




Gabriela Vanzo SPASIANI*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1861-5567>


Fernanda Reis Theodoro da SILVA**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6946-4423>

Edward GOULART JÚNIOR***

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4923-433X>

Marianne Ramos FEIJÓ****

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6036-9884>

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IMPLICATIONS OF HOME OFFICE FOR WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT: CONSEQUENCES FOR WORKERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The recent pandemic has required many changes in people's daily lives and remote work, specifically with the home office having come to occupy a central role in organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the possible implications of this for the work-family conflict, a construct that consists of conflicting interactions among the roles played in professional and family lives. **Method:** A bibliographic search was carried out using the SCIELO, LILACS, BIREME, BVSPsi and Google Scholar databases. The bibliographic search was conducted using the descriptors: "work-family conflict" and "home office and work-family conflict". 41 texts were found, but few empirical studies. **Main results:** Studies showing conflicts associated with the home office, an issue marked by gender, class and color inequalities, indicate that women with young children face greater burdens and difficulties in finding a balance between their professional and family roles when compared to men and/or those without small children. **Final considerations:** The home office can have an effect on the relationship between work and family, and there may be differences among work activity and social role, intensification of work, lack of time to carry out personal, domestic and professional activities, with a greater overload for women with children, which impact on the family and the organization of work.

Keywords: Remote Work. Work-Family Conflict Pandemic

IMPLICAÇÕES DO HOME OFFICE PARA O CONFLITO TRABALHO-FAMÍLIA: CONSEQUÊNCIAS PARA TRABALHADORES E ORGANIZAÇÕES

RESUMO

Introdução: A recente pandemia exigiu inúmeras mudanças no dia a dia da população e o trabalho remoto, especificamente o home office, passou a ocupar um papel central nas organizações. Assim sendo, faz-se necessário entender as possíveis implicações deste para o conflito trabalho-família, um constructo que consiste em uma interação conflituosa entre os papéis desempenhados na vida profissional e familiar. **Método:** levantamento bibliográfico realizado nas bases SCIELO, LILACS, BIREME, BVSPsi e Google Acadêmico. A pesquisa bibliográfica foi realizada utilizando-se dos descritores: "conflito trabalho x família", "home office e o conflito trabalho-família". Foram encontrados 41 textos, mas poucas pesquisas empíricas. **Resultados principais:** Estudos que mostram conflitos associados ao home office, questão atravessada por questões de desigualdades de gênero, classe e cor apontam que indivíduos do sexo feminino e com filhos pequenos enfrentam maior sobrecarga e dificuldades em encontrar o equilíbrio entre os papéis profissional e familiar quando comparados a pessoas do sexo masculino e/ou que não tenham filhos pequenos. **Considerações finais:** o home office pode produzir efeitos na relação entre trabalho e família e que podem ocorrer divergências entre atividade laboral e papel social, intensificação do trabalho, falta de tempo para a realização de atividades pessoais, domésticas e profissionais, com maior sobrecarga para as mulheres com filhos, que impactam a família e a organização de trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho remoto. Conflito trabalho-família. Pandemia.

* Psychologist, São Paulo State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho – Unesp, e-mail: gabriela.spasiani@unesp.br

** Psychologist, São Paulo State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho – Unesp, e-mail: fernanda.reis@unesp.br

*** Doctor, Professor at the São Paulo State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho – Unesp, e-mail: edward.goulart@unesp.br

**** Doctor, Professor at the São Paulo State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho – Unesp, e-mail: marianne.r.feijo@unesp.br



1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of major technological changes in our society, organizations have been able to obtain more flexibility in terms of structuring the work and creating the means to carry it out. The Home Office, a term used to refer to the performance of professional activities by workers in their homes, emerged more than 50 years ago. It has grown and stands out today as a recurring type of work that allows the maximization of existing resources, remote management of business, reduction of the need for commuting, among other advantages, which corroborate the trend of its strong, worldwide acceptance.

The Home Office, then, is work done remotely, from the home, and is a type of teleworking. According to Konradt, Schmook and Mälecke (2000), teleworking is when individuals carry out all or part of their work activities in an environment that is physically different from where the company is located, using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to do so. In this sense, we can say that the home office is a form of flexible work that uses the technological developments that have taken place over the years (ROCHA; AMADOR, 2018; BANA; BENZEL; SOLARE, 2021).

