

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REACTIONS TO COVID-19

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Work-Family Conflict During the Pandemic— Induced State of Emergency in Serbia: The Female Perspective

Abstract: Work-family conflict (WFC) has major consequences for both work and personal life outcomes, especially for women. The COVID-19 pandemic has set the stage for deepening the already existing gender gaps, especially in the semi-peripheral societies, such as Serbia. We argue that working from home during the pandemic-induced state of emergency aggravated the WFC among working women. To collect data, we applied mixed research plan on a sample of 265 women. Results showed that women who worked from home experienced a greater WFC than usual since they had to play professional and family roles simultaneously. Being a sort of social crises, COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency led to over-exploitation of female resources and instrumentalization of family relations. Furthermore, the intensity of the WFC was shaped by both women's personal characteristics and their family/household's features.

Keywords: pandemic, COVID-19, state of emergency, work-family conflict, female perspective, Serbia

Introduction

In the modern world, difficulties in harmonizing work and family life have become increasingly common and represent a major stressor for many. Recent decades have seen a significant rise in research interest in this topic, with worldwide shifts in work and family demographic trends diminishing individuals' ability to balance these two complementary life spheres (Seltzer 2019; Hofmeester and van Nederveen Meerkerk 2017; Lisenkova et al. 2010). Over the past several decades, female participation in the workplace has increased; there has been a growing number of families in which all adults work for pay (Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Bellavia and Frone 2005; Ahmad 2008); men have become more involved with family caregiving demands, particularly in developed Western countries (Lopez-Anuarbe and Kohli 2019; Calasanti and King 2007), and there has been a rapid rise in elder care demands due to an aging population (Bookman and Kimbrel 2011). The problem is significantly augmented by technology-enabled interconnectivity, which can keep individuals linked to work and family concerns 24–7 (Harris et al. 2011). These ever-growing difficulties in managing professional and private life are recognized as the work-family conflict (WFC). Vast empirical evidence has confirmed that the WFC represents

a source of severe stress and has important consequences for both work and personal life outcomes (Bellavia and Frone 2005; Mihelič 2014; Allen et al. 2000) as well as family well-being, marital and life satisfaction (Yucel 2017; Adams et al. 1996; Hill 2005; Barling and Macewen 1992), and physical and psychological health (Borgmann et al. 2019; Frone et al. 1992; Judge et al. 2006).

The WFC is a form of inter-role conflict that occurs when the time, energy or behavioral demands of the work role conflict/become incompatible with those of the family role (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). The theoretical roots of the concept are grounded in role theory (Katz and Kahn 1978; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985) and are closely attributed to the ecological systems theory (Bellavia and Frone 2005), the boundary/border theory (Ashforth et al. 2000), resource conservation (Hobfoll 1989; Grandey and Cropanzano 1999), demands and resources (Voydanoff 2004; Drenzo et al. 2011), and life-course perspectives (Moen and Sweet 2004; Moen et al. 2009).

The WFC is conceptually bi-directional (Akkas et al. 2015; Zhou et al. 2018). It occurs when experiences and commitments at work interfere with family life (work-to-family conflict) and *vice versa*, when family responsibilities interfere with work (family-to-work conflict). Although these concepts are correlated and both are associated with individuals' well-being, researchers argue that they are distinct constructs that need to be measured separately (MacDermid and Harvey 2006; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005). In this context, certain authors have pointed out that work-to-family conflict is more common than family-to-work conflict (Voydanoff 2005; Frone 2003), which implies that they have different impacts on individuals' general well-being.

We can distinguish between three categories of the WFC (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985): a) time-based conflict, b) strain-based conflict and c) behavior-based conflict. All of these conflict types are based on the conflict between multiple life roles and demands (e.g., spouse, parent, employee, elder care, home care, and leisure). Time-based conflict occurs due to inability to satisfy the demands of work and family simultaneously. In this case, "the demands of work and family compete for a finite amount of an individual's time" (Magnini 2009: 122). Strain-based conflict occurs when the strain generated in one role interferes with or precludes adequate participation in another role, while behavior-based conflict arises when specific behaviors dictated by one role are incompatible with the behavioral norms of another role (Cooper et al. 2001).

Many researchers have stressed the negative consequences of the WFC for women and their families across cultures (Fackrell et al. 2013; Aryee et al. 1999; Duxbury and Higgins 1991; Zhou et al. 2018; Ngo and Lui 1999). It has been suggested that cross-cultural differences in the strength of various inter-role conflicts could be a function of the salience of different roles in societies (Aycan 2008).

