This corresponds to an approximate overall return rate of 89% (101/113) and a usable response rate of 88% (100/113).

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. The questionnaire began with a title page explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the intended use of data. Anonymity was assured; no identifying information was required on the survey. No respondent was pressured to participate, and individuals could decline

without consequence. When questions arose about item wording, a member of the research team was available on site to clarify content. Several respondents requested access to the final findings; contact details were collected only from those who opted to receive a summary report.

Data Analysis

All survey responses were entered manually and analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). After entry, variables were checked for coding consistency and completeness. Because the study focuses on respondents' *frequency of experience*, the analysis emphasizes frequency tables and percentages.

Items for work-family conflict (WFC), family-work conflict (FWC), and perceived burden (PB) used a five-point frequency scale: *Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Often,* and *Always*. To summarize the presence versus absence of each construct, the scale was collapsed into two categories:

- Negation (absence): *Never + Rarely*

- Affirmation (presence): *Occasionally + Often + Always*

For each item, SPSS was used to compute the collective percentage in the Negation group and the collective percentage in the Affirmation group.

Construct-level Summaries

Item-level results were then summarized by construct (WFC, FWC, PB) using simple, unweighted aggregation across relevant items to provide an overall prevalence indicator (i.e., the average percentage of respondents endorsing Affirmation across items within each construct).

Decision Rule and Interpretation

For any item or construct:

- If the Affirmation percentage (*Occasionally/Often/Always*) exceeds the Negation percentage (*Never/Rarely*), the researcher interprets this as evidence of the presence of that conflict/burden in the sample.

- If the Negation percentage is higher, the researcher interprets this as evidence of absence/low prevalence for that item or construct.

Both sets of percentages are reported to preserve nuance rather than

relying on a single threshold.

Results and Discussion

Most respondents were in early mid-career (31-40 years), predominantly married (81%), and held advanced degrees (MPhil/PhD). Tenure in academia was substantial many having 10+ years of experience. About 67% were permanent employees. Typical workload was heavy, most worked 6-10 hours/day, and 71% exceeded 31 hours/week.

Although about 89% reported some form of domestic help, conflict indicators remained high.

Work-family Conflict (WFC)

WFC was widespread and primarily time/strain driven.

- *Quality time squeezed:* 54.5% said they were unable to spend quality time with family due to work.

- *Household tasks suffer:* 68% struggled to manage chores because of work-related fatigue.

- *Irritability at home:* 58% reported lower tolerance for family members as a spillover of work strain.

- *Work stress at home:* 56% felt work stress interfered with home duties.

- *Boundary blur:* 64% took work home, particularly on weekends.

Figure 1
Work-family Conflict
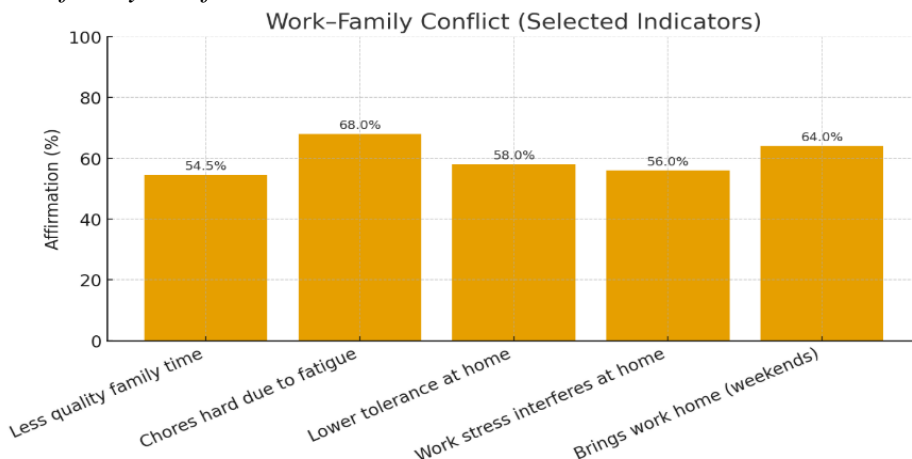
These patterns point to time-based and strain-based WFC as the dominant forms.