Nowadays, this type of work has become even more widespread and prioritized in various segments, also due to the sudden onset of a highly transmissible, contagious virus with great lethal potential, the coronavirus (COVID-19), at the end of 2019. In March 2020 this led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a pandemic. As a result of this warning, governments were advised to adopt a variety of measures such as hand hygiene, the use of masks, systematic cleaning of environments and surfaces, restrictions on community life in different places and social distancing (MALTA et al., 2020; GOULART JUNIOR; CAMARGO, 2021), to contain the virus.

To comply with the guidelines related to social distancing and restrictions on places of communal interaction, many companies had to suspend their activities, partially or completely, and find a way to keep working. To do this, many of them started to operate in the home office mode. The People Management Survey in the Covid-19 Crisis (MELO, 2020; AMIN; RAUDHOH, 2021) pointed out that working from home was a strategy adopted by 46% of companies during the pandemic, bringing this mode to the front and center of the organizational context. Therefore, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2021), there are 7.9 million people working remotely in Brazil. The services sector has the highest percentage of remote workers, followed by the public sector, with an upward trend.

Data from the Institute for Applied Economic Research (2021) showed that the industrial sector displayed a certain stability, with approximately 7.1% of workers in remote activity, similar to commerce and agriculture, with 5.0% and 0.6%, respectively. Queiroga (2020) reveals the existence of remote work in different contexts even before the pandemic. However, for the author, for a large part of the working population, this modality was unprecedented and, in many cases, compulsory.

The literature points out some advantages of the home office for individuals, mainly related to the flexibility of the working day and the reduction in commuting time. This can also lead to a greater possibility of balancing social, family, work and leisure demands, as well as the autonomy of the individuals to organize themselves in relation to the ways they work and manage their time, among others. Regarding the advantages of the home office for the organization itself, one can mention the decrease of expenses with physical space and equipment, in addition to the possibility of increased productivity, greater motivation and less absenteeism (ALMEIDA; NOGUEIRA, 2019; RAFALSKI; ANDRADE, 2015; ROCHA; AMADOR, 2018).

However, in addition to the positive points, the literature also presents the negative points of this modality, namely: the difficulty of managers to monitor workers' activity; the decrease of interaction between them, which can lead to a decrease in collaboration at work; the possibility of increased workload; of demobilization of the worker as a class; and, the need for adaptation to integrate work into daily life at home (ALMEIDA; NOGUEIRA, 2019; RAFALSKI; ANDRADE, 2015; ROCHA; AMADOR, 2018; HAUBRICH; FROEHLICH, 2020).

Amin and Raudhoh (2021) also point out some advantages and disadvantages of the home-office. For the authors, one of the benefits of this mode is the flexibility of time and place, saving on transportation costs. Another outstanding advantage is that the worker is free from interference from co-workers. As for the disadvantages, they explain that this mode depends on adequate network connections and work equipment that may not be as reliable as in the workplace. Another major negative point, for the authors, is the lack of the "emotional touch" due to the lack of face-to-face contact and interaction. According to the authors, if this work-from-home policy continues, it could have several other impacts, such as a reduction in communication between colleagues and reduced motivation to work – mainly due to the simultaneous domestic workload.

Considering that the individual acts in society, playing different social roles, it is inferred that work in the home-office can have implications not only for the worker's professional life, but also for their personal life. When professional activities are carried out in the worker's home, this situation can lead to various conflicts in the relationship between work and family. The work-family conflict, in this scenario, is a construct used to refer to a conflicting interaction between these two important dimensions of human life and, for this reason, is an important focus of the study of Organizational and Work Psychology.

In this sense, the main objective of the present article is to explore, through this theoretical essay, the possible implications of the home office on work-family conflicts. This is justified by the need to have more information on such topics, since there are few studies in Brazil that address this relationship. Moreover, the present article is important because it makes it possible to think about how future professionals can deal with this new way of working in order to reduce and mitigate conflicts, and to find a better balance between work and family in the context of remote work. This issue is reinforced by the fact that, even with the weakening of the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to "normality" in terms of social distancing requirements, many organizations will need to maintain remote work for some functions. The present theoretical essay was developed through a bibliographic search conducted in important electronic indexers, most of which disseminate scientific production in the health area such as Scielo, Lilacs, Bireme, BvsPsi and Google Scholar. The descriptors "work-family conflict" and "home office and the work-family conflict" were used. 41 texts were found, but with little empirical research.

