



Department of Psychology

**Work-life conflict in the health-care industry: comparative study between male
and female employees in Mexico and Sweden.**

Montserrat Arnaiz

Master's Thesis

Spring 2018

Supervisor: Roger Persson

Abstract

In this thesis I report the results from a study that explored the influence of a gender-country interaction on work-life conflict experience among a sample of employees from Mexico and Sweden working in the health-care industry. It highlights the importance of cultural background, presuming that men and women will experience work-life conflict differently depending on their nationality/cultural background. Additionally, this research also discusses the causes and potential consequences of work-life conflict and its link to additional demographic variables such as age, cohabitant status, and children living at home. For the purpose of the analysis, work-life conflict was divided into three different measures, namely *work-life imbalance*, *work to life conflict*, and *life to work conflict*. The final sample consisted of 235 participants, 194 of whom were from Mexico and 41 from Sweden. Data were subjected to descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (Anova test), post-hoc test (Tukey test), and non-parametric test (Kruskal-Wallis test). It was found that gender-country interaction did not have an influence in none of the work-life conflict measures; however, country on its own did influence *work-life imbalance*, as well as *work to life conflict*. It was also detected that participants age influenced in their work to life conflict experience. Furthermore, participants' cohabitant status had an influence not only in *work-life imbalance* but also in *life to work conflict*, and having children living at home, also influenced *work-life imbalance*.

Keywords: Work-life conflict, work-life imbalance, work to life conflict, life to work conflict, gender, country, age, cohabitant status, children, personal life, professional life.

Introduction

The present study comprises a comparison of work-life conflict experience between male and female employees in Mexico and Sweden within the health-care industry. Work-life conflict is assessed based on various life spheres such as home responsibilities, leisure and private-life activities, and work centrality. The following paragraphs describe the history of research about work-life conflict in organizational settings, the lack of research regarding the influence of cultural background and gender roles, and the interaction effect between these two aspects in regards to work-life conflict experiences.

The term work-life balance was first used in 1986 in the USA to describe a tendency to spend more time on work-related tasks than other aspects of life (Smith, 2010). There is a real balance only when the individual feels that he/she has fulfilled all their roles and is satisfied about the result (Haslam, Filus, Morawska, Sanders, & Fletcher, 2014).

One of the strongest criticisms about contemporary working life is that it tends to be invasive with respect to private life. It is now harder to disconnect from the job outside office hours due to communication tools that, while making work more flexible, also perpetuate the interpenetration of blending work and private life. Thus, work takes up too much time and energy, negatively influencing the well-being of entire families and communities (Demerouti, Derks, Lieke, & Bakker, 2014). Imbalance generates high levels of stress, limits quality of life, and in the long-term affects mental and emotional health. All of these implications ultimately reduce employees' performance and effectiveness (Demerouti et al., 2014). Therefore, it is becoming more common to see organizations putting special emphasis on policies and norms to maintain employees' work-life balance and to enhance their well-being.

In addition, Dempster (2003) argues that, besides promoting work-life balance, organizations should also create awareness about work-life conflict and its implications. She claims that this conflict should be fostered as an issue that affects workers on a daily basis regardless of their life situation, stage or age. Thus, not only employees but also the organization should be able to detect when conflict is about to arise and develop methods to deal with it.

As prior research focused largely on organizational strategies based on employees with children and the family responsibilities that come along with it, Dempster (2003) also appeals that research should focus on other aspects of life. It would not be surprising to find in the present study that young employees place a high value on work-life balance, irrespective of any family responsibility, as earlier studies have demonstrated before (Smith, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Therefore, current generations might care more about maintaining a balanced life than career success at the expense of sacrificing personal time.

