

Working mothers and their perceived work-life balance



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Abstract

Many studies have focused on working women's strains when it comes to the balance between paid work and family responsibilities. Yet few studies analyze women's subjective sense of success in balancing these two separate spheres in terms of full-time and part-time employment.

In this thesis, I will explore the ways in which full-time and part-time work affects women and their perceived work-life balance. First, with the help of data from the Dutch database of the WageIndicator I will examine the influence of child-care support, educational attainment, age of youngest child, number of hours worked, conflict at work, and high workload on the perceived work-life balance of working women.

Second, I examine how influential these variables are by separating them into two different domains: life and work and carried out a statistical analysis using SPSS.

Furthermore I will outline six hypotheses regarding the influence of the aforementioned variables divided in the life and work domain. I demonstrate that work-domain variables affect the perceived work-life balance more than life-domain variables. Regarding role conflict I demonstrate that for women employed full-time young children in the household has a significant negative impact on success in balancing paid work and family life.

In the conclusion I reflect on the implications of these findings for the traditional values of "good mothering" and an evaluation is presented with ideas for further research including better methods for conceptualisation and operationalisation.

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1. Introduction

This first chapter deals with the central question of the thesis, which will be answered with the help of several hypotheses. What follows is a brief explanation of the social and scientific relevance of the research question posed.

1.1 Introduction to the problem

Research on work-life balance has presented important insights into the problems of combining family responsibilities with paid work in relation to policy relevant agendas. Work-life balance scales are problematic for many scholars and researchers because they conceptualize the work component more specifically than the life component, therefore what “life” means remains rather abstract apart from general references to the “home”, “housework, and “family responsibilities”. However, this conceptualization neglects different dimensions to work-life balance common to specific subgroups and renders the measurement rather intangible (Pichler, 2008: 449). Furthermore, the wordings of work-life balance indicators already include their most probable explanations. There is thus the danger of a circular argument here and many explanations seem causal. This makes it difficult to conclude on the effects of other than work-related aspects on work-life balance, which are, arguably, also important aspects of work-life balance. Finally, work-life balance scales hardly correlate with relevant external criteria, for instance, subjective wellbeing (Pichler, 2008).

Among the reasons for the increasing interest in the work-life balance we find the increase of female employment, feminism, de-industrialization, higher unemployment among men, low-level (new) service jobs as well as an intensification of “life” (see Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; MacInnes, 2006). Despite an apparently clear meaning of the concept- “to combine work and life in a way that both are pursuable” (Pichler, 2008: 450), there is some variety in meanings, origins and approaches to the concept, which emphasize the aforementioned reasons to different degrees.

Work-life balance is generally related to working time, flexibility, welfare, social security, family, fertility, migration, demographic changes, consumption, leisure time and so on (see also Dez & Bond, 2005; Noor, 2003; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Research that examines

demographic trends (e.g. ageing, low fertility, migration), emphasize a structural component of work-life balance, whereas approaches referring to personal circumstances, family arrangements, (care, gender roles) and wellbeing focus on the individual. That is, the individual's assessment of work-life balance includes some references to the family situation, household composition, breadwinner models, family size, and life plans turning this into a more comprehensive picture instead of an isolating approach to work-life balance as a concept.

This thesis attempts a more critical analysis of the impact of the different aspects of the work and family domain on the work-life balance of working mothers.

- Leading question:
How do work domain variables and life-domain variables influence the perceived work-life balance of working mothers?

After a thorough literature analysis on the perceived work-life balance and its determinants a more specific research questions will be posed. Consequently a data analysis will be carried out in order to examine the correlations of the variables of each domain on the perceived work-life balance.

1.2. Social Relevance

Ever since the 1970s social change has initiated the decline of institutional arrangements between the state, the economy and the family. The famous male breadwinner model where men worked and their wives cared for the children has become less and less sustainable in Western countries. Moreover, feminist approaches to the work-life balance emphasize an increased strain for women in employment, whilst gender roles and ethics of care remain rather stable concerning work in the household and child-care responsibilities (Pichler, 2008; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

Public policy in the Netherlands is mainly directed towards the increase in the labour participation of women. The government set goals and has established they wanted 65 percent of the women participating in paid work by 2010 and 80 percent by 2016 (Ministerie van OCW, 2008). It is clear that there are social expectations that come as a result of increased female labour participation. This is expected not only before childbearing but also after the birth of one or more children. However, in the *Emancipatiebeleid 2008-2011*, the issue of men and household tasks has been practically deleted from the agenda. This is

mainly due to the government's priority on the combination of work and household tasks for couples, and not necessarily on the re-distribution of household tasks at home (Ministerie van OCW, 2008). This means that women automatically assume a disadvantageous position in the labour market. The fact that public policy is needed to stimulate the participation of women in the labour market is already quite a significant phenomenon. In addition, the struggle for a better combination of paid and unpaid work explains that this phenomenon deserves some attention. More importantly, many of the publications that have been published over the topic (see Ministerie van OCW, 2008; Portegijs *et al.* 2006) show that women in high positions are quite difficult to find.

Educational attainment does not seem to be the problem. Recent studies show that women younger than 35 years old have more educational attainment than most men their same age (CBS, 2007) This is why it is interesting to examine the influence of educational attainment on the work-life balance of working mothers. Despite it all, number of worked hours seems to always be influential in the work-life balance. For instance, research increasingly offers labour market relevant policy recommendations to increase work-life balance as public debates tend to focus on long working hours as the most likely threat to a balanced life (Fleetwood, 2007). But work-life balance is further considered as a cause of other things, such as low fertility, population aging and their consequences (Dey, 2006; MacInnes, 2006). This further explains why policy makers are interested in work-life balance in order to discover ways in which the population matches the upcoming needs of the economy, the labour market, and social security.

1.3 Scientific relevance

Generally it is assumed that work-life balance is experienced when demands from the domain of (paid) work are compatible with demands from other domains, e.g. family or leisure time (Pichler, 2008). Byrne (2005: 54) describes work-life balance very broadly as "juggling five aspects of our lives at any one point in time: work, family friend, health and spirit (or self)". It can therefore be assumed that a "balanced" living occurs when activities and aspirations in one domain do not have negative effects on activities in the other one. Many studies have, however, put emphasis on the relationship between work and (family) life and thus narrowed down the scope of what scholars and researchers of work-life balance are most interested in. Furthermore, in the majority of analyses of survey data, working conditions explain by far the largest part of the variation on the one hand (Pichler, 2008). More importantly, some working conditions are explicitly presented as a clear threat

to the work-life balance. On the other hand, measures of work-life balance show to be hardly significant when tested for correlations with components such as child-care responsibilities or number of children. It can therefore be argued that an accurate measure of work-life balance is sensitive to all aspects of life and merely (family) life-related variation in work-life balance is only one aspect of it. The model used in this dissertation includes a variety of competing explanations of both the life and family domains of the work-life balance of working mothers.

2) Literature research and theoretical framework

This chapter gives an overview of the existing literature and studies regarding the perceived work-life balance of working mothers. The first part of the chapter starts with an overview of the studies that have already been carried out on this particular subject. This will be examined more carefully throughout the whole chapter. What follows are the hypotheses, which will be examined separately from the literature research.

2.1. Perceived work-life balance

The concept of work-life balance is attracting increasing attention at both the national and international level. Rising levels of employment among women were a consequence not only of changes in the attitudes and values of women, but also of developments in the wider economy.

So what exactly does perceived work-life balance refer to? A rich research literature already addresses some aspects of work-life balance. For example, there is a well- developed literature pertaining to work and family domains (see Edwards & Rothbards, 1999; 200; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2002; Crooker *et al.*, 2002, Pichler, 2008).

As such, *family* is typically defined in terms of parent/child or dual-career relationships, and studies target specific demographic groups such as working mothers. Research also examines employer programs, such as flexible work schedules, alternative work arrangements (Powell & Mainiero, 1999), and child-care responsibilities (see Hughes & Galinsky, 1988) that are developed to support oriented demographic groups. However, in the study of Crooker *et al.* (2002) this perspective on work-life excludes other demographic groups such as “singles who may have less financial flexibility and fewer resources of social support, men who may be primary caregivers, family members who may be responsible for elder care, and cultures with dissimilar value systems” (p. 388).

The traditional approach to addressing work-family issues has been challenged in the press and is not fully compatible with current patterns of the twenty-first century workforce. For example, the expanding globalization of operations will welcome more cultural diversity, and the workforce will see a continued influx of women and minorities. This diverse workforce

will be increasingly likely to telecommute or work at decentralised locations and maintain contingent employment relationships as temporary or contract workers (Crooker et al., 2002). Evolving work relationships, placing more pressure on organizations, as well as on individuals balancing multiple domains of their lives, illustrate the need both heuristically and theoretically to expand the conceptualization of work-life balance issues.

In their research Crooker *et al.*, (2002) argued that higher levels of life complexity and dynamism experienced by individuals will result in lower levels of perceived work-life balance. However, this relationship will vary with the munificence and accessibility of resources in one's environment as well as with individual differences of values and personality traits. As a result, they incorporated the impact of four sets of moderating variables, two macro-level variables and two micro-level variables, on the relationship between life complexity/dynamism and work-life balance. At the micro-level, the relationship is influenced by the personal value system (Rokeach, 1973) and individual applies and holds dear to himself or herself (value intensity) as well as the values that are shared across domains of one's life (values pivotal space) and values that are shared with members of his or her work life and personal life (value crystallization) (Chatman, 1989).

The study of Crooker et al., (2002) focused particularly on those personality constructs that may explain how individuals respond to complexity and dynamism in life. In their model there is a representation of the antecedents of work-life balance in which life complexity and dynamism are posited as an independent variable set affecting the dependent variable work-life balance.