2 CONSIDERATIONS ON WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

An individual's life is made up of various dimensions, with the professional and family dimensions being predominant and inseparable. That is, aspects of one of these dimensions interfere with the other, and vice versa. When the roles assumed in the professional and family lives have a conflicting interaction, it is called a work-family conflict (ANDRADE; OLIVEIRA; HATFIEL, 2017; LATUPAPUA; ATTAMIMI; PUTRI, 2021). For Lemos, Barbosa and Monzato (2020), the work-family conflict occurs when an individual suffers different pressures in performing the professional and personal roles, making it difficult to reconcile these two dimensions. For Boyar and Mosley (2007), the work-family conflict is characterized by problems or conflicting family situations generated by work issues.

According to Andrade, Oliveira and Hatfiel (2017), the work-family construct is bidirectional because it can occur when work interferes with family (WIF) and when family interferes with work (FIW). Still, regarding the construct, it is possible to identify three main bases of interference as: aspects related to time, tension between roles, and behavior (GREENHAUS; BEUTELL, 1985). As for the time aspect, it is understood as the time that an individual invests in one of these roles to the detriment of the other, for example, when there is a high workload that prevents the individual from spending quality time with family members. Tension between roles occurs due to the pressures and demands in each of these areas and the difficulty of meeting them properly, such as parents of young children who need a lot of care, in jobs with high demand. The behavioral aspect occurs when the individual has difficulty adjusting the appropriate behaviors to each of these instances.

The study by Chambel (2008) corroborates Greenhaus and Beutell's model regarding the time factor, such as when the individual spends a lot of time working, especially due to the overload factor. This has negative consequences, making it difficult or even impossible to reconcile the demands of work with those of the family.

Wolff (2021) carried out a study that aimed to analyze the work-family conflicts reported by teleworking mothers during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that doing work outside of working hours (overload) and thinking about work while at home (time) were the main conflicts faced by these women during the atypical situation of compulsory remote working.

Latupapua, Attamimi, Putri (2021) carried out a study with 100 professionals from the hotel chain in the city of Ambon (Indonesia), with the aim of determining the effect of the work-family conflict on organizational commitment and job satisfaction as mediating variables for workers. The results of the study showed that there is a significant, negative effect of the work-family conflict on organizational commitment, and that the organization that promotes job satisfaction has more committed workers who cope better with the work-family conflict. Also considering job satisfaction and the relationship with the work-family conflict, the study by Jimenez and Bravo (2020) showed a negative relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction, indicating that the lower the perception of this conflict on the part of the worker, the higher their level of job satisfaction and vice versa. The study concluded that work organizations that can meet work and family demands have more satisfied professionals who rate their work more positively.

Although the concept of the work-family conflict originated from a negative connotation regarding this interaction, more recent studies (GEURTS et al., 2005; GREENHAUS; POWELL, 2006; PEREIRA et al., 2014) have investigated the positive effects that this relationship can have on the individual, promoting a feeling of greater well-being and satisfaction in performing both roles simultaneously instead of just one of them. For example, we can mention a caregiver who has children and a good relationship with the professional area and access to means of providing for the family, can be reasons for great satisfaction. In this sense, a perspective of balance rather than of conflict is used, in which the enrichment of one of the domains (professional or personal) can interfere with the other in a positive way. Therefore, what is experienced and developed in one of these dimensions impacts on the other (RIBEIRO; QUEIRÓS, 2012).

However, the negative influences of the work-family conflict are still recurrent. They are related to a series of losses for workers such as low life satisfaction, dissatisfaction with the quality of romantic relationships and other losses in the family dimension (ALLEN et al., 2000; MICHEL et al., 2009 apud ANDRADE, OLIVEIRA; HATFIEL, 2017), as well as physical and emotional exhaustion and psychosomatic symptoms (RIBEIRO; QUEIRÓS, 2012).