There is evidence to suggest that younger generations do experience work-life conflict. For instance, a study done by Sturges and Guest (2004), which was based on a sample of recently graduated employees working for diverse companies, showed that they had scarce responsibilities at home, but still experienced conflict between their personal and professional life. Participants considered that the possibility to achieve the right balance between their private life and work was the main influence on their decision to stay with or leave their current company. These results demonstrated the importance of the adoption of frameworks that consider work-life conflicts beyond family responsibilities. They suggested that rather than the more restricted notion of work-family conflict, the issue with employees of all ages and at all stages of their career and personal life should include

private life matters such as social life, relationships, and leisure activities (Sturges & Guest, 2004).

It has been suggested that besides age, other factors should also be considered to develop research about work-life conflict (Demerouti et al., 2014). On the one hand, work characteristics such as organizational values, organizational culture, workload, and job demands. On the other hand, the combination of several employees' demographic characteristics, such as gender, cultural background, country, social support, and/or co-habitant status may also have a strong influence. Thus, further research could focus on the interaction between demographics and private life matters beyond family responsibilities, and interesting findings could come across (Dex & Bond, 2005).

Regarding organizational characteristics that might be the potential source of work-life conflict and thus an imbalanced life, one of the most competitive and rapidly expanding branches on a global scale is the health-care industry (Godbole & Lamb, 2013). The health-care sector seems to be an industry with a high potential for creating conflicts between work and private life. This implies high job demands that lead to increased pressure to achieve results. High expectations come along with the corresponding job positions and professional skills. A considerable percentage of employees in this field are in charge of selling and promoting medical devices in hospitals. Their working processes include assisting doctors in surgeries, supporting nurses in using their products, assisting patients, and so on. Therefore, these jobs require high amounts of time and energy along with irregular working hours. In short, due to the large amount of regulations in the industry, the production of medical devices presents significant challenges from various perspectives such as engineering and legal, thus these challenges impact the rest of the staff, their work-life experience, job performance and subsequent achievements (Godbole & Lamb, 2013).

Work-life conflict and gender

One of the major concerns for the field of work-life research was gender; it can be traced back to studies of women and the awareness of their multiple social roles, i.e. mothers, main caretakers, wives, housekeepers. Before the term *work-life balance* was formally established, Rosalind Barnett and Grace Baruch (1985) looked into the psychological distress connected to the balance of rewards and concerns generated by women's multiple roles as paid workers, wives and mothers. They found that more rewards than concerns were related to low levels of anxiety and work-life conflict. Society assumes that if a woman for instance does not have children she will thereby have fewer concerns (Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno, & Tillemann, 2011). However, women have been in constant disadvantage over the course of history within organizational settings compared to men, regardless of their life stage and personal responsibilities, having for instance lower job positions, lower wages, less job opportunities within certain type of industries and so on (Korabik, McElwain, & Chappell, 2008).

Despite these early attempts to study women's experience in the work setting, it is today still unclear how work-life conflict interacts with gender roles. Few studies have examined the difference between men and women's experiences, and those few findings are mixed (Korabik et al., 2008). Birgit Weyer (2007) developed a theory called the "glass ceiling" which refers to an invisible barrier that inhibits the progression of women to higher positions in organizations. She explained that as a result of gender stereotypes women are fixed at lower levels within organizations and there is little opportunity for development and advancement, often disregarded when considered against a man (Rantanen et al., 2011).

During the last two decades, some studies conducted in various industries, such as banks, construction, and health-care (our current focus of research), have reported stronger work-life conflict for women than for men (Castro, 2012; Joshi Sethi, 2014; Woodworth, O'Brien-Malone, Diamond, & Schüz, 2016). Other studies have reported the opposite, stronger work-life conflict for men than for women; and some others have found no significant difference (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Sav & Harris, 2013). Neil Harris and Adem Sav (2013) found that work-life conflict was equally common for both sexes, concluding that work negatively influencing private life is frequent for employees, regardless of their gender. These contradictory findings account for additional argumentation to investigate further and perform the current research with male and female employees considering other demographic information, namely nationality, cultural background.