Balancing work and family responsibilities has become an increasingly important topic in Western Balkans societies. This region is characterized by low inclusivity in this practice, a relatively large gender gap due to the tradition and cultural patterns, but also limited availability and high costs of childcare and elderly care services, along with discrimination against women in the labor market (Bertek and Dobrotić 2016; UPCG 2017). In Serbia, despite slight modifications, the traditional family model is still dominant and women shoulder most of the family responsibilities (Blagojević Hjuson 2013, 2015; Tanasijević 2016).

Longstanding unfavorable social and economic conditions have negatively affected the fledging transformation of the family model, leaving the existing asymmetry in roles and relations almost “frozen” (Bobić 2006; Bobić and Vukelić 2011). In this context, balancing work and family responsibilities is primarily seen as “a women’s problem,” because women are still the ones who handle more of the unpaid household work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has set the stage for deepening the already existing gender gaps—it has contributed to women’s greater unemployment rates (Alon et al. 2020; Dang and Viet Nguyen 2021), an increase in domestic violence (UN 2020) and unpaid care work (UN 2020), but also growing health risks due to occupational sex-segregation (UN 2020).

In Serbia, nine days after the first COVID-19 infection case was identified (COVID-19.rs), the Serbian government declared a state of emergency on March 15th (Official gazette of the RS 2020). It lasted for 52 days and caused major shifts in everyday life of Serbian citizens. A majority of the working population started working from home or completely stopped working. Schools and kindergartens were closed so children were being home-schooled. There were shortages of sanitizers and safety masks in the pharmacies. Farmers’ markets were shut down. Many restaurants, pubs, bars and coffee shops stopped working, while some transferred to take-away services. By the government’s order, elderly citizens were banned from leaving their homes—they were completely locked down for five weeks. General lockdowns were mandatory for the entire population during the weekends and/or holidays—some of them lasted from 59 up to even 83 hours. Contradictory information and insecurity (especially during the first few weeks of the state of emergency) caused confusion, stress and sometimes even panic among the population.

Recent studies have shown that the pandemic outbreak and the state of emergency had a profound impact on people’s everyday life practices and strategies in Serbia, among both residents and returnees (Ristić et al. 2020; Pešić 2020; Čikić and Bilinović Rajačić 2020). They led to a decrease in the level of personal happiness and life satisfaction, but also an increase in honesty and solidarity (Pavlović and Petrović 2020). Researchers have also noticed a gendered impact of the pandemic and the state of emergency in Serbia. In labor and employment, following the COVID-19 outbreak: a) more women lost their jobs and b) their working hours increased more often compared to employed men (SeCons 2020a). Women in Serbia were more often transferred to working from home than men (as result of gendered sectoral segregation).

In this context, we aimed to analyze the impact of the novel social circumstances on women’s experience of WFC. The main hypothesis was that the type of work arrangement during the pandemic-induced state of emergency impacted the level of the WFC in the sense that working from home aggravated the WFC among working women. We expected to find that the WFC was more significantly impacted by the changes in family obligations than the changes in professional responsibilities (family-to-work conflict). We further hypothesized that the ability to manage work and private life was shaped by both respondents’ personal characteristics and their family/households’ features.

Method and Data Sources

Our research was undertaken during the third and fourth weeks of the state of emergency (end of March–beginning of April 2020). Due to the restrictive circumstances in which

the research was conducted (mobility restrictions/lockdowns; the WHO and the national Ministry of Health's recommendation on physical distancing) and the nature of the research topic, we applied a mixed research plan (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018). The research combined a semi-structured interview (primary, qualitative method) with an online survey (secondary, quantitative method). We created an interview list comprising 45 questions in the form of reminders to collect women's narratives regarding their family life during the pandemic-induced state of emergency. The questions were classified into eight groups (socio-demographic data, personal perception of the pandemic and the state of emergency, professional and family duties, everyday family life, children and the state of emergency, intergenerational solidarity, intimate relations, and pregnancy during the pandemic-induced state of emergency). The question list was distributed online, via e-mail and Facebook. The combination of interview elements (open-ended questions, in-depth insight) and an online survey (free access to the questionnaire at any time that suits the participant, enough time to answer, the simplicity of the communication between researchers and participants) enabled us to: a) collect data on the complex issue (changes in family life under risk circumstances), b) obtain data from a sample larger than is usual in qualitative research, and c) enable women to express their experiences and perceptions.