According to Hildebrandt & Littig (2006) the long-term tendencies of changing societal value orientations also play an important role. Currently, we can observe a certain synthesis of traditional, performance and reliability-oriented values on the one hand, and modern demands for self-determination and self-realization on the other hand. This shift has for a long time been interpreted as an increased emphasis on free time, as a diminution of the significance of work-related obligations in favour of leisure time. The various changes in work organization have increased the need for new skills and self-organization, but people have also become more aware of the obligations and duties of private, every-day life. Unfortunately, the work-life balance formula does not prevent the dominance of work over the time patterns of life.

Another characteristic is the extent to which normative standards are taken into account, both directly and indirectly. Many studies focus mainly on female employment and new

family constellations (see Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Their normative point of reference is gender equity in employment participation and the distribution of care work, but different ideas about the right balance between public assistance for families and individual responsibility are considered as well. In this way, some studies associate balance with a state of near stability, whereas others emphasise the act of balancing in a situation of (permanent) imbalance (see Hildebrandt & Littig, 2006). Work-life balance studies examine negotiation processes that involve different interests and different areas of life, including the possibilities to attain the individually desired conditions (such as working time) and thus maintain or improve the quality of life.

The term work-life balance is based on the assumption that these are two individual and clearly separated spheres, the interplay of which significantly affects the quality of life, but many, especially feminist, researchers often doubt the validity of this assumption. They criticize the separation of work and family life as being a “simplified dualism” (Hildebrandt & Littig, 2006: 220). Furthermore they argue that day-to-day life also happens under employment conditions, and that the family and household have always involved hard and involuntary work.

The proposed difference between the work and family spheres has been strengthened by the continuous reduction of time spent at the workplace and the resulting increase of free time. Some more recent developments have cast further doubt on this type of differentiation and cause at least some of the boundaries between work and family life to disintegrate. In spite of the increasing tendency to individualize employment, free time has been reduced by various work-related activities such as the trip to and from work, vocational training, health programs, or simply working overtime. The boundaries between time spent at the workplace and the time set aside for private life may vary in each individual case and need to be continually re-determined.

The main obstacle lies in adequately conceptualising these boundaries and/or their removal. In addition the work-life balance formula mainly concentrates on short-term, individual reconciliation efforts, which are in most cases only a reaction to existing imbalances. Many different requirements have to be met at the same time and relevant work- and family-related conditions need to be reconciled with everyday life. However, it is also possible to attain balance by focusing on different things at different times, i.e. step by step, rather than trying to get everything done simultaneously. This leads to a so-called biographical balance, which makes it possible and/or easier to accomplish all elements of a fulfilling existence during the course of one's life.

This dual way to organize life comprises a life story that is separated into different phases (education, employment, family). So far, the biographical balance has hardly been considered, although it should be taken into account that these two types of balances do indeed have a strong mutual effect on each other.

2.2 Determinants of the perceived work-life balance

Some researchers assert that the way individuals evaluate their own particular mode of work-life balance will, apart from more objective role demands, depend on specific needs, expectations, and satisfactions. Determinants such as long working hours and a high workload are likely to be critical to determine the degree to which an individual is able to “balance the demands of work and family responsibilities” (Steibler, 2009: 470). Moreover, large-scale surveys most definitely play an important role in contemporary social science. Nevertheless, there are small-scale (partly non-representative) surveys as well as more qualitative studies dealing with the work-life balance in varying depth (see Hyman *et al.* 2005; Noor, 2003). Some authors have used a 22-item scale to differentiate between various forms (time-based; strain based) of work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts (see Kelloway *et al.* 1999; Noor, 2003). Whilst these measures tackle the issues at hand from a slightly different perspective, they apply the same conceptual ideas to the study of work-life balance. Qualitative research, such as the one by Hyman *et al.* (2005) often investigates the nature of the boundaries between work and home (family). This highlights the problematic distinction between work and home, which cannot be upheld in all situations (e.g. shift work, work on short notice, etc) and thereby negatively impacts the subjective feelings of balance (Pichler, 2008).

In the literature, the work-life balance is mostly considered more important for women, who continue to bear the burden of domestic duties. Behson (2002) found evidence that family-friendly work cultures were slightly more important to satisfaction and commitment for women than men. When testing for organizational variables Sturges & Guest (2004) found that age, gender, marital status and dependent children had no effect on the work-life balance. Similarly, Greenhaus *et al.* (2003) did not find any moderating effects of gender, parenthood, and career aspirations on relations between the work-life balance and the quality of life (Parkes & Langford, 2008).

In the following pages I make a sharp distinction between life and work domain. For each domain I examine the literature on the correlation of several factors that can have an influence on the perceived work-life balance. At the end of the chapter it will be concluded which variables will be examined in the data analysis. The chapter will end with a more

specific research question in which the chosen life and work domain variables will be named.

2.3 Life domain

What follows is a literature research investigating the relationship or correlations found in previous studies between the perceived work-life balance and each of the independent variables of the life domain; child-care support, age of youngest child, and educational attainment.

2.3.1 Perceived work-life balance and child-care support

For the most part, the entry of women into the labour force has resulted in an extension of women's roles rather than a redefinition of gender roles. Hochschild (1989) found that 80 percent of the men in her sample did not share in the housework and child-care responsibilities, even when their partners had full-time jobs. Their study also showed that women seemed to be restructuring work on a regular basis in response to needs of the family, spouse or children. Therefore, the results support those of earlier studies (Hertz, 1986) showing that women bore a greater burden when adapting to work and family demands on a daily basis. More than fifteen years later it seems that this situation has not changed. Crompton & Lyonette (2006) found a negative perceived work-life balance of working women in five different European countries (Finland, Norway, Britain, France, Portugal) in particular when it came to childcare responsibilities (in their study referred to as "domestic tasks"). They argued that at the individual level, attitudes to gender roles would certainly have an impact; for example, a highly "traditional" domestic division of labour might lower the perceived work-life balance. This is because by convention, women carry out the larger part of domestic work, although the extent of gender differences varies considerably between different countries. The findings of their research show that the presence of a more "traditional division of domestic labour made a contribution to lower levels of perceived work-life balance (Crompton & Lyonette, 2006).

The literature on women and men's daily lives is fairly consistent in reporting that the total demands on employed women (paid work, housework, and child care) are higher than on employed men (Milkie & Peltola, 1999). In a study by Robinson and Godbey (1997) using time diaries, they report that for those employed more than 20 hours a week, women spend 30.8 hours doing paid work per week, and men spend 39.7 hours. Women spend 25.6 hours and men spend 14.3 hours on family care, including standard housework, shopping, and caring for the children. This means that for employed women, the total time demands from unpaid and paid work exceed men's total by about 1 ½ hours per week. This proved to

have a negative influence on the balancing of work and family responsibilities for women, and therefore a negative perception of the work-life balance. Hochschild (1989) reports that employed mothers put in an “extra month per year” of a 24-hour day, compared with employed fathers.

Not only are employed women and men likely to have different total workloads but they also allocate their time in different ways. Men typically engage in more paid work, and women engage in more housework, childcare, and eldercare. It is commonly acknowledged that women often choose for part-time work due to the presence of children (in particular young children) in the household. This is due to the fact that in most EU countries women still carry the burden of unpaid household and family work (Fagan & Burchell, 2002). This is important to consider when thinking about women’s work-life balance. Moreover, the literature shows that men generally do not adjust their home time in response to their wives’ feelings of balance may be less affected by husbands’ work life.

The importance of child-care cannot be undermined. Dual-earner families in The Netherlands are increasingly dependent on support from grandparents, babysitter, *crèche*, in order to leave their children to go to work. It is important to investigate whether having this support influences the perceived work-life balance positively.

2.3.2 Perceived work-life balance, age of children

A study by Lundberg *et al* (1994) comparing total workload (sum of paid and unpaid work), conflict between demands of work and family, and control over housework between men and women in white-collar occupations, showed that number of children at home was a crucial factor with regard to these variables. In families with no children at home, the total workload of full-time employed women was about 60 hours per week. For women, the number of hours per week increased rapidly with children at home, but this increase was much smaller for men. In families with three or more children, women’s total workload was almost 90 hours. In addition, conflict between demands of work and family roles increased and control over home and household work decreased with number of children at home. Many scholars argue that unpaid work takes up a great deal of time for women, particularly when there are children in the family (Craig, 2006). Moreover, the burden of childcare occurs when children are very young and decreases as the children mature (Craig, 2007).

Pichler (2008) found that very small children do not make a difference everything else being equal. However, women with children aged three to five (0.10) and children aged six to eleven (0.05) reported slightly lower levels of perceived work-life balance. Interestingly,

people with children under the age of three are as good (or bad) off in terms of perceived work-life balance than people without children under twelve.

2.3.3 Perceived work-life balance and educational attainment

For working women with young children it applies that, the higher their educational attainment the higher their participation in the labour force. For the last decade, the general trend has been an overall decrease in the number of hours spent on unpaid labour by women, in particular regarding domestic responsibilities. In 1995 women were spending as much as twice the time on domestic and family responsibilities compared to men. However, that year was also busy for men, since they also spent more time on both paid and unpaid labour (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001). Furthermore, the level of educational attainment of couples living together seems to have little effect on the amount of time that men spend on domestic tasks. Robinson & Godbey (1997) report that “time crunch” is more common among women, particularly divorced women and women in the paid labour force. Their findings also indicate that parents are more time pressured than non-parents and that well-educated and affluent respondents are more likely to report feeling highly time crunched. Furthermore, Pichler (2008) argues that the highest level of education also impacts on the work-life balance, though to a minor extent. Education was among other social-demographic variables such as gender, occupational class, and age, which accounted for only 2 percent of the variance in the work-life balance.

Twenty years ago education had a positive influence on the work-life balance. In a study by Ross and Huber (1985), the results showed that, when other aspects of status are held constant, education is the single most important aspect of status for women’s well being. In addition, for women, whether employed or not, education has the largest effect on reducing stress. It is therefore predicted that educational attainment will have a positive influence on the work-life balance.

2.4 Work domain

What follows is a literature research investigating the relationship or correlations found in previous studies between the perceived work-life balance and each of the independent variables of the work domain; number of hours worked, conflict at work, and high workload.