When we add to the equation the socio-cultural environment and its belief system, the scenario turns out to be much more unfavorable for some than for others, i.e. some cultures may place more emphasis on the role of women as home-keepers and managers of domestic affairs (Castro, 2012). The present study intends to investigate further into the gender-country interaction by comparing responses of employees working for health-care companies within two quite contrasting countries, Mexico and Sweden.

Work-life conflict and country (Mexico and Sweden)

In order to provide the reader a context about the differences between Mexico and Sweden's organizational cultures, I will describe in this section some relevant data that gives a brief overview of the situation each country is facing regarding their working population.

On the one hand, according to the Better Life Index in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development platform (OECD, 2017), Mexico ranks above average in civic engagement and subjective well-being, but below average in the dimensions of job, earnings, environmental quality, income and wealth, work-life balance, personal security, among others. In regards to work-life balance, it scored very low, 0.8 out of 10, with 0 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest. This score is based on several indicators, such as long working hours and time devoted to leisure and personal care. Furthermore, while the average of employees working long hours all around the world is 13%, almost 30% of employees in Mexico experience a long working schedule. Nonetheless, Mexican employees seem satisfied with their lives. When asked to rate their general satisfaction with life on a scale from 0 to 10, 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, Mexicans gave it a 7.3 grade on average, slightly higher than the OECD (2017) average of 6.5.

On the other hand, in Sweden about 1% of employees work very long hours, which means they have one of the lowest rates within the OECD data (2017). As expected, Sweden has a quite different and stronger welfare system than Mexico. A clear example is the policy regarding parental leave, Swedish parents are offered 480 days of parental leave (Swedish.se/quickfact) versus Mexican mothers with 90 days, and fathers with just 4 days by law. Moreover, Sweden is within the five best countries regarding work-life balance, with short working hours and high levels of personal time.

Regardless of the differences between both countries' benefits and welfare system, Mexicans rate slightly higher their general satisfaction with life than Swedes, 7.3 versus 6.6 on average (OECD, 2017). This similarity between both countries scores might be due to the mentality of both societies, what each interpret as a "good life". Furthermore, both countries have a very high score in the Indulgence Index, meaning that they tend to exhibit

a willingness to realize their impulses with regard to enjoying life and having fun, thus they place high importance in leisure time (Schachner, 2017). Mexico's score is 97 out of 100, while Sweden's score is 78, lower in comparison, but still considerably high. However, these scores do not imply they actually have enough time or organizational resources to afford a good quality of life and balance, it just means that they both consider their free time to be meaningful and valuable (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

In Mexico working long hours (more than 40 hours per week) means working hard, interpreted as an indication of commitment and potential for career progression (Castro, 2012). Mexican society has been described as a collectivist society that relies strongly on group relationships; what others do or do not do will be praised, shared or judged by the group. Loyalty is extremely important; it overtakes rules and regulations. Employees accept hierarchical order, thus it displays natural inequalities and subordinates are expected to be told what to do (Castro, 2012).

Sweden on the other hand, strongly values individualism (Hofstein, Shore, & Kipnis, 2004). People are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate family only. Individual happiness is valued before group success. According to Geert and Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov (2010), Sweden's individualism pervades in organizations, where leadership is handled through coaching, hierarchies are flat, power is decentralized, and employees expect to be consulted over managers' decisions. Managers and employees should be able to converse and debate without status, thus organizational structures tend to be flat. Swedes generally believe in a strong work-life balance style and an equal opportunity for everybody to achieve it. Moreover, the employer-employee relationship is typically a contract based on mutual advantage, hiring and promotions are usually based

only on merit, and therefore relationships might not tend to develop further (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Interaction between gender and country (Mexico and Sweden)

In regards to gender, Mexico has a considerable gap between the amount of men and women in the working population, 79% of men are in paid work versus 45% of women (OECD, 2017). This difference might be due to societal values. According to Mayra Ruiz Castro (2012), Mexico is a traditional society characterized by deeply rooted gender roles, thus the general working life and organizational culture are characterized by a paternalistic masculinity. The control of management relies on “the father”, which is usually a male head of an organization. The prominent masculinity drives society by competition, achievement and success as defined by the becoming the best in the team. Thus, this dynamic prevents women from being able to balance the high job demands with their personal life, which contributes to their work-life conflict experience (Castro, 2012). However, in the last decade, these roles have slowly become more flexible, raising awareness about equal rights, equal payment, and women in managerial positions, but substantial progress still needs to be made in order to achieve greater equality.