The sample consisted of 265 female respondents (Tab. 1.). Due to the previously mentioned restrictive conditions in which the research was conducted, a voluntary responding tactic and snowball sampling were applied. The main criterion for selecting the respondents was legal age. Since our research focused on the WFC, we only analyzed the data obtained from respondents who stated that they were employed (204 or 76.9% of the total sample). There were several non-significant differences between the main sample population and the subsample of employed women regarding the age structure, marriage status, family structure, and employment status.

Data analysis process encompassed both quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data were processed using content analysis (Milić 2014) in order to find patterns, but also specifics in women's narratives. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, measures of central tendency) and non-parametric test (chi square test, Kruskal-Wallis test). Data were processed with the statistical package SPSS 20.0.

Are You going to Work Today? Work Arrangements During the State of Emergency

The pandemic-induced state of emergency brought about changes in women's work arrangements. Three major types of work arrangements were identified: a) status quo, b) complete work suspension, and c) a new work setup. The least common type was status quo. It entailed women who continued to go to work, despite the pandemic and the state of emergency (21.4% of all employed participants). These women were mainly employed in the public sector (53.8%), especially in the health service, financial, retail, and media sectors. They described their work conditions and atmosphere differently—from positive to rather discomforting and stressful:

Table 1
Main sample and subsample characteristics

Main sample		Subsample	
<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
18–29	23.0	18–29	15.7
30–39	50.2	30–39	55.4
40–49	21.5	40–49	24.0
50–59	4.2	50–59	4.4
60+	1.1	60+	0.5
<i>Employment status</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Employment status</i>	<i>%</i>
employed	67.9	employed	88.2
owner	6.0	owner	7.8
freelancer	3.0	freelancer	3.9
unemployed	17.7	unemployed	0.0
pensioner	1.1	pensioner	0.0
student	4.2	student	0.0
<i>Marriage status</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Marriage status</i>	<i>%</i>
single	11.3	single	7.8
married	59.2	married	62.3
cohabitating	22.3	cohabitating	23.5
divorcée	5.7	divorcée	5.4
widow	1.5	widow	1.0
<i>Family type</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Family type</i>	<i>%</i>
nuclear family	48.7	nuclear family	52.9
extended family	17.4	extended family	14.7
DINK family	20.4	DINK family	22.1
single parent family	5.7	single parent family	4.4
sibling family	1.1	sibling family	0.5
single member	3.0	single member	2.9
other	3.8	other	2.5
<i>Members of the household</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Members of the household</i>	<i>%</i>
one	3.0	one	2.9
two	25.7	two	27.5
three	34.7	three	34.3
four	23.8	four	24.5
five	7.2	five	6.4
six or more	5.7	six or more	4.4
<i>Number of children</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of children</i>	<i>%</i>
no children	33.6	no children	32.4
one child	34.7	one child	35.3
two children	25.3	two children	26.0
three children	5.2	three children	4.9
four or more children	1.1	four or more children	1.5

Source: Research results; authors' calculation.

I work at a social facility for the accommodation of people and families in need... The work atmosphere is great; all employees are responsible—from the managers, doctors, and medical staff to social workers, all employees in general. All the prescribed measures are followed. (56 y., the public sector, social service)

I feel a certain kind of worry, discomfort, anxiety, and sadness when I travel alone to work by car during the lockdown, because the streets are unusually empty and I often get pulled over by the police and asked for documents. (41 y., the public sector, health service)

Even though these women's work arrangements did not fundamentally change, they experienced slight modifications in the form of new working hours, increased scope of work, pay cuts or unprofessional relations with the colleagues, which caused women's discontent:

We have three times more work to do. The biggest change concerns new working hours—we no longer work 8 but 9 hours a day and the boss said he is not going to pay us overtime. (39 y., the private sector, retail)

We asked to work from home, but they (managers—n.a.) said they are not going to allow it. I nagged and nagged, so they arranged for me to be alone in the office... which is ok. The working hours are the same as always, from 8 am to 5 pm with a one-hour lunch break. We all wear masks, wash hands, and avoid physical contact. We've heard of wages being reduced to the minimum wage. So, it is really stressful. (30 y., the private sector, design)