2.4.1 Perceived work-life balance and the number of hours worked

Several studies show that the most powerful predictors of the work-life balance are work-related objective criteria such as working hours and working outside “normal hours”

(evenings, weekends, and working overtime on short notice). Pichler's study (2008) shows that women who work part-time experience even better work-life balance as indicated by a negative interaction term of -0.06. The longer the working hours, the higher their imbalance by 0.01 and working evenings, weekends or overtime on short notice are severe causes of a disruption in the work-life balance.

In their study Marks & Macdermid (1996) argued that people who have well balanced role systems, which they conceptualize as full engagement in and enjoyment of all (unspecified) roles, have higher levels of wellbeing. Using a sample of employed mothers, they showed that those who were more "role balanced", who enjoy every part of life equally well, were not necessarily the ones who worked the fewest hours. They worked the same number of hours as the less balanced, and they report less overload, had higher self-esteem, and lower depression levels. Similarly using a sample of college students, they showed that role balance was not related to less demanding roles. The more balanced students did not have fewer friends, did not work fewer hours, nor did they take fewer classes.

Marks & Macdermid (1996) also argued that the structure of everyday relations and cultural norms suggest that women having less power may lead to greater sacrifice so that work-family life can run smoothly. For example, the role of mother makes demands that often cannot be scheduled and that may be exacerbated by the culturally normative expectations attached to "good mothering". In fact, some studies suggest that the role of mother is the principle source of stress for women (see Barnett & Baruch, 1987).

Women can be committed to and enjoy their roles as mothers and workers equally and still feel strains- more so than men- because their responsibilities to home are likely greater and they may sacrifice more (Shelton, 1992).

2.4.2 Perceived work-life balance, conflict at work, and high workload

In order to explain differences in the work-life balance, Pichler (2008) referred to subjective and objective factors in the areas of work and the household. As for house-related factors he used breadwinner models (partner is also working or not), presence of children of specific ages in the household, main type of childcare (for youngest child), and hours spent on housework as objective criteria. Subjective household-related aspects then are economic strain, amount of housework, time flexibility, concerning housework and stressful housework. Objective household criteria explained only 2 percent of the variation in the work-life balance. As mentioned earlier, their most interesting finding concerning the household is that women with children aged three to five (0.10) and children aged six to

eleven (0.05) report slightly higher levels of perceived imbalance. Interestingly, people with children under the age of three are as good (or bad) off in terms of work-life balance than people without children under twelve living in the household. On the other hand, subjective household conditions explained 6 percent of the variation.

Perceptions such as an overload of household work, the lack of flexibility concerning schedules of housework, and the level of perceived stress in household related tasks contributed significantly to the explanation of work-life balance. However, by far the most powerful predictors of work-life balance in this study are work-related objective criteria such as working hours and working outside “normal hours” (evenings, weekend, and working overtime on short notice). On top of household conditions, they explained another 14 percent of the variation. The results indicated that part-timers experience much lower levels of imbalance (-0.19) than full-time workers.

Finally, work-related subjective aspects also contribute to the explanation of work-life balance. Three percent was additionally explained by perceptions of job (in)security (0.04), an effort-dependent wage or salary (0.02), time (in)flexibility (0.03), a hard job (0.09) and a heavy work (over)load (0.09).

Despite a somewhat different question wording the underlying ideas about the work-life balance in large-scale surveys is quite similar. Work-life balance is threatened if people are too tired from work to do necessary things at home (Pichler, 2008), if they cannot perform according to their roles because of the time they spend on their job and if household or family responsibilities impede concentration at work.

Most empirical studies based on the demands and resources approach have used a single item asking respondents about their level of satisfaction or success with the balance between their work and family lives, demands, or responsibilities. Valcour & Batt (2003), however, developed a scale based on items asking the level of satisfaction with the division of time and attention between work and personal life, ability to balance needs across domains, ability to perform job and home duties adequately, and fit between work life and personal or family time. In addition, the scale produced in the study of Hill *et al.* (2004) included items on the extent to which work resources such as flexibility and time away from work are sufficient to maintain balance as well as questions regarding overall balance. These measures provide an insight of the extent to which balance of demands and resources allows an adequate role performance in work and family life. Results showed that within-domain and boundary-spanning demands such as long work hours, job demands,

conflict, elder-care responsibility, and job-related travel generally were negatively related to work-life balance, whereas the relationship between balance and young children at home was statistically significant in some studies but not others (Hill *et al.*, 2004; Batt & Valcour, 2003). Within-domain and boundary-spanning resources such as job autonomy and complexity, part-time work; supervisor work-family support, and a supportive work-family culture generally showed positive relationships to work-family balance, whereas flexible working hours and on-site child-care were unrelated to balance (see Batt & Valcour, 2003).

2.5 The rational model: “time bind” and reversing roles

Although work can compliment- and, indeed, improve- family life, in recent decades it has largely competed with the family (Hochschild, 1997).

Hochschild (1997) first introduced the term “time bind” to describe a situation in which one prefers to divide time between work and home differently than it is usually done, but fulfilment of this preference is very difficult to achieve. The “time bind” implies that both men and women have limited amounts of time available to allocate to the home and the work domain. Thus, time becomes a valuable resource to families.

In the context of this dissertation the time bind can be understood as a perceived imbalance between the work and life domain. This explanation allows for the possibility that individuals might prefer more or less work time and/or less family or personal time and all would perceive work-life imbalance. The opposite of a time bind is a perceived work-life balance (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Hochschild (1997) argues that as the first shift (at the workplace) takes more time, the second shift (at home) becomes more hurried and rationalized. The longer the workday at the office, the more pressure to hurry home and to segment the remains of family time. Furthermore, Hochschild (1997) argues that the more attached individuals are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape their lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work. What may seem to working parents like a solution for their bind- efficiency and time segmentation- can eventually become problematic. Therefore, in order to be efficient with whatever time they do have at home, many working parents try to go faster. Therefore as time becomes something to “save” at home as much as or even more than work, domestic life becomes a second shift; it becomes all about efficiency.

The rational view of work-life balance postulates that the levels of imbalance one perceives rises in proportion to the number of hours one expends in both work and family roles (Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987). According to this view, the more hours a

person spends on work activities, the more she or he should experience interference from work to family. Similarly, the more time spend in family activities responsibilities the more he or she should experience imbalance in both domains. Furthermore, the rational view also predicts that the total amount of time spent performing work and family roles is positively associated with role overload (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Research indicates that employed women spend many more hours than employed men on family and household chores and more hours on work and family activities in total (Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1979).

Kahn *et al.* (1964) distinguished among different types of role conflict, all having one more major characteristic: member of the role set exert role pressures to change behaviour of the focal person. For the purpose of this thesis only inter-role conflict will be examined. The nature of one's relations with his/her role senders affects the way working mothers experience and respond to imbalance, created mostly by role conflict. That is, interpersonal relations mediate in various ways the emotional and behavioural consequences of role conflict.

Role expectations refer to the prescriptions and proscriptions held by members of a role set. Individuals develop beliefs and attitudes about what they should and should not do as part of their role (Kahn *et al.*, 1964). The content of these expectations may include preferences with respect to specific acts and personal characteristics or styles; they may deal with what the person should do, what kind of person he/she should be, what she should think or believe, and how she should relate to others. From the different types, other complex forms of conflict develop. For example, a very prevalent form of conflict is *role overload*. Overload could be regarded as a kind of inter-sender conflict in which various role senders may hold legitimate expectations that a person perform a wide variety of tasks, all of which are often mutually incompatible (Kahn *et al.*, 1964). Individuals are likely to experience overload as a conflict of priorities. Therefore role conflict and ambiguity tend to create special problems of adjustment for the individual and this in turn affects the work-life balance. It is costly for the person and for the organizational unit in which the individual works. This creates an imbalance because the individual is not able to manage the work and the home domain successfully. It is because of the importance of role and time conflict that the operationalization of work-life balance in this thesis will be related to the satisfaction that working mothers perceive in the relationship between the different determinants of the work and life domain as well as the work-life balance. I therefore focus on the psychological experience of the perceived work-life balance by operationalizing it as (1) satisfaction with

timing of work, (2) satisfaction with work-stress, (3) satisfaction with time left for family, (4) satisfaction with taking days off, and (5) satisfaction with taking days off for sick relatives. After examining both life and work domain determinants, the leading question can be specified:

Leading question:

How do child-care support, age of children, educational attainment, number of hours worked, conflict at work, high workload, influence the perceived work-life balance of working mothers?

2.6 Conclusion literature research

The literature concerning the work-life balance is abundant. Many theories are used to explain the level of (im) balance of men and women. Most studies examine the effect of work and life domain determinants on both men and women. For many researchers, the normative point of reference is gender equity in employment participation and the distribution of care work. The problem with this is that different determinants have different levels of relevance to both men and women and of course, the pressures experienced can also differ greatly when comparing the effect of certain determinants with gender. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that much of the research done on this subject gives importance to both the work and life domain determinants. Nevertheless, it still remains difficult for researchers to separate the boundaries between work and home. The term work-life balance is based on the assumption that these are two individual and clearly separated spheres, the interplay which significantly affects the quality of life. But many researchers, in particular feminist, often doubt the validity of this assumption criticizing it for being simplistic and dualistic. Therefore the solution is to try and adequately conceptualise both domains.

3. Methodology

This chapter deals with the methodology that will be used for the data analysis. In the sections that will follow the conceptual model will be presented and the hypotheses will be explained. Subsequently, the main concepts will be operationalized. Section 3.2 describes the data that will be used and the research plan. The chapter finishes with section 3.3, which illustrates the dependent and independent variables.

3.1 Leading question

How do child-care support, age of children, educational attainment, number of hours worked, conflict at work, high workload, influence the perceived work-life balance of working mothers?