Conversely, Sweden is distinguished by its feminine society (A Feminist Government, 2018). In feminine countries, it is important to keep the work-life balance and inclusion of both genders. Managers and employees value equality in their working lives (Schachner, 2017). Regarding the amount of women versus men in the working population, 82% of men are in paid work versus 78% of women (OECD, 2017). According to its government website (A Feminist Government, 2018), Sweden is one of the first nations in the world to take the side of socially progressive measures, as it is self-proclaimed the “first official feminist government in the world”, meaning that gender

equality is a priority for the Government, regarding resource allocation and decision making.

Rationale of the present study

Against the backdrop of the research and findings in this field, and the corresponding theoretical background mentioned above, there are several reasons to further examine on work-life conflict beyond family responsibilities and create awareness about what influences this experience. The present study incorporates two aspects related to roles, namely country and gender, as well as their potential interaction effect in regards to work-life conflict.

Based on the results obtained, future studies might be suggested within Work and Organizational Psychology concerning this broad topic. Concisely, from a scientific perspective, no research has been conducted including comparative perspectives between male and female employees in Mexico and Sweden. This study will not just contemplate different perspectives of the same problem, but also investigate further into how strongly the work-life conflict experience is influenced by cultural background.

From a practical perspective, knowledge about the way work-life conflict interplays with gender roles and how they shape our personal and professional lives is important since equality and work-life balance are crucial aspects for potential job seekers to even consider joining a company or not. In other words, awareness about what current potential employees consider attractive in the labor market. Furthermore, if there were to be found significantly different results between Swedish and Mexican employees, further research could be applied to look into these health-care companies' best practices. The health-care industry could benefit from their policies aiming to reduce work-life conflict. Both

companies within each country could learn from these policies and even mimic them, with their proper adjustments according to the corresponding labor laws and welfare systems.

Research questions

The overall aim of the present study was to investigate the difference in work-life conflict experiences between male and female employees in Mexico and Sweden working within the health-care industry. Three aspects of work-life conflict were assessed: work-life imbalance, work to life conflict, life to work conflict. Specifically this aim was broken-down into three research questions:

- a) To what extent do employees in the health-care industry experience work-life conflict?
- b) Do men and women in Mexico and Sweden experience work-life conflict differently?
- c) Do work-life conflict differ between other factors, namely age groups (≤ 25 , 26-35, 36-45, > 45), cohabitant status (single/co-habitant), or children/no children living at home at least 50% of the time (one child, two children, three or more children, no children)?

Methods

Study design and procedure

I conducted a cross-sectional English based online questionnaire study within two health-care companies in Mexico and nine health-care companies in Sweden. I sent the questionnaire, along with a brief explanation by email to the corresponding Human Resources person in charge in each company for them to forward to their employees. The employees were given a month to answer the survey, from March 5 to April 5, with one email per week reminding them to take the opportunity and time to answer it.

Ethical considerations

As mentioned above, the Human Resources person in charge in each company was informed about the purpose of the study and that the responses should be anonymous through a prescheduled phone call. Therefore, the Human Resources department examined and approved the application of the survey beforehand. Once the survey was approved, I sent an email template with the explanation of the study and survey to the Human Resources person in charge. This email template included, for example, information about the anonymity of the answers, the purpose of the study, and a statement about how no employees' email addresses, background, department, area or names were to be collected. Additionally it stated that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw before or while answering the survey. After receiving the template, a call was scheduled with the Human Resources person in charge to confirm that the email was authorized to be sent out. Once all the details were set, the Human Resources person sent it out to the employees.