I go to work regularly, every day. The working hours are the same, eight hours a day. What has changed? Unscrupulous people have begun to show their true colors. Due to these circumstances (the state of emergency—n.a.), they have stopped pretending to be decent and they have finally showed what they truly are like. (46 y., the public sector, health service)

Second type of work arrangement—complete work suspension—was characteristic for the 34.1% of the employed women. It was the most diversified arrangement as it comprised of three different work scenarios. First one entailed women who were not working at all as they were taking time off work, with most of them being on a maternity leave (35.1%). The second scenario included women who were not working because they were on vacation (3.2%). The third, most common scenario (61.3%) applied to women who were not working at all due to their employers' or government's decision. A majority of these women were employed in the private sector (71.0%). They lost their income and feared getting fired:

Currently, I am not working at all. To be honest, I am quite scared of getting sacked. (24 y., the private sector, services)

My company is still working but I am not because my husband works abroad. I am on a leave, but I'm not getting paid. (33 y., the private sector, production)

Everything has stopped, I have no income. I have clients who cannot wait to come back and I also look forward to seeing them as they are wonderful girls and women and I hope my life, business, and income will slowly go back to normal. (25 y., owner, the private sector, services)

A new work setup is the third and most common type of work arrangement among the employed women as 44.5% of them continued working, but from home. For some, this situation did not considerably differ from pre-pandemic circumstances:

The working hours are the same, from 8 am to 4 pm. There is no particular change in the scope and type of work (39 y., the private sector, law office).

However, for the majority in this group, working from home was a completely new experience and it was rather demanding:

I work 24/7. I am exhausted!!! (32 y., the public sector)

I work from home, which can be quite challenging with a baby on board; the working hours last all day. (39 y., the private sector, PR)

Working from home brought different experiences to women, especially regarding their work organization and professional efficiency. The results revealed three main distinctive experience types. The most common type (66.7%) included women who were working from home and stated that they were well-organized and did not lose any of their usual office efficiency:

I work from home, in the afternoon, when my husband finishes work, so he can take care of the kid. I am pretty efficient and I manage to perform all my professional duties. (36 y., the public sector, education)

I needed some time to adapt, but now it's ok. I've made a chore list in my planner, I check it every morning and stick to it. I take breaks more often than when I am at the office, but for now I've managed to finish all my activities on time. For me, it's great to work in publishing—my tasks usually don't have to be done the same day, so I organize them and work at my own pace. (35 y., the private sector, publishing)

I've worked from home before, for years. I have a good professional infrastructure and I am extremely efficient. (32 y., the private sector)

On the other hand, one in four women working from home experienced a decrease in their professional efficiency, regardless of their organizational skills. According to women's narratives, this decrease in professional efficiency was a direct consequence of the multiple roles these women had to play at the same time and place (e.g. professionals, mothers, spouses). Moreover, during the state of emergency, women started to play new roles (e.g. kindergarten/school teachers; geriatric nurses):

It seems to me like I'm working all day long! It is hard to synchronize child care duties with the job, but, in the end, I do my best not to neglect any of those. I work a little bit in the morning and then after she falls asleep, and late in the afternoon when my husband comes home from work. (32 y., the private sector, graphic design)

Working from home in these circumstances is really difficult. Harmonizing it with other duties, most importantly homeschooling is not always possible, so professional duties suffer. All professional deadlines are postponed, so I've been managing to do my job so far. I usually focus on professional duties after children go to bed and then I work late into the night. (43 y., the public sector, science)

I work from home and when children are around, it is really difficult for me to concentrate. In fact, when they are present, I have almost no time to do my job and I cannot focus. I spend so much energy on homeschooling my daughter—she's in the second grade. My son is in the last year of preschool so I work with him on his graph-motoric skills... But, it is both time-consuming and nerve-racking. (37 y., the public sector)

At the end of the day, exhaustion is greater due to overlapping private and professional duties. (28 y.; HR)

The third experience type was reported by the smallest group of women (7.8%), who were unanimous in estimating their work from home as completely inefficient due to major issues with work organization. This experience led to an increase in their professional and

private dissatisfaction, making professional activities senseless and additionally increasing anxiety.

It is completely chaotic! (34 y., the public sector, culture)

I work from home: it is inefficient and unnatural due to the nature of my job, which is based on close communication with children. (43 y., the public sector, education)

It is pointless and it bothers me that it all comes down to form. (43 y., the public sector, education)

How Hard Is It to Balance Work and Family Life During the Pandemic and the State of Emergency?