3.2 Hypotheses and Conceptual Model

In the literature research it was concluded that women still bear primary responsibility for home and child-care responsibilities regardless of their employment status (Hochschild, 1997). Based on the findings of the literature research a series of hypotheses were formulated that deal with the positive, negative, or no relationship between life and work domain variables and the perceived work-life balance. The hypotheses created mainly assess for positive, negative or no correlations between the determinants and the perceived work-life balance. Furthermore, the hypotheses were separated into two categories in the section that follows, the work and the life domain. The categorization of these variables into two domains is crucial when analysing the influence of the selected independent variables on the work-life balance. The life domain includes hypotheses that investigate a positive, negative, or simply no correlation between childcare support, age of children, and educational attainment on the one hand. On the other hand, the work domain includes hypotheses concerning number of hours worked, and working conditions, such as high workload and conflict at workplace. The next section shows the hypotheses that will be examined and the conceptual model.

3.2.1 Hypotheses involving the life domain

- It is expected that more childcare support will lead to a positive perceived work-life balance.
- It is expected that the younger the children the more negative the perceived work-life balance will be.
- It is expected that the higher the educational attainment the more positive the perceived work-life balance

3.2.2 Hypotheses involving the work domain

- It is expected that a higher number of working hours will lead to a negative perceived work-life balance.
- It is expected that more conflict at work will lead to a more negative perceived work-life balance
- It is expected that a higher workload will lead to a negative perceived work-life balance

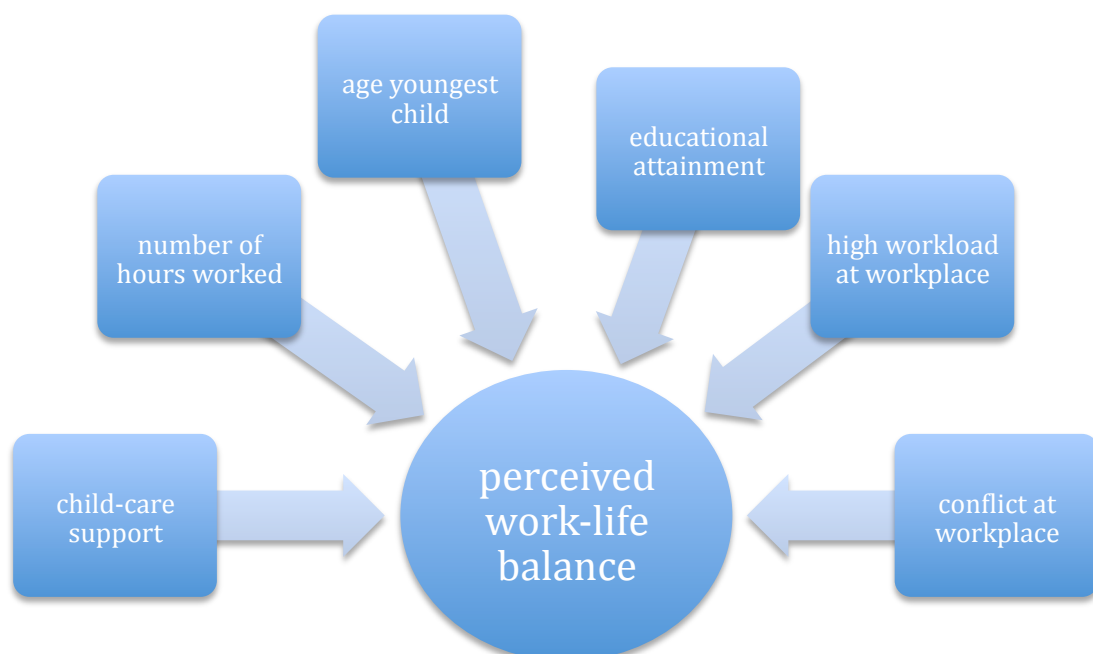


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable “perceived work-life balance”.

3.3 Selection of Data

The hypotheses will be tested using secondary data from the *Wageindicator 2004*, which is a database that started originally as a project in 2000 and aimed at establishing a website with salary information for women's occupations. The survey was published in a few magazines in the Netherlands. This survey is the most appropriate given the population selection of this study. Furthermore the survey was carried out among both female and male employees, concerning work and income in about 120 different professions. The questionnaire was originally created to research the differences in income between men and women. The first questionnaire published (2001) consisted of six different clusters of questions regarding:

- A) Profession and sector (6 questions),
- B) The organization (7 questions),
- C) Work history (7 questions),
- D) Working hours (9 questions),
- E) Work contract and income (10 questions),
- F) Personal questions (11 questions).

At the end of each cluster respondents were also asked questions in which they had to give an opinion. Filling in the questionnaire took on average about fifteen to thirty minutes. The questions are primarily over the respondents' profession, work environment, employment history and contract, working hours, division of domestic tasks, etc. However, the number of personal questions is remarkably high. It therefore includes questions about all the determinants that will be tested in this study in particular the questions concerning the life domain. Many surveys contain questions concerning only the work domain or almost on questions on personal circumstances. Respondents could access this survey through Internet websites www.vrouwenloonwijzer.nl and www.loonwijzer.nl.

In 2002 the questionnaire EURO-proof was created, and respondents' income began to be registered in euro currency on the websites. The original questionnaire was revised, improved and released again the same year (*WageIndicator 2002*). It is important to point out that the data has also been kept clean throughout the years. This means the researchers delete all unfilled and incomplete questionnaires from the database, in order to exclude high numbers of missing value that could corrode the data analysis.

The data is available as an SPSS file and it will be used to test the influence of the chosen independent variables on the perceived work-life balance. The table below shows the selection criteria for the chosen population for this study.

Variable Label	Variable	Selection Criteria
* Living with partner	Hhpartner1	Yes
* Living with one or more children	Hhchild	Yes
* Year youngest child born	yyyochld	>=1992 en =<2000 >=2001 en =<2004

Table 1: Selection criteria for respondents

Source: WageIndicator, 2004 Dutch dataset (Loonwijzer 2004), selection of working women living with a partner and children up to 12 years old.

1. *Living with partner*

According to the selection criteria, the chosen women for this analysis must have a job, and live with a partner and child(ren). For the purpose of this research the marital status of these women is irrelevant.

2. *Living with one or more children at home*

This variable shows the number of children of the selected respondents who are living at home.

3.3.1 List of independent variables: Life domain

3. *Year youngest born*

This variable sets a limit to the age of children. This variable was chosen because it also includes respondents who only have one child living at home. The age limit is 12 years old.

4. *Child-care support*

For the purpose of this research this variable will be defined as “*extra support for taking care of the children per week*” where the answer categories are “*Yes*” (if so, which?) and “*No*”. It is therefore a dichotomous variable. The following items were recoded into one variable to represent child-care support:

- Babysitter or guest parent took care of child
- Others took care of child
- Partner took care of child
- Nursery took care of child

The age of children will be limited to 12 years old.

5. *Age of children*

This variable is numerical and will be separated into two categories, age of children from 0 to 3 years of age, and 4 to 12 years of age. Only working women with partner and child(ren) living at home up to 12 years old will be included in the analysis.

6. *Educational attainment*

The educational attainment variable is nominal will be divided into low, middle, and highest attained education. The variable represents low educational attainment, middle educational attainment, and high educational attainment. “*What is the highest level of education you have attained (with diploma)?*”

The three levels represent the following diplomas:

Low: Basischool/ VBO/ VMBO/ MAVO/ ULO

Middle: HAVO/ MMS/ VWO/ HBS/ MBO

High: HBO/ WO

3.3.2. List of independent variables: Work domain

7. *Number of hours worked*

This is a numerical variable. Respondents were asked to fill in the amount of hours worked as stated in their job contract “*Fill in the number of hours worked as stated in your job contract*”. In the dataset the selected cases were those that corresponded to working women with partner and children living at home. Therefore single mothers, or women without children or partner were not included in the analysis.

8. *High workload at workplace*

This variable is interval and measured by means of a Likert scale of 5 items that range from 1= “Fully disagree”, 2= “Disagree”, 3= “Neutral”, 4= “Agree”, and 5= “Fully agree”.

Respondents were asked to answer to what extent they agreed with the following statement “*At workplace workload is high*”.

9. *Conflict at workplace*

This variable is nominal with three categories. Respondents were asked to the following statement “*At workplace conflict regularly occurs*”. Answer categories were “yes”, “no”, and “I don’t know”.

10. *Perceived work-life balance*

For the purpose of this analysis, the operationalization of the work-life balance must include variables that concern both the work and life domain. In the dataset there is no variable, which accurately represents both domains. Based on the literature research and the central question of this analysis, the work-life balance will be operationalized by creating a variable including the following five variables:

- Satisfaction with timing of work
- Satisfaction with work stress
- Satisfaction with time left for family
- Satisfaction with taking days off
- Satisfaction with taking days off for sick relatives

These five variables are interval and the Likert items range from 1= “Highly dissatisfied”, 2= “Dissatisfied”, 3= “Neutral”, 4= “Satisfied”, and 5= “Highly satisfied. In part 4 a principal component analysis will be carried out.

This analysis begins with communalities of 1 with all factors retained (because we assume that all variance is common variance). A reliability analysis will also be carried out in order to test the reliability of the scale. A common interpretation of Cronbach’s alpha is that it measures “undimensionality”, i.e. the extent to which the scale measures one underlying factor or construct. This interpretation stems from the fact that when there is one factor underlying the data, Cronbach’s alpha is a measure of the strength of that factor. This will be examined in detail at a later stage of the data analysis

3.4 Missing values

	Perceived Work-life balance	Child support	Educational attainment	Age youngest child	Number of worked hours	High workload at workplace	Conflict at work
N valid	2185	2073	2179	2185	2109	1466	2043
missing	0	112	6	0	76	719	142

Table 2: Initial missing values per variable

The table below shows the initial missing values per variable. This will show which cases will be taken into the analyses. The missing values are further not used in this research and are therefore not included in the results or interpretations. The number of missing values in this data is relatively high. This could be explained by several reasons. The questionnaire might have been too long and the respondents lacked the time to finish answering it. Furthermore the questionnaire might have also been difficult to fill in, questions unclear, etc. For this reasons it was chosen to exclude all missing data from the analysis.