Participants and Inclusion criteria

Only employees working at least 75% of full-time work, that is at least 30 hours per week were included.

In Mexico, the survey was sent to 544 employees in one health-care company, 194 answered it, giving a response rate of 36%. In Sweden the survey was sent to 500 people, among them employees registered in health-care unions, subscribed to associations, and through various networks on LinkedIn. The response rate for Sweden was 6%, with a final sample of 41 people. With both countries' respondents, the ultimate sample consisted of 235 participants, giving an overall response rate of 23% (235 / 1044). The demographic

characteristics of the sample and their perceptions of the social climate at work are provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

The sample also included a high proportion of participants without children, 54%.

Table 1: Demographic features of the total sample (n = 235)

<i>Item</i>	Total	Sweden (n= 41)	Mexico (n= 194)
<i>Gender (%)</i>			
Male	49	58	47
Female	51	42	53
<i>Age (%)</i>			
<=25	1	2	1
26-35	36	24	38
36-45	41	24	44
>45	22	49	16
<i>Children (%)</i>			
Yes, one child	18	22	18
Yes, two children	24	24	24
Yes, three or more	3	0	4
No	54	54	55
<i>Cohabitant (%)</i>			
Single	37	15	41
Partner	63	85	59
<i>Work hours (%)</i>			
30-45	36	56	32
>45	64	44	68

Table 2: Overview of the social climate in the total sample (n = 235)

<i>Item</i>	Total		Sweden (n= 41)		Mexico (n= 194)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Social Climate</i>						
Competitive	3.7	1.06	3.1	1.2	3.8	1.0
Encouraging and supportive	3.4	1.2	3.8	0.9	3.3	1.2
Distrustful and suspicious	2.3	1.2	1.8	0.9	2.4	1.2
Relaxed and comfortable	2.6	1.0	3.1	1.1	2.4	1.0
Rigid and ruled based	3.3	1.3	2.5	1.0	3.5	1.3

Considering that various employees in the industry work on Saturdays (Hofstede et al., 2010) part-time and that 8 hours per day are the common standard from Monday to Friday, 30 to 45 hours per week were classified as a regular working schedule. Above 45 hours per week were classified as long working hours. As can be appreciated in Table 1, 44% of employees in Sweden versus 68% of employees in Mexico have a long working schedule.

In order to gather additional information about the employees' experience regarding their organizational environment, five statements collected from the QPSNordic (Lindström et. al., 2000) about *social climate*, were included in the last section of the questionnaire. Namely, *Competitive, Encouraging and supportive, Distrustful and suspicious, Relaxed and Comfortable*, and *Rigid and ruled based*; each statement was based on a 5-point Likert-scale (from 1= Very little or not at all, to 5= Very much). Nonetheless, these statements and further results were not considered for the aim of the present study; this scale (social climate) was added with merely exploratory purposes. Table 2 shows that participants in Mexico considered their social climate to be mainly Competitive ($M= 3.8, SD= 1$), Rigid and Ruled Based ($M= 3.5, SD= 1.3$), but Encouraging and Supportive ($M= 3.3, SD= 1.2$). Participants in Sweden considered their social climate to be mainly Encouraging and supportive ($M= 3.8, SD= 0.9$), Relaxed and Comfortable ($M= 3.2, SD= 1.1$), but also Competitive ($M= 3.1, SD= 1.2$).

Measures

Beyond demographics, the survey included 19 items divided into three *work-life conflict measures*. The purpose of this division was to measure work-life conflict based on diverse perspectives. Firstly to measure the participants' experience of their work and life as a whole; secondly to measure whether they experienced conflict in their personal life due to their work responsibilities; thirdly, on the contrary, to measure whether the conflict in their working life was due to their life responsibilities (an overview can be found in the Appendix).