A majority of women (52.1%) stated that their everyday duties were about the same as before the pandemic and the state of emergency. These women reported that during the state of emergency, their everyday responsibilities changed minimally (e.g. due to multitasking or the emergence of new and disappearance of old duties) or did not change at all:

My duties are the same, but I have less time for each of them because I am multitasking, e.g. reading emails and peeling potatoes. (33 y., the public sector, finances)

Everything's the same, some (duties—n.a.) are gone, some have newly emerged. (46 y., freelancer, the private sector, architecture)

On the other hand, 34.5% of the respondents reported having more duties than usual. For three-quarters of these women, taking care of family members and household maintenance were the main reasons for having more responsibilities than usual. This particularly refers to having more responsibilities regarding children (as kindergartens and schools were closed down) and elderly family members (as they were locked down for five weeks), but also having more housework than usual (e.g. more cooking, more cleaning). The narratives of women who reported having more duties than usual indicated that they took over activities that were executed by institutions (school, kindergartens, and elderly nursing home) or others (e.g. (un)paid help) in pre-pandemic circumstances. One in ten women reported having more professional responsibilities than usual, while one in six women stated that they had more family and professional duties since the pandemic outbreak.

I take more care of my kid, cook more often and do a lot more housework. (36 y., the public sector, education)

I have more duties, but professionally. As for housekeeping, my husband has taken over all the duties. (39 y., the private sector, retail)

I have more responsibilities around children because I take part in their homeschooling. Moreover, I normally do not do my job online, so I constantly have to learn new things and find ways to teach from a distance. (36 y., the public sector, education)

The smallest number of respondents (13.4%) reported having fewer duties than before the state of emergency. These women pointed out that they had more spare time than usual,

which made them more relaxed and organized. Some stated that the crisis situation made them focus more on what was important and stop wasting energy and time on irrelevant matters. For others, having fewer duties than usual was a result of a more equal distribution of housework among family members.

On the contrary, it seems to me that I was burdened with irrelevant things, so I had no time for myself. (36 y., the private sector, administration)

No, we have distributed housework equally among all family members. (25 y., the private sector, health service)

Actually, my husband has started taking care of our kid more than usual. (35 y., the private sector, electrical engineering).

There was no statistically significant difference between the participants in terms age ($\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 2.523, p = .283$), partnership duration ($\chi^2(2, 204) = 0.748, p = .688$), the number of household members ($\chi^2(2, 204) = .646, p = .724$) or the family budget before/during the pandemic ($\chi^2(2, 204) = 5.017, p = .081$; $\chi^2(2, 204) = 5.676, p = .059$) according to their experience of change in responsibilities in novel social circumstances. The only difference pertained to the number of children per woman ($\chi^2(2, 204) = 4.443, p = .009$). Women who stated that they had more responsibilities than usual also had more children. This was a consequence of the previously mentioned new roles they took on during the state of emergency. Women's new roles led to new family practices, which interfered with previously established routines, but also conflicted with their professional duties, especially in the case of working from home.

At first glance, our research results revealed two major types of women's experiences with managing work and family responsibilities during the state of emergency: a) inability to manage them and b) ability to handle two main complementary life spheres. Despite different work arrangements and experiences, only 6.1% of the respondents reported that they were completely unable to harmonize their professional and family duties during the state of emergency:

I can't manage to do my job because I spend most of the time with my kid and doing housework. Before the state of emergency, my son went to kindergarten. My parents would come over when he needed to be looked after if I had something to do. (35 y., the public sector, education)

I fail to do my job; there are too many duties at home, including homeschooling and taking care of our health. (45 y., the public sector, spatial planning).

These women formed a rather homogenous group—all of them were working from home, had at least one child and were married or cohabitating. A majority of them had difficulties in organizing work and experienced a decrease in professional efficiency and income.

By contrast, the experiences of women who reported managing to harmonize professional and family duties during the state of emergency were not uniform. Based on participants' reports, it was possible to differentiate between three distinct practices. The first practice—'it is easier than usual'—was most common (reported by 36.1% women who stated that they managed to balance work and home). The main reasons for this practice

included having more spare time than usual, shorter working hours, and sharing duties with their husbands, who were not working and/or were spending more time at home.