The damage arising from the work-family conflict also has negative impacts on organizations as it increases the levels of dissatisfaction with work on the part of the worker, interferes with the effort dedicated to work, increases the intention to leave the organization, decreases organizational loyalty and affects the number of job promotions of these professionals (ALLEN et al., 2000; ERNST; OZEKI, 1998; HILL, 2005; VOYDANOFF, 2005 apud ANDRADE; OLIVEIRA; HATFIEL, 2017; LATUPAPUA; ATTAMIMI; PUTRI, 2021).

Feijó et al. (2017, p.110) explain that "the work-family conflict is a concept related directly to several other theoretical concepts arising from the individual's relationship with the work such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, worker health and worker well-being". According to the authors, work-family conflicts are being studied more closely and, as a result, discoveries are also being made about the consequences of the conflict on the quality of life and health of workers. Among the health-related problems, Patlán Perez (2013) and Ribeiro and Queirós (2021) also highlight the burnout syndrome which, according to the authors, may be present in unbalanced relationships between the two dimensions of the subject's life.

Given the above, there is an understanding that organizations need to pay attention to the work-family conflict. This is especially due to the fact that the remote work or home office

model affects the relationship between work and family life for workers in general. This can exacerbate or generate conflicts, problems in work relationships, dissatisfaction and damage to workers' health.

It is important to understand when the home office is a choice, or is a necessity. What used to happen in separate environments becomes intertwined. That is, the reproduction of work is interconnected within the family context of interpersonal and affective relationships. Molina and Silva (2019) and Barros and Silva (2010) report that teleworkers generally lose the boundaries of space and time that used to separate their work and home routines. As a result, their perception of the domains of work and home is hindered, often resulting in overlapping roles, which can have negative consequences, intensifying the work-family conflict.

In addition, the merging of professional life and personal life can lead to divergences between work activity and the social role played in the family, creating a duality of contexts that can increase the friction and tension between the parties. This notion has a potential impact on the reduction of worker productivity, or even on the development of family disputes, since the roles overlap (MOLINA; SILVA, 2019).

In this scenario, Tremblay (2002, apud BARROS; SILVA, 2010) explains that, in general, the workload of individuals in the home office is usually 10 to 20% higher than what is usually performed on the organization's premises. This data shows us that this mode leads to an intensification of work (which can be explained by the flexibility of the remote context). This can interfere in the family context, since it will take up time that should be allocated to personal and non-professional activities, which can result in an increase in the conflict between work and family. Bridi et al. (2020), in their study, state that remote work at the time of the pandemic brought even more overload to workers, that is, a greater number of hours and days worked, generating a faster pace.

Another very important point that can impact this relationship is the possible distraction in the domestic context, which can lead to a lack of concentration at work in such a way that the family routine interferes with the professional activity to be performed and, therefore, in the role played by the worker. This complexity occurs because not every professional who works in the home office has a designated space just to do their work, and may have to do so surrounded by social and family life (MOLINA; SILVA, 2019).

It should be noted that this will depend on the type of situation experienced at work as well as on personal issues such as the size of the family, especially the number and age of children, physical aspects of the home, family lifestyle, gender and economic issues, and

technological resources available. Some people may suffer more impacts than others in their work-family relationship when they are in the remote modality, with different consequences in the family and professional dimensions.

The conflicts between the roles played at work and in the family permeate the inequalities of gender, class and color. Gender inequality is a central factor since women who are mothers, especially of young children, report higher levels of conflict than fathers. A study conducted by Lemos, Barbosa and Monzato (2020), in which 14 women who adopted remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic were interviewed, showed that all of them reported a significant increase in the workload during the period analyzed. According to the authors, this increase is related to the sudden adoption of the home office due to the pandemic, confining the entire family together without any planning or appropriate material resources such as a suitable place to work, ergonomic chairs, among others. Added to this is the fact that, in many households, domestic tasks increased during this period. According to the interviewees, they dismissed professionals hired to do household chores, such as cleaning, reduced interactions, physical activities and so on, which are now carried out remotely and mediated by technology. In addition, the interviewees who were mothers had to reconcile this entire new reality with full-time childcare and remote school activities, since the schools were no longer offering in-person classes.