4) Data Analysis and Empirical Results

The empirical results are central in this chapter. It first begins with a review of the descriptive statistics for both the life and work domains. The chapter then continues with a close view of the means scores of the dependent variable on some of the variables used in the selection criteria. The hypotheses will then be tested using SPSS secondary data from the WageIndicator 2004. Consequently the hypotheses will be tested with ANOVA and regression analyses.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics: Independent and Dependent Variables

Before introducing the variables that will be tested it is important to look at the descriptive of the different means of the age groups of the sample. The table below shows the means and standard deviations on the three different age groups in this sample.

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics in three age groups

Age in 3 groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<25	149	1.00	5.00	3.49	.884
Valid N	149				
25-44	1940	1.00	5.00	3.78	.803
Valid N	1940				
>=45	96	1.00	5.00	3.60	.909
Valid N	96				

Table 3: descriptive statistics in three age groups

The table shows that 1940 of the female respondents are between 25 and 44 years old. Furthermore there are 149 respondents who are younger than 25 and 96 respondents who are 45 years old or older. The table also shows that the group of respondents with the largest mean; 3.78, is between the ages 25 and 44. This means that the average age of the female respondents is predominantly between 25 and 44 years old. The second largest group are the women older than 45 with a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 0.90. This shows a relatively normal distribution within the sample.

As mentioned earlier the independent variables were divided into two separate categories, the life and work domains. The data analysis will examine the influence of the variables belonging to the life domain and the variables belonging to the work domain.

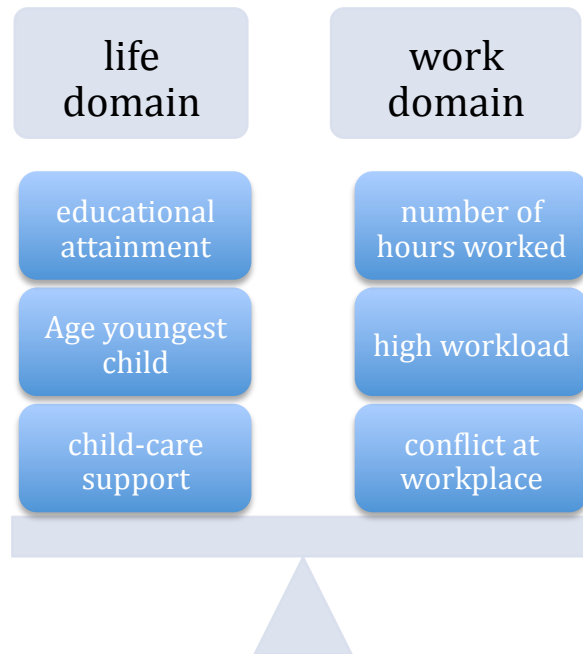


Figure 2: Illustration of the life domain and work domain variables

4.1.2 Independent variables: Life domain

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Educational attainment	2179	1	3	2.26	.584
Age youngest child	2185	1	2	1.44	.497
Child-care support	2073	0	1	.70	.460

Table 4: Descriptive statistics, life domain variables

1. Educational attainment

The chosen variable to represent the educational attainment of the selected population is *EDU_level*. Dummies were made in order to categorize the educational attainment into three different levels: low, middle, and high. This also means that the mean and standard deviation won't explain much about the distribution of answers among the sample. Because

this variable is separate into groups a frequency analysis was chosen in order to examine the educational attainment of the respondents. The respondents were asked the following question:

“What is the highest level of education you have attained (with diploma)?”

The three dummies represent the following diplomas:

- Low: Basisschool/ VBO/ VMBO/ MAVO/ ULO
- Middle: HAVO/ MMS/ VWO/ HBS/ MBO
- High: HBO/ WO

Educational attainment	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Low VBO/VMBO/MAVO	399	18.3	18.3
Middle MBO/MMS/HBS/HAVO/ VWO	1069	48.9	49.1
High HBO/WO	711	32.5	32.6
Total valid N	2179	99.7	100.0
Missing	6	3	
Total	2185	100.0	

Table 5: Frequency table of the three categories of the variable *Educational Attainment*.

The table shows that 1069 of the respondents have a middle educational attainment. The second highest group is the high educational attainment with a total of 711 respondents. Only 399 have a low educational attainment. It can therefore be concluded that the majority of respondents has a middle educational level (MBO/MMS/HBS/HAVO/VWO).

2. Age youngest child

For this variable we are particularly interested in the age of the youngest born, in order to include those women who only have one child. The chosen variable is *age_youngest* with a maximum of 12 years of age. It was chosen for 12 years because this is the age when children normally finish elementary school and this study examines the differences in children old enough to attend the crèche, and children who already attend elementary school.

The table in the previous page shows the descriptive statistics of the variable, including mean, standard deviation, and number of respondents. The standard deviation helps to explain the shape of the distribution of scores. If the mean represents the data well then most of the score will cluster close to the mean and the standard deviation will be smaller

than the mean. In this case the mean age of the youngest child, is 7,4 years old and the standard deviation is 3,6. The population is normally distributed.

In order to see whether there is a difference in within the different age groups, the variable *age of children* was divided into two categories, 0 to 3 years of age (1), and 4 to 12 years of age (2). The frequencies of both categories are shown in the table below.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
0 to 3 years old	1208	55.3	55.3
4 to 12 years old	977	44.7	100
Total	2185	100	

Table 6: Frequency table of the two categories of the variable *age youngest child*.

The table shows that 55.3 percent of the female respondents have children aged 0 to 3 (1208). In addition, 44.7 percent of the female respondents have children aged 4 to 12. It can be concluded that the majority of the women in this population, 1208 female respondents, have children who are old enough to attend the crèche. However, only 977 respondents have children old enough to attend elementary school.

3. *Child-care support*

The following items were recorded into one variable to represent child-care support:

- Babysitter or guest parent took care of child
- Others took care of child
- Partner took care of child
- Nursery took care of child

Respondents could choose between “yes” and “no” answers, which makes this variable dichotomous. If yes, respondents are asked at a later stage to specify which kind of support. In addition, the age of children will be limited to 12 years old. The chosen extra supports are not further examined in this analysis, only whether respondents use extra childcare support, or not.

The table shows that the mean and standard deviation value are close to each other. As mentioned earlier the standard deviation is a measure of how well the mean represents the data. Therefore a large standard deviation (relative to the mean) indicates that the data points are distant from the mean. In this case the mean is not an accurate representation for the extra time spent on childcare support.

4.2.2 Independent variables: Work domain

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of hours worked	2109	0	80.00	33.5	8.5
High workload	1466	1	5	3.54	1.11
Conflict at work	2043	0	1	0.31	0.46

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics independent variables work domain

The table shows that the average (mean) hours worked is approximately 30.6. The population is evenly distributed with a standard deviation of approximately 15. The standard deviation is also used as a measure of how representative the mean was of the observed data. Therefore a small standard deviation represents a scenario in which most data points are close to the mean, while a large standard represented a situation in which data points are widely spread from the mean. In this case the standard deviation is relatively close to the mean so the distribution is normal. This is not the case, however, for the variable *number of hours worked*. The mean is 33,5, which means the average is 33,5 hours per week. The standard deviation is 8,5; this indicates that there isn't a normal distribution of the responses for this particular variable among this sample.

1. Number of hours worked

The chosen variable was *working hours according to contract= HRSCON*.

There were three dummies made for this group in order to divide between *small part-timers (1-20 hours per week)*, *medium part-timers (21-36 hours per week)*, and *small part-timers (37 or more hours per week)*. A frequency table was chosen to illustrate the respondents' frequencies of the three different dummy groups.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Small part-timers	509	23.3	24.1
Medium part-timers	1268	58.0	60.1
Full-timers	332	15.2	15.7
Total Valid N	2109	96.5	100.00
Missing	76	3.5	
Total	2185	100.00	

Table 6: Frequencies of the three categories of the variable *number of hours worked*: small part-timers, medium part-timers, and full-timers.

The table shows that 1268 respondents work between 21 and 36 hours per week (*medium part-timers*). The second highest category is the *small part-timers* group with 509 respondents that work between 1 and 20 hours per week. The lowest group are the *full-timers* with 332 respondents who work 37 hours or more per week.

2. High workload

The Likert items ranged from 1="Fully disagree", 2= "Disagree", 3= "Neutral", 4=" Agree", 5="Fully agree", missing values: -1.

The chosen variable was "*at workplace workload is high*"= *conworkl*. The table shows that the answer categories are evenly distributed. The standard deviation 1.112 is small compared to the mean 3.54. The high mean could be explained by a high number of respondents chose "I don't know" as answer for this particular variable.

3. Conflict at work

The chosen variable to represent conflict at work is "*At workplace conflict regularly occurs*". The respondents could choose between the following answers to fill in "Yes"= 1, or "No"=0, missing values: -1= "Not (skipped)", 8= I don't know.

There is clearly a normal distribution of this population: both the mean and standard deviation are between 0 and 1, showing almost a perfect normal distribution of the answer categories. Therefore this is also an accurate reflection of the population. Assuming that the distribution of scores is normal it can be concluded that approximately 95 percent of the scores in the sample will fall within two standard deviations of the mean, therefore 95 percent of the scores in the sample will fall the range of $31 - (2 * .462)$ to $.31 + (2 * .462)$ or between -.614 and 1.234.

4.3 Dependent variable: Perceived work-life balance

For a good representation of the data the standard deviation must be small relative to the mean. In other words, the standard deviation is a measure of how well the mean represents the data. In this case the standard deviation is .817, smaller than the mean of 3.75.