It's easier. I cannot explain it, but I am always better organized during the day when I know that I don't have to go out (that doesn't include shopping for groceries). I don't put off doing things, don't waste time on getting ready (make-up, getting dressed), don't spend hours in traffic. In the morning, I finish all the housework and in the afternoon, I do things for work. (26 y., the public sector, education)

It's easier because my husband is also at home and he also does things around the house; also, there are no out-of-home activities. (43 y., the public sector, health)

It's easier as I don't work shifts. I am always home by 4 pm. (39 y., the private sector, retail)

The second practice could be considered as the opposite of the first practice. Namely, women reported managing to balance work and home responsibilities, but they found it much harder than usual (33.3%). There were several reasons for this:

- restricted mobility (*It's harder to manage all the things. Mainly because children are being locked-down—39 y., the public sector, kindergarten*);
- the lack of the usual help from other family members, which was not available during the state of emergency (*It's much harder now. I usually get help from my mother and my mother- and father-in-law and now children cannot stay with them—45 y., the public sector, education*);
- having new social roles (*It's more difficult now because I also have to be a teacher, among all other things—42 y., the private sector, finances; Homeschooling functions well, but it requires much more parental commitment than usual—45 y., the public sector, education*);
- experiencing increased work pressure (*I manage to strike a balance, but I constantly feel tension and pressure. You never know when the employer could call you; sometimes, I would like to turn off my phone because my kid is asleep, but I cannot do it—42 y., the public sector, economy*).

Single mothers were in a particularly difficult situation, due to the multiple roles they had to take on, with no help from others:

I am a single mom of one kid. Besides being a cook, cleaner, entertainer and 'errand boy', now I am also a teacher. My general impression is that I have much more things to do at home now and I don't have enough time to do all the things I think I should do. (42 y., the public sector, social planning and development)

One in four women reported the 'status quo' practice. For them, there were no changes in balancing work and home during the pandemic in comparison to pre-pandemic circumstances:

Everything is the same, like in a regular situation. Every household member has his/her own chores. (43 y., the private sector, services)

I harmonize professional and family duties as easily as before, except I need more time to do shopping, which can sometimes affect my daily schedule. Basically, nothing has changed compared to the regular situation. (28 y., owner, the private sector, services)

The results showed that age, marriage/cohabitation duration, changes in the family budget during the pandemic, the status of the employed women, and the economic

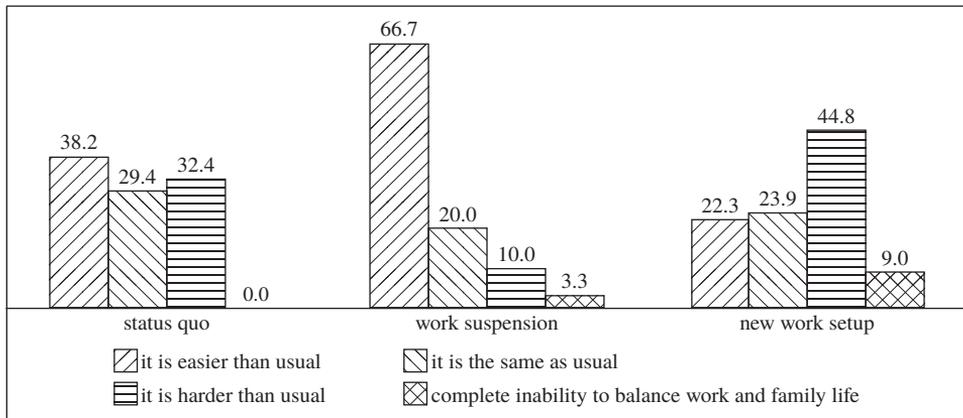
sector in which they were employed did not influence the type or intensity of their WFC. However, the number of children ($\chi^2(3, n=204)=14.093, p=.003$), the number of household members ($\chi^2(3, n=204)=7.687, p=.053$), the family budget before the pandemic ($\chi^2(3, n=204)=7.369, p=.051$), the characteristics of work organization ($\chi^2(3, n=204)=12.890, p=.005$), and the level of efficiency ($\chi^2(3, n=204)=10.664, p=.014$) impacted women's ability to harmonize professional and family responsibilities in the following manner:

- Women who claimed that the WFC was manageable but more intense than usual had more children ($M=1.42$) than those who claimed that the conflict was intense ($M=0.84$) or less intense than usual ($M=0.80$). Interestingly, women who claimed that they were completely unable to balance work and family duties had fewer children than the first group of respondents ($M=1.00$);
- A greater average number of household members ($M=3.4$) corresponded with increased difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. Conversely, women who reported experiencing the same or even lesser WFC also lived in households with a lower average number of household members ($M=3.0$ and $M=2.9$ respectively);
- Respondents who reported having a smaller family budget before the pandemic also experienced greater difficulties in managing work and family duties during the state of emergency. Among women who reported an intense but manageable or completely unmanageable WFC, a majority had a livelihood that only enabled them to fulfill their basic needs (52.9% and 60.0% respectively). By contrast, among those who reported a WFC of the same or even lower intensity than usual, a majority had a larger family budget, which allowed them to fulfill all of their family needs (51.3% and 69.7% respectively);
- Women who reported having difficulties organizing work or being completely disorganized also encountered an unmanageable WFC or a manageable but more intense conflict than usual (73.3% and 55.5% respectively). Conversely, only one-third of well-organized women described such episodes;
- The level of professional efficiency was lower among women who experienced an unmanageable WFC or a conflict that was manageable but more intense than usual (83.4% and 42.9% respectively). On the other hand, respondents who managed to harmonize their work and family duties mainly reported high levels of professional efficiency (82.4% of those who claimed it was the same as usual and 62.5% of those who claimed it was even easier).

The results also showed that there were significant differences in women's ability to manage professional and family duties, compared to their work arrangements during the state of emergency ($\chi^2(8, n=204)=23.431, p=.003, \text{Cramer's } V=.283$). Women who continued to go to work experienced the least significant changes in the level of their WFC. One third of them reported a manageable conflict, but found it more difficult than usual to balance work and family responsibilities. Women who stopped working during the state of emergency (work suspension) experienced the lowest levels of the WFC, with two-thirds of them stating that they managed professional and work responsibilities more easily than usual. Finally, three-quarters of women who started working from home experienced certain changes in their ability to manage work and family duties. They mostly found it more

Figure 1

Ability to manage work and family duties, according to the work arrangement during the pandemic-induced state of emergency (%)



Source: Research results; authors' calculation.

difficult than usual or reported being complete unable to balance work and family/a high WFC. All women who experienced a WFC that was particularly high or greater than usual stated that it was mainly due to the increase in family duties during the state of emergency, given that they were in charge of homeschooling, taking care of preschoolers and/or elderly or handling more housework.

However, in spite of the WFC and social commotion caused by the pandemic, a majority of the employed women (87.7%) stated that they found something positive in the state of emergency, mainly due to the fact they were able to spend more time with their families:

I spend more time with the family, we play together, we cook, bake bread... This is a family virus! ☺ (34 y., the public sector, media)

There were no statistically significant differences in women's general perceptions of the state of emergency according to their work arrangement ($\chi^2(2, n = 204) = 2.114, p = .348$, Cramer's $V = .108$).

Discussion

The state of emergency caused modifications in women's work arrangements and domestic/family responsibilities, which is in line with similar studies within the national context (SeCons 2020b). In our research, these modifications appeared to form a continuum of different levels of (un)manageable demands from the professional and private spheres. One end of the continuum entailed experiences that indicated an unquestionable WFC, recognized as women's complete inability to manage work and family life. The opposite end referred to the situation in which such episodes were nearly absent as managing work and family responsibilities was easier than usual. Interestingly, there was not a single respondent who reported experiencing a complete absence of the WFC. The main hypothesis

was confirmed as there were statistically significant differences in women's experiences of the WFC, according to their (changing) work arrangements during the state of emergency. Women who worked from home experienced a greater WFC than usual due to the fact they had to perform professional and family roles simultaneously.

Similar studies have also shown that women experienced an increase in the WFC during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns (Adisa et al. 2021; Schieman et al. 2021; Uddin 2021). Namely, the novel social circumstances induced a (temporary) deinstitutionalization of caregiving, schooling and supervising and led to their re-familization. Being generally perceived as natural caregivers, women were expected to fully take over the care of family members. This is typical of the Serbian society as women traditionally take care of children and the elderly more than men (SORS 2017). Caregiving is perceived as a female practice and it is embedded in social customs regarding motherhood (Blagojević Hjuson 2013). Thus, during the state of emergency and lockdowns, women took over the activities of the temporarily dysfunctional social institutions (e.g. kindergartens, schools, elderly nursing homes), adding more activities to their list of responsibilities (e.g. nurse, teacher). Besides being time-consuming, these activities were quite challenging as many women did not have qualification or previous experience in these domains. Moreover, pre-pandemic family practices of housekeeping, cooking and grocery shopping also changed during the state of emergency in the sense of their re-domestication (Čikić and Bilinović Rajačić 2020), which further contributed to women's domestic workload and led to a greater WFC.