Family-work Conflict (FWC)

FWC appeared less pervasive. Just over half (52.5%) acknowledged that household responsibilities reduce time available for work, yet a majority (59%) *did not* feel family duties overshadow their jobs. In short, reverse interference exists but is less consistently experienced than WFC. Notably, 50% reported physical exhaustion from juggling both spheres, an indicator that cuts across directions of conflict.
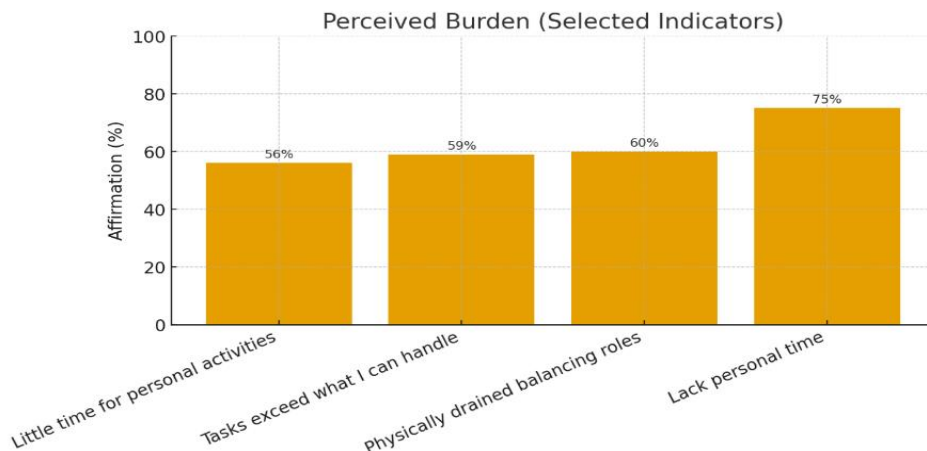
Perceived Burden (PB)

Perceived burden was strikingly high.

- 56% said work and family demands leave little time for personal activities.

- 59% felt they are tasked with more than they can handle.

- 60% felt physically drained from balancing roles.

- 75% reported a general lack of personal time.

Figure 2
Perceived Burden

Perceived Burden (Selected Indicators)

Across indicators, WFC eclipses FWC, suggesting that fixed teaching schedules, assessment cycles, advising, and committee work compress personal time and drain energy. The high share bringing work home (64%)

signals boundary permeability: academic work routinely spills into evenings and weekends. Even with widespread domestic help (89%), time scarcity and fatigue remain. This implies that institutional timing and workload design (when and how work happens) may matter more than the mere presence of household assistance. While FWC is less pronounced, the perceived burden is high (especially for the 75% lacking personal time). Burden reflects the ongoing effort of coordination, constantly managing schedules, expectations, and energy, even when overt clashes are intermittent.

Practical Implications

- *Timetabling & meetings:* Avoid late-day peaks and back-to-back blocks; keep meetings inside core hours.

- *Workload design:* Stagger assessment deadlines; protect no-teaching prep time; rebalance committee loads equitably.

- *Flexibility signals:* Normalize short-duration flexibility around caregiving ***events; make policies explicit rather than ad-hoc.***

- *On-campus supports:* Explore childcare partnerships and targeted supports during peak weeks.

Limitations

Findings are self-reported, single-institution, and cross-sectional. Collapsing response categories gives clear prevalence signals but masks finer gradations. Future work could track semester timing, include time-use diaries, and test department-level interventions.

Conclusion

This study confirms that work–home interference is bidirectional in theory, but not every group experiences both directions in practice. Among female faculty at the University of the Punjab, work-to-family conflict (WFC) is pronounced, whereas family-to-work conflict (FWC) is largely absent. Importantly, a high sense of burden persists even when only one direction of conflict is active. This suggests that WFC alone, through compressed time, lingering strain, and spillover in attitudes or behavior, is sufficient to generate sustained pressure on personal well-being. Across subtypes, time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based interference all appeared within WFC. By contrast, these same forms were not evident for

FWC. Taken together, the pattern is consistent with a context in which work-side triggers (fixed schedules, deadlines, and cognitive load) push into home life, while family-side supports (e.g., domestic help or shared care) mute reverse spillover. when organizational conditions that typically drive conflict are present in the work domain, WFC emerges; when arrangements that ease demands in the family domain are in place, FWC is minimal. Reducing time compression and cumulative strain at work is therefore the most credible route to lowering overall burden for this population.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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The authors did not used any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research.

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