Furthermore the population is normally distributed. The points are close to the mean and therefore a good representation of the data.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived work-life balance	2185	1.00	5.00	3.75	.817

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics, perceived work life balance

As mentioned earlier the work-life balance variable was created using five different variables (SPSS: compute variable) concerning respondents' satisfaction with different aspects of both the work and life domain:

- Satisfaction with timing of work
- Satisfaction with work stress
- Satisfaction with time left for family
- Satisfaction with taking days off
- Satisfaction with taking days off for sick relatives

In order to test the reliability of the newly formed variable a factor analysis was carried out. The results of the reliability are shown in the table below.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.816	5

Table 7: Cronbach's alpha reliability results

In the social sciences an accepted value of Cronbach's alpha is .7 or higher. It can be concluded that the Cronbach's alpha is suitable with 81,6 percent. The next step was to compare the size of the observed correlation coefficients to the size of the partial correlation coefficients. Large values for the KMO measure will indicate that a factor analysis of the variables is a good idea. Furthermore, another indicator of the strength of the relationship among variables is Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.783
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	1509.507
	Df.	10
	Sig.	.000

Table 8: KMO and Bartlett's Test

The first result shown in the table is that of the KMO test, which can be calculated for individual and multiple variables and represents the ratio of the squared correlation between variables to the squared partial correlations between variables. The KMO statistic varies between 0 and 1. A value of 0 indicates that the sum of partial correlations is large relative to the sum of correlations, indicating diffusion in the pattern of correlations. This means

factor analysis is likely to be inappropriate. On the other hand, a value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors. In this case 0.783 is close to 1 and is considered good, which makes the factor analysis possible. In order to carry out a Factor Analysis the Bartlett's test of sphericity must be significant i.e. the value of Sig. should be less than .05. In this case the test is significant $p < .00$, which shows that the correlation between all five items is sufficient to carry out a Principal Component Analysis. It should be pointed out that a principal factor analysis is not quite the same as a factor analysis. It is true that the steps followed when conducting a PCA are virtually identical to the steps in an exploratory factor analysis.

In a PCA it is possible to calculate a score for each respondent on a given principal component. It was chosen because it is only concerned with establishing which linear components exist within the data and how a particular variable might contribute to that component. The factor extraction showed that only one item had a value higher than 1 (by default SPSS uses Kaiser's criterion of retaining factors with *eigenvalues* greater than 1). The *eigenvalues* associated with each factor represent the variance explained by that particular linear component and SPSS also displays the *eigenvalue* in terms of the percentage of variance explained. In this case factor 1 explains 50.25 percent of the total variance. This was the only identified factor with a value greater than 1 therefore rotation is not possible in this case. The analysis found 1 common factor. This is because by default SPSS uses Kaiser's criterion of retaining factors with *eigenvalues* greater than 1. The *eigenvalues* associated with each factor represent the variance explained by that particular linear component and SPSS also displays the *eigenvalue* in terms of percentage of variance explained.

	Factor Loadings
Satisfaction with timing of work	.605
Satisfaction with work stress	.686
Satisfaction with time left for family	.657
Satisfaction with taking days off	.777
Satisfaction with taking days off for sick relatives	.773
Eigenvalue	2.75
Variance	50.25
N	2185

Table 9: Principal Component Analysis: Component Matrix

Variable	Variable Label	Valid Cases	Total
Perceived work-life balance	Perceivedworklifebalance	2185	2185

Table 10: Valid cases of the dependent variable “perceived work-life balance”

In the first part of the factor extraction factor 1 (2,75) accounted for 50,25 percent of the total variance before extraction. However, the table shows that after extraction factor 1 still explains about 50 percent of the total variance. It should also be pointed out that the first few factors explain relatively large amounts of variance, especially factor 1, whereas subsequent factors explain only small amounts of variance. As shown in the table 9 above all items load up with values greater than .6 on the factor perceived work-life balance. By adding all the items into “compute variable” in SPSS the variable perceived work-life balance is created. The factor loadings, *eigenvalues*, and valid cases of the newly created variable are shown in table 9 in a component matrix.

4.4 One way ANOVA tests

The purpose of the ANOVA analysis is to test the influence of the perceived work-life balance on the difference subgroups of educational attainment, age youngest child, childcare support, high workload, conflict at work, and number of worked hours

In the literature ANOVA is mostly described as a way of comparing the ratio of systematic variance to unsystematic variance in an experimental study (see Field, 2005). The ratio of these variances is known as the *F-ratio* and it serves the purpose of assessing how well a regression model predicts and outcome compared to the error within that model, but in this particular model there are only categorical predictors involved. Since all of the independent variables chosen in this analysis are of categorical nature it is a logical step to use this method to examine the means of the perceived work-life balance on the different groups of the independent variables in order to accept or reject the hypotheses. In the next page the means scores of the perceived work-life balance on the life domain variables will be examined. Consequently the mean scores of the perceived work-life balance on the work domain variables will be assessed.

4.4.1 Means of the perceived work-life balance on the subgroups of the variable educational attainment

	N	Mean	St.Deviation	Std.Error
VBO/VMBO/MAVO	399	2,70	.955	.047
MBO/MMS/HBS/HAVO/V WO	1069	2,68	.936	.028
HBO/WO	711	2,62	.828	.031
Total	2179	2,66	.906	.019

Table 11: means of the perceived work life balance on three educational attainment groups

The table shows the majority of the selected population has achieved an intermediate level of educational attainment (MBO/MMS/HBS/HAVO/WO) with a total of 1069 respondents and a means of 2,68. However there is still a high number of women that have a high level of educational attainment, 711 respondents have HBO/WO diplomas. The standard deviation explains the shape of the distribution of scores. In this case the scores are normally distributed across the population. The table shows that the means are quite close to each other, which entails that the difference within groups won't be large. The largest mean corresponds to the lowest educational attainment group: VBO/VMBO/MAVO, with 2.70. Therefore it can be concluded that the biggest effect of the perceived work-life balance lies on the mean of the lowest educational attainment group.

By taking a look at the ANOVA table that SPSS displays it can be concluded that the difference in the means of the perceived work-life balance and educational attainment is not significant with an F-value of 1,417 and $p=.150$.

4.4.2 Means of the perceived work-life balance on age youngest child (up to 12 years old) divided into two categories

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error
0 to 3 years old	1208	2.66	.883	.025
4 to 12 years old	977	2.66	.936	.029
Total	2185	2.66	.907	.019

Table 12: Means of the perceived work life balance on age youngest child (up to 12 years old) divided into two categories.

The table shows the two categories for the age of their youngest child. Furthermore the means of the perceived work-life balance for both categories. The perceived work-life

balance shows similar means for both categories of respondents. The perceived work-life balance accounts for 2.66 percent of the mean for both categories. The ANOVA table shows that the difference in the means between selected and not selected is not statistically significant with an F value of .004 and a *p-value* of .949. Post hoc tests could not be carried out because SPSS asks for a minimum of three groups in the independent variable to analyze the differences and in this case there are fewer subgroups. We can therefore conclude that the differences in the perceived work-life balance between the two categories of age youngest child are not statistically significant.

4.4.3 Means of the perceived work-life balance on child-care support

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
No	631	3.70	.783
Yes	1442	3.78	.817
Total	2073	3.76	.808

Table 13: Means of the perceived work life balance on childcare support

The table shows that the group sizes as well as the means are different from each other. The means range from 3.70 up to 3.78 so they are actually quite close to each other. Furthermore the selected population has a lower mean of the perceived work-life balance. The Leven statistic 2.591 shows that the variances are equal with a *p-value* greater than .005 (.108). The ANOVA table shows that the differences in the means between selected and not selected is statistically significant with an F value of 6.301 and a *p-value* of .012. Post hoc tests could not be carried out because SPSS asks for a minimum of three groups in the independent variable to analyze the differences and in this case there are fewer subgroups. Thus, it can be concluded that the differences in the perceived work-life balance between the two groups of childcare support are statistically significant. Therefore having childcare support does influence the perceived work-life balance. The respondents who choose “yes” for childcare support have a higher perceived work-life balance than the respondents who chose for “no” childcare support.

4.4.4 Means of the perceived work-life balance on high workload

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Fully disagree	88	2.79	1.23
Disagree	174	2.65	.954
Neutral	415	2.70	.949
Agree	475	2.66	.782
Fully agree	314	2.85	.844
Total	1466	2.72	.899

Table 14: Means of the perceived work life balance on high workload

The table shows the different group sizes. The majority of respondents chose for “agree” for the statement “*In workplace workload is high*”. The female respondents in this category have one of the lowest perceived work-life balance with 2.65, the lowest being “disagree” with 2.65. The perceived work-life balance has a smaller influence on the respondents that disagree with this statement. The influence of the perceived work-life balance is the greatest by people that “fully agree” with this statement with a mean of 2.85 and a standard deviation of .844. The Levene statistic shows that the standard deviations of the different groups are not equal. Furthermore the ANOVA table shows that the differences in the means are statistically significant with an F-value of 2.64 and a p-value of .032. To examine which differences are statistically significant a Post Hoc test was conducted, it was chosen for the Bonferroni test. The test showed that there is a statistically significant difference between “agree” and “fully agree”. It can therefore be concluded that the influence of perceived work-life balance is the highest on respondents who “fully agree” with the statement that the workload at workplace is high, and that the difference between “fully agree” and “agree” is statistically significant.

4.4.5 Means of the perceived work-life balance on conflict at work

	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Yes	1376	2.56	.949
No	667	2.83	.774
Total	2043	2.65	.905

Table 15: Means of the perceived work-life balance on conflict at work

The table shows the different group sizes as well as the different means between the groups. To the statement “*In workplace conflict regularly occurs*”, 1376 female respondents

answered “No”, while only 667 respondents answered “Yes”. The highest mean of the perceived work-life balance is 2.83 and it corresponds to the respondents who answered “yes”. Therefore the influence of perceived work-life balance is higher when conflict at work regularly occurs. The ANOVA table shows that the F-value of 40.187 is statistically significant with a p-value of .000. This means that the differences between the means in each subgroup are statistically significant. A post hoc test could not be carried out in this case due to a low number of subgroups (there are two for the independent, and minimum 3 are required). But it can be concluded that the difference between answer categories “yes” and “no” are statistically significant and the respondents who answered “yes” are more affected by the perceived work-life balance.