Unlike other respondents, women who worked from home experienced high work-home integration with a minimal or non-existent distinction between different roles, especially regarding their location and timing (Schieman et al. 2021). This led to an increase in role permeability (Schieman et al. 2021), which was associated with an increase in time-based (Magnini 2009), but also strain-based WFC (Powell 2020; Cooper et al. 2001). The increase in the WFC for these women was also a result of the unexpectedness and rapidity of the transition to working from home. The change was almost instant and found most of the workers unprepared, in terms of the available equipment and skills for working from home. Therefore, the pandemic and the state of emergency brought into question previous findings on reduced levels of the WFC (Gajendran and Harrison 2007) when working from home.

Nevertheless, the results suggested that differences in family traits (the number of children, the number of household members), economic aspects (family budget before the pandemic) and work conditions (work organization, the level of efficiency) differently impacted the intensity of the WFC. That is in line with pre-pandemic studies (Kotowska et al. 2010) and current analyses (Adisa et al. 2021; Schieman et al. 2021).

There is continuity in the WFC among Serbian women (Golubović and Golubović 2015). As noted by Mihić, Mihić and Spasojević (2011), Serbian women were more likely to experience a stronger WFC in all of its dimensions (time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based WFC). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency brought about changes in the source of the conflict. Namely, pre-pandemic research showed that "work affected family life more than commitments towards the family affected their job performance" (Golubović and Golubović 2015: 196). This speaks in favor of the claim that the work-to-family conflict is more common (Voydanoff 2005; Frone 2003). On the other hand, the modified circumstances of family functioning and work arrangements (of women)

during the pandemic and the state of emergency resulted in the prevalence of the family-to-work conflict, due to increased demands from the private life / family sphere. These results are in line with the assertions of certain authors (MacDermid and Harvey 2006; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005) who found that, although correlated, the work-to-family conflict and the family-to-work conflict are distinct constructs that need to be measured separately.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency can be perceived as a form and/or initiator of crisis in many social aspects (e.g. health, economy, democracy, food security, education, science, social security, domestic violence). Under such circumstances, family relations are often used as a form of social capital that enables individuals to overcome a lack of socially available services and facilitates fulfilling personal and/or group needs. Female resources have proved to be especially valuable, as they are commonly available (for free) and expected to be used. This was verified during previous turbulent periods in the history of the Serbian society (Blagojević 1995; Blagojević Hjuson 2013). The extensive use of female resources is considered to be a consequence of the prevailing gender regime. In a semi-peripheral society such as Serbia, there is a continuity of over-exploitation of female resources (Blagojević 1991), along with a certain level of instrumentalization of family relations (Blagojević Hjuson 2013). In such a context, women are expected to sacrifice themselves for the family.

Although not specifically analyzed, some of the women's narratives indicated the issue of an increased demand for emotional management (in both work and family activities), which additionally contributed to their WFC. This was in line with previous studies that indicated the power of emotional labor in explanations of balancing work and family life (Yanchus et al. 2010).

In line with Milliken, Kneeland and Flynn's findings (2020: 1769), we could assume that the multiple changes in both work and family practices during the pandemic-induced state of emergency, along with the women's experience of an increased WFC, may have resulted in their diminished personal life satisfaction, but also in 'lower performance ratings, career satisfaction, salary, and hierarchical position in the long-term'. Together, these changes might have led to a decrease in their general well-being. However, spending more time with the family was not viewed only as a source of the WFC but also as a positive outcome. This certainly constitutes the baseline for women's coping and surviving strategies during the state of emergency (da Costa Lemos et al. 2020).

Further research on this topic is both welcome and needed. It would be purposeful to include the male perspective of the issue and compare the findings with the results of studies based on the female experience. Furthermore, it would be fruitful to conduct research on this topic across cultures, that is, explore cross-cultural differences in the strength of various inter-role conflicts. Additional variables (e.g. job position, spouse support, the use of paid help, job satisfaction) could also provide a better viewpoint on the issue.

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