As a result of this research, Lemos, Barbosa and Monzato (2020) found elements, in the reports of some of the interviewees, that corroborate what is pointed out in the literature. That is, women feel overloaded with domestic tasks, childcare and professional demands, which has worsened during the pandemic. The study also revealed the feeling of inability to meet these various demands and a strong sense of anxiety which, for some participants, involves the habitual consumption of alcoholic beverages. This situation affects the women surveyed, who share common characteristics: they are mothers of young children and do not live with their children's fathers. This puts a strain on them because they have no other adult with whom to share responsibility for the children, which contributes to them feeling that they can neither devote themselves properly to their work nor to their children. There are women with children who live with the father of the children and who are in charge of most of the tasks, while women without children faced an overload at work due to the new structuring of work or because the partner also overloads them with all domestic tasks, according to data from the aforementioned survey.

Although, for the majority of women, teleworking is a factor that increases work-family conflict, for a portion who can count on different types of help, this modality can bring benefits. This is because in traditional work, in addition to time, pressure and behavior, there are other sources of conflict such as commuting and the physical distance that hours dedicated to work outside the home require (LEMOS; BARBOSA; MONZATO, 2020).

On the other hand, some of the interviewees gave a different account, suggesting that for them the adoption of remote work was not a factor that intensified the work-family conflict, since they felt closer to their children and husbands and had more time for other physical activities and leisure time. In this portion of the interviewees, there is a predominance of women without young children and with husbands who participate in all the activities involving the home and childcare. These women report that, even with the increased workload in the home office, they could distribute the household chores to their partners and organize themselves so that they could better enjoy the hours of the day, with moments of leisure and quality time with the family. Thus, it can be inferred that, for working women, the proactive participation of their partners is a crucial factor for the reconciliation of the professional and family dimensions (LEMOS; BARBOSA; MONZATO, 2020).

The aforementioned study reinforces the fact that the environment of the home office plays an important role in the relationship between work and family. Rafalski and Andrade (2015) point out that major consequences can occur due to poor adaptation to the new working environment or to the inefficient implementation of this modality. A study conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, 2021) indicates that the most developed countries in the world adapt more easily to the home office than other countries, both because of the high level of quality of the internet and because of the previous experience of working from home already familiar to workers.

That said, the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many uncertainties and has very suddenly forced many workers to reorganize their routines, seeing their homes transformed into workplaces overnight. Thus, the home office was established very abruptly and without much planning by most organizations.

It is also noteworthy how domestic work has also intensified in the context of the pandemic and social isolation, since school, university and daycare center activities have started to have their content delivered through digital platforms, just like other activities (social gatherings, physical activities, among others) have started to be done remotely, causing all

members of a family to direct most of their activities to the inside of the home (LEMOS; BARBOSA; MONZATO, 2020).

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conflicts between work and family can be expanded and exacerbated by the home office, with increased pressures on the individual for whom family, work and other contexts of development and social interaction often intersect. Therefore, there are groups of people, such as women with children, who suffer the greatest impact from the home office, which can worsen depending on aspects such as race and color, which increase social inequalities and such impacts.

The intensification of work is one of the main consequences of the home office, which tends to intensify the work-family conflict when professional tasks take time away from family and personal activities. In addition, the theoretical essay showed that working from home can lead to a lack of concentration at work, so that the family routine and interactions between people in the home interfere with the professional activity.

The points made address economic issues and gender inequalities. Also, that women feel more overloaded due to the accumulation of domestic tasks, unless there is proactive participation from partners, older children, or the availability of material resources and other solutions to reconcile the professional and family tasks. Finally, factors such as the planning and context of the implementation of the home office can also have a negative impact on the relationship between work and family when there is no appropriate and sufficient structure to set up this modality.

That said, the present theoretical essay revealed the importance of investigating, more empirically, data on the influence of the home office on work and family conflicts in different places and contexts of life and work. The limitations of the present study are noteworthy, as it focused on the aspects found in the literature, which are few and mostly only theoretical and restricted to certain population and organizational segments – therefore, without the possibility of generalization. In this sense, it is important to encourage new studies, in scenarios such as the current one, in which the home office is increasingly in the spotlight, with different relationships and backgrounds, such as economics and ethnicity/race.

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