4.4.6 Means of the perceived work-life balance on number of hours worked

For the variable *number of hours worked*, dummy variables were created in order to distinguish between women who work full-time and part-time. In this table the mean scores and standard deviation are shown. *Small part-timers* work between 1 and 20 hours a week. *Medium part-timers* work between 21 and 36 hours a week. Finally the *full-timers* work 37 hours and above a week.

Number of hours worked per week	N	Mean	Std.deviation
Small part-timers	509	2.57	.983
Medium part-timers	1268	2.66	.899
Full-timers	332	2.76	.817
Total valid N	2109	2.65	.910

Table 16: Means of the perceived work-life balance on number of hours worked per subgroup.

As mentioned above this table shows the subgroups with the highest number of respondents. The table shows that the majority of the respondents work between 21 and 36 hours a week. The mean of the perceived work-life balance is the highest on women who work between 21 and 36 hours a week with 2.66. The lowest group of respondents are the *full-timers*. Interestingly, respondents who belong to the *full-timers* group are the most affected by the perceived work-life balance with a mean of 2.76. The lowest mean, on the other hand, corresponds to the respondents who work between 1 and 20 hours a week (N=509). It can be concluded that women who work more hours a week are more affected by the perceived work-life balance.

The ANOVA table shows that the F-value 4.54 is statistically significant with a p-value of .011. The following step was therefore to carry out Post-Hoc tests. The Tukey HSD Post-Hoc tests showed that there is a statistically significant difference between women who work between 1 and 20 hours per week (*small part-timers*), and women who work 37 hours or more per week (*full-timers*) with a p value of .008.

4.5 Regression analyses

In a regression analysis the regression coefficients are defined by differences between group means. The bigger the differences between the group means, the greater the differences between the regression line and the grand mean. The regression coefficients are only significant when $p < .05$. In the first part of the analysis, we tested the means of the dependent variable perceived work-life balance on the different groups of each independent variable (each with different sample sizes) with one-way ANOVA.

In the regression analysis three different models were examined. One model included only the life domain variables: *educational attainment*, *age youngest child*, and *childcare support*. The next model examined the life domain variables and the work domain variables; *number of hours worked*, and *conflict at work*. However, this model excluded one variable of the work domain: *high workload*. This variable was included in the third model, and this proved to be highly significant for the overall influence of this model on the perceived work-life balance. The third model therefore includes all variables from both domains. Using the ENTER method the third model accounts for most of the influence of the perceived work-life balance. The third model clearly shows that all the variables of the work domain are more influential to the perceived work-life balance of the female respondents compared to the life variables (*child-care support* and *age youngest child* tested significant). Furthermore, all of the regression coefficients of the work domain variables in the third model test significant ($p > .05$) on the influence of the independent variables on the perceived work-life balance. This is why model 3 was chosen to explain the correlations between the life and work domain variables on the perceived work-life balance. In the next section each hypothesis will be examined independently beginning first with the life domain variables: *educational attainment (divided into low, middle, high)*, *age youngest child*, and *child-care support*.

4.5.1 Regression analysis of the independent variables

	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	3.53	.077	.000						
Edu_middle	.016	.062	.797						
Edu_high	.078	.067	.241						
Age youngest child	-.101	.053	.056						
Child-care support	.146	.054	.007						
(Constant)				3.72	.084	.000			
Edu_middle				-.010	.061	.874			
Edu_high				.059	.066	.372			
Age youngest child				-.099	.052	.060			
Child-care support				.140	.052	.008			
Conflict at work				-.392	.047	.000			
Medium part-timers				-.011	.056	.844			
Full-timers				-.196	.072	.007			
(Constant)							4.01	.103	.000
Edu_middle							.004	.060	.953
Edu_high							.084	.066	.202
Age youngest child							-.100	.053	.056
Child-care support							.137	.052	.009
Conflict at work							-.353	.047	.000

Medium part-timers							.004	.055	.947
Full-timers							-.167	.072	.020
High workload							-.167	.072	.020
R2	.084	.084	.084	.257	.257	.257	.287	.287	.287
Total	1312	1312	1312	1312	1312	1312	1312	1312	1312

Table 17: Regression analysis of the independent variables using three different models

Table 17 shows the results of all three models: the B-value, the standard error and the significance value of all the variables chosen in each particular model.

The total N=1312, which is lower than the original 2185. However this also means the variable *high workload* could account for the drastic decrease in the N (from 2185 to 1312) due to its high number of missing values.

Hypotheses life domain:

1. *It is expected that the younger the children, the more negative the work-life balance will be.*

The model 3 summary of the regression shows that the R square accounts for 28.7 (R2) percent of the total variance (N=1312); this indicates that 28.7 percent of the variance in the variable “perceived work-life balance” is explained by model 3. However this also means the variable *high workload* could account for the drastic decrease in the N (from 2185 to 1312) due to the high number of missing values. By every year that the children get older the perceived work-life balance decreases by .100 (B-value). However, in all three models this relationship is not significant, in particular in model 3, which accounts for the most variance $p > .05$ (.056). The hypothesis can therefore be rejected.

2. *It is expected that the higher the educational attainment the more positive the work-life balance*

There was no significant effect of educational attainment on the perceived work-life balance in all three models. Neither the group with a medium educational attainment or the group with a high educational attainment influence the perceived work-life balance. The table shows that the perceived work-life balance increases by .004 (B-value) with the medium educational attainment and .084 with a high educational attainment. However this relationship is not significant and we can therefore reject the hypothesis.

3. *It is expected that more childcare support will lead to a positive work-life balance.*

There was a significant effect found between childcare support and the perceived work-life balance. For the women who have childcare support the perceived work-life balance increases by .137 (B-value). This value is significant with a $p < .05$ (.009). The hypothesis can therefore be confirmed.

Hypothesis work domain

4. *It is expected that a higher number of worked hours will lead to a negative perceived work-life balance.*

The last two models show a significant effect between the number of worked hours and the perceived work-life balance. However when high workload is excluded on model two, medium part-timers (B= -.011) and full-timers (B= -.196) both have a negative effect on the perceived work-life balance. Nonetheless, model three includes the variable high workload and this changes the effect for medium part-timers, becoming a positive B value (B= .004), however this effect is not significant. The negative correlation between full-timers and the perceived work-life balance is significant both model 2 and 3.

Model 3 accounts for a bigger percentage of the variance of the perceived work-life balance. The model shows that a higher number of hours will lead to a negative work-life balance. The B-value shows a negative relationship between both variables. Moreover, with every extra hour worked the perceived work-life balance decreases by -.167 and this effect is significant with a $p < .05$ (.020). The hypothesis can therefore be confirmed.

5. *It is expected that more conflict at work will lead to a more negative perceived work-life balance*

Both model 2 and 3 show a significant effect between conflict at work and the perceived work-life balance. Model 2 shows that more conflict at work will decrease the perceived work-life balance by -.392. The B-value shows a negative relationship between both variables. In addition, in model three once the variable *high workload* is included the B value slightly decreases to -.353, but in both models the correlation is significant with a $p < .05$ (.000). The B value used to confirm this hypothesis is that of model 3 because it accounts for the most variance (R²= 28.7 percent) in the dependent variable perceived work-life balance. This means that more conflict at work decreases the perceived work-life balance by -.353. The hypothesis can therefore be confirmed.

6. *It is expected that a higher workload will lead to a negative perceived work-life balance*

The last model shows a significant relationship between a high workload and the perceived work-life balance. The higher the workload is the more negative the perceived work-life balance will be. The B-value shows this negative relationship. It shows that with more workload the perceived work-life balance will decrease by $-.095$. The model is significant with $p < .05$ ($.020$). The negative relationship and its significance confirm the hypothesis.

4.6 Conclusion data analysis

In the conclusion the results from the data analysis will be discussed. The results will then be compared to studies that were examined previously in the literature research. The variables will be examined in their respective domains: life and work.

4.6.1 Childcare support and the perceived work-life balance

The influence of childcare support on the perceived work-life balance was not significant and the hypothesis was rejected. The more childcare support a working woman has, the more positive her perceived work-life balance will be.

The literature research also showed that childcare responsibilities have a negative relationship with the perceived work-life balance of women in particular. Crompton and Lyonette (2006) argued that because of a “traditional” division of labour in many European countries, women end up carrying the burden of domestic tasks including childcare responsibilities. After many years this arrangement has not changed and women are still seen as primarily responsible for the household, which inevitably affects their perceived work-life balance in a negative way.

4.6.2 Age of youngest child and the perceived work-life balance

The literature showed that very small children do not make a difference everything else being equal (see Pichler, 2008). Nonetheless, women with children aged three to five (0.10) and children aged six to eleven (0.05) reported slightly lower levels of perceived work-life balance. This study showed similar findings. There was no significant effect of age of youngest child on the perceived work-life balance of working mothers. In model 3 the R squared showed that 28.7 percent accounts for the variance in the perceived work-life balance. Furthermore, by every year that the children get older the perceived work-life balance decreases by $.100$ (B-value). However, in all three models this relationship is not significant $p > .05$ ($.056$). The hypothesis was therefore rejected.

4.6.3 Educational attainment and the work-life balance

The literature showed that educational attainment has a minor effect on the work-life balance. In the study of Pichler (2008), education accounted for 2 percent of the variance in the variable work-life balance. In this study education accounted for only .004 (B-value medium educational attainment), and .084 (B-value high educational attainment) respectively, and the correlation was not significant. The hypothesis was therefore rejected. The analyses showed that educational attainment does not have a significant influence of the perceived work-life balance of working mothers.

4.6.4 Number of worked hours and the perceived work-life balance

The literature shows that the number of worked hours is one of the more significant determinants of the perceived work-life balance. Pichler's study (2008) showed that part-time women report high levels of perceived work-life balance as indicated by a negative interaction term of -0.06. Dex & Bond (2005) found that weekly hours clearly played a large part in determining individuals' perceived work-life balance. Compared with the excluded reference category of 36-39 hours per week, the work life score of individuals who worked less than this tended to be lower, especially those working under twenty hours per week. The work-life scores of those who worked more than 40 hours per week were higher than those who worked under 40 hours.

In this study, model 3 of the regression analysis accounts for a bigger percentage of the variance of the perceived work-life balance. The model shows that a higher number of hours will lead to a negative perceived work-life balance. The B-value shows a negative relationship between both variables. Moreover, with every extra hour worked the perceived work-life balance decreases by -.167 and this effect is significant with a $p < .05$ (.020). The hypothesis was confirmed and was concluded that women who work full time have a negative perceived work-life balance.

4.6.5 Conflict at work, high workload, and the perceived work-life balance

From the literature research it was concluded that work-related subjective aspects also contribute to the explanation of the perceived work-life balance, in particular fulltime hours, conflict at work and high workload (job demands). The results of Hill *et al.* (2004) show that within-domain and boundary-spanning demands such as long work hours, job demands, conflict, elder-care responsibility, and job-related travel generally were negatively relate to

work-life balance. In addition, the results showed that within-domain and boundary-spanning demands such as long work hours, job demands, conflict, elder-care responsibility, and job-related travel were generally mainly related to work-life balance. Similar results were found in this study for the variables *conflict at work* and *high workload*.

The B value used to confirm the hypothesis created for the variable *conflict at work* is that of model 3 because it accounts for the most variance ($R^2 = 28.7$ percent) in the dependent variable perceived work-life balance. This means that more *conflict at work* decreases the perceived work-life balance by $-.353$. The hypothesis was confirmed.

Despite a somewhat different question wording the underlying ideas about the work-life balance in large-scale surveys remains similar. Work-life balance is threatened if people are too tired from work to do necessary things at home (Pichler, 2008), or if they cannot perform according to their roles because of the time they spend on their job and if household or family responsibilities impede concentration at work. These issues will be further examined in the next chapter.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The last chapter deals with the evaluation of the results that were gathered from the literature research and the empirical analysis. This will help to reiterate the validity of the analysis in this particular subject matter. The discussion puts the analysis in perspective and includes restrictions as well as recommendations for further research.

5.1 Answer to the central question

The purpose of this analysis was to examine whether childcare support, age youngest child, educational attainment, conflict at work, high workload, and number of hours worked affected the perceived work-life balance. The chosen research population was working women living with a partner and children up to 12 years old. The central question was formulated as follows:

- *How do child-care support, age youngest child, educational attainment, number of hours worked, conflict at work, and high workload, influence the perceived work-life balance of working mothers?*

After the analysis it is possible to answer the central question of this dissertation. The rest of this chapter will examine the dependent variable perceived work-life balance. The operationalization of the dependent variable perceived work-life balance chosen for this study will be compared to the operationalization discussed in the literature research.

5.2 The perceived work-life balance

The literature research showed that most of the work-life balance studies examine negotiation processes that involve different interests and different areas of life, including the possibilities to attain the individually desired conditions, such as working time, and thereby maintain or improve the quality of life. The term work-life balance is based on the assumption that these are two individual and clearly separated spheres, the interplay of which significantly affects the quality of life. Some authors used a 22-item scale to differentiate between various forms (time-based; strain based) of work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts (see Kelloway *et al.* 1999; Noor, 2003). Although these measures deal with

the issues at hand from a slightly different perspective, they apply the same conceptual ideas to the study of work-life balance. Qualitative research, such as the one by Hyman *et al.* (2005) often investigates the nature of the boundaries between work and home (family). This highlights a troublesome distinction between work and home, which cannot be sustained in all situations (e.g. shift work, work on short notice, etc) and thus negatively affects the subjective feelings of balance (Pichler, 2008).

In another study, Crooker *et al.*, (2002) asserted that higher levels of life complexity and dynamism experienced by individuals could result in lower levels of perceived work-life balance. However, this relationship will vary with the munificence and accessibility of resources in one's environment as well as with individual differences of values and personality traits. As a result, they incorporated the impact of four sets of moderating variables, two macro-level variables and two micro-level variables, on the relationship between life complexity/dynamism and work-life balance. At the micro-level, the relationship is influenced by the personal value system (Rokeach, 1973) and individual applies and holds dear (value intensity) as well as the values that are shared across domains of one's life (values pivotal space) (Chatman, 1989).

Crooker *et al.*, (2002) focused particularly on those personality constructs that may explain how individuals respond to complexity and dynamism in life.

In this study it was important to include satisfaction in terms of both domains. Thus the operationalization of the perceived work-life balance was based on items that explained the extent to which the respondents were satisfied with aspects of both the work and life domain:

- Satisfaction with timing of work
- Satisfaction with work stress
- Satisfaction with time left for family
- Satisfaction with taking days off
- Satisfaction with taking days off for sick relatives

These five variables are interval and the Likert items ranged from 1= "Highly dissatisfied", 2= "Dissatisfied", 3= "Neutral", 4= "Satisfied", and 5= "Highly satisfied".

The PCA analysis showed a Cronbach's alpha of 81,6 percent, which is highly reliable in the social sciences. It was mentioned earlier that a common interpretation of Cronbach's alpha is that it measures "undimensionality", i.e. the extent to which the scale measures one underlying factor or construct. This means that when there is one factor underlying the data, Cronbach's alpha is a measure of the strength of that factor. As shown earlier in the table 9, the PCA analysis showed that all items loaded up with values greater than .6 on the factor perceived work-life balance.

5.3 Discussion: Limitations and ideas for further research

The analyses carried out in this study have shown that the chosen life domain aspects, especially the presence of small children, barely contribute to the explanation of the perceived work-life balance. One life domain that proved significant in most of the analyses was childcare support. This is important to consider when thinking about women's work-life balance.

The literature research also showed that the importance of child-care couldn't be undermined. Dual-earner families in The Netherlands are increasingly dependent on support from grandparents, babysitter, *crèche*, in order to leave their children to go to work. It is important to do further research on whether having this support influences the perceived work-life balance positively.

In addition, future studies and government policies should not encourage policies that treat women primarily as mothers. More importantly, these policies should focus on how working women with children can be supported by promoting job positions that suit their career preferences rather than offering benefits that will continue to encourage gender inequalities in the labour market.

As mentioned earlier the perceived work-life balance is constantly threatened if people are too tired from work to do necessary chores at home (see Pichler, 2008; Hochschild, 1997), if they cannot perform according to their roles because of the time they spend on their job and if household or family responsibilities impede concentration at work. Women nowadays are still consumed by unpaid work, particularly when there are children in the family. The results showed that the age of the children is not significant but the childcare support remains an important factor when determining the perceived work-life balance.

Kahn *et al* (1964) argued the nature of one's relations with his/her role senders affects the way working mothers experience and respond to imbalance, created mostly by role conflict. A very prevalent form of conflict is *role overload*. Overload could be regarded as a kind of inter-sender conflict in which various role senders may hold legitimate expectations that a person perform a wide variety of tasks, all of which are often mutually incompatible (Kahn *et al.*, 1964). Individuals are likely to experience overload as a conflict of priorities. Therefore role conflict and ambiguity tend to create special problems of adjustment for the individual and this in turn affects the work-life balance. It is costly for the person and for the organizational unit in which the individual works. The results of this study seem to confirm role conflict. If these women work too long, have constant conflict at work, and a high

workload, then the perceived work-life balance will be influenced in a negative way, and this in turn will affect the role overload of this women.

Similarly, Hochschild (1997) coined the term “time bind” to imply a situation in which both men and women have limited amounts of time available to allocate to the home and the work domain. Thus, time becomes a valuable resource to families. As the first shift (at the workplace) takes more time, the second shift (at home) becomes more hurried and rationalized. The longer the workday at the office, the more pressure to hurry home and to segment the remains of family time. This is similar to the results found on this study. The work variables seem to be more influential in the perceived work-life balance of working women, therefore these variables affect their lives the most. This is also why the life domain variable childcare support proved significant. It is important that these women have the childcare support needed when dealing with demands from the workplace.

This certainly has important implications for policy, as it suggests that women are ready to welcome new household arrangements where paid work and domestic responsibilities are more equally shared. This could also relieve the current pressure, and perhaps role overload, exerted on fulltime working women.

Ideas for further research include identifying and examining the institutional barriers that prevent the achievement of a work-life balance, in particular negative employer attitudes towards family-friendly work policies.

It is important to consider the limitations of this study. The variables that were tested vary immensely with the situation in which people find themselves. Therefore perceptions change because people adjust to the varying situations in their lives. The data used was cross-sectional therefore it could not be examined for perceptions over a period of time. This naturally affects the validity of the results acquired. The perceived work-life balance remains a difficult variable and concept to measure and understand within certain contexts. This is mainly because different researchers use different concepts to measure the balance. The domain of “life” remains the more difficult concept to measure since only a few number of the life domain variables affect the perceived work-life balance but also because examiners always choose different “life” variables, which often do not affect the balance at all.

The results of this study are a reflection of these shortcomings. Large-scale social surveys have settled with a limited number of determinants in order to facilitate cross-national comparisons. However, uniformity in these measures is crucial but comes unfortunately at

the expense of the functionality of the concept. Moreover because the “life” domain remains fairly unspecified and varies greatly, large-scale surveys produce rather habitual measures of the perceived work-life balance, which are often more favourable to employment-related explanations. It has become evident after the analysis that the “work “ domain remains the more powerful determinant of a perceived balance. It is hard to believe that the perceived work-life balance is almost irrelevant to subjective wellbeing. Therefore a suggestion for further research is that more information should be provided about the extent to which conflicts between “life” and “work” domain impact on broader measures of subjective wellbeing.

Another alternative is to measure conflict within the family independently from work-related aspects and vice versa. Additionally, researchers could also include more specific references to more particular aspects of life (for example an evaluation of time spend with children and also examine the different kinds of support used by each respondents as well as examine the costs of using such support. This measurement will provide a different perspective on the measurement of the perceived work-life balance and will open the door for alternative agendas involving the examination of the work-life balance.

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