The first measure was **Work-life imbalance**, constituted by 10 items collected from Daniels and McCarraher's scale (2000), based on a 3-point Likert-scale ($\alpha = 0.9$). For this measure, the sum of scores was considered. The score ranged from 10 to 30: 10 = Disagree, to 30 = Agree; and their mean (M) was contemplated in the statistical analysis.

The second measure was **Work to life conflict**, constituted by 4 items based on a 7-point Likert-scale with good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.6$): 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Two of these items were collected from Haslam, Filus, Morawska, and Sanders scale (2014) and the next two collected from the QPSNordic scale (Lindström et. al., 2000). For this measure the mean (M) was considered in the statistical analysis.

The third and last measure was **Life to work conflict**, constituted by 5 items, based on a 5-point Likert-scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Three of the items were collected from Banu and Duranpandian's scale (2014) and the next two created by the author of the present study. For this last measure the mean (M) was contemplated in the statistical analysis as well. The internal consistency of these five items was good ($\alpha = 0.70$).

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed with RStudio Version 3.3.2 statistic software, with packages such as psych, readr, car and publish. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics (means, medians, standard deviations), inferential statistics (Pearson Correlations, Anova F-test, Tukey post-hoc test for the demographic variables that had more than two groups) and non-parametric statistics (Kruskal-Wallis test). Demographic characteristics, shown in Table 1, were included in the analyses as categorical group variables. An interaction variable between country (Mexico, Sweden) and gender (male, female) tested whether men and women in Mexico and Sweden differed as regards the work-life conflict measures.

A Levene's test was performed to check homogeneity for each categorical grouping variable (i.e. Age, Cohabitant status, Children, Gender, and Country) with each of the three work-life conflict measures. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for all categorical grouping variables except for Co-habitants status with Work-life imbalance ($F=4.84$, $p=0.03$), thus the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test replaced the otherwise generally applied ANOVA F-test.

Results

Pearson correlations indicated that there was a significant positive association between work-life imbalance and work to life conflict ($r = .503$, $p < 0.001$); work to life conflict and life to work conflict ($r = .34$, $p < 0.001$); and between work-life imbalance and life to work conflict ($r = .55$, $p < 0.001$).

Mean levels and dispersion in the three work-life conflict measures

With respect to the first question, and in order to describe to what extent employees in the health-care industry experience work-life conflict, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted for the three work-life conflict measures. Table 3 provides means and standard deviations as well as non-parametric statistics in relation to each measure. As can be observed, participants scored on the balance point in regards to life to work conflict ($M=2.4$, $SD=0.7$), meaning that they neither disagreed, nor agreed about experiencing conflict in work due to their life activities. They were slightly inclined to agree about experiencing work-life imbalance ($M=20.3$, $SD=5.7$) as a whole, as well as moderately inclined to agree about experiencing work to life conflict ($M=4.5$, $SD=1.1$). Therefore, considering the three measures, as a total group, participants did not experience significantly high work-life conflict.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics per measure (n=235)

Measures	Mean	SD	Median	Q1	Q3	Min.	Max.
Work-life Imbalance (10 - 30)	20.3	5.7	20	15	25	10	30
Work to Life Conflict (1 - 7)	4.5	1.1	4.0	4.0	5.0	1	7
Life to Work Conflict (1 - 5)	2.4	0.7	2.0	2.0	3.0	1	4

Comparison between men and women in Sweden and Mexico

Based on the second research question, a two-way ANOVA with an interaction effect between country and gender, tested whether men and women in Mexico and Sweden differed as regards the work-life conflict measures. No statistically significant interaction effect was found between country and gender for any of the three work-life conflict

measures, namely Work-life imbalance, $F(1, 231)= 0.047, p= 0.83$; Work to life conflict, $F(1, 231)= 1.37, p= 0.25$; and Life to work conflict, $F(1, 231)= 0.029, p= 0.86$.

However, a statistically significant main effect was observed that indicated a difference between Countries (i.e. Mexico versus Sweden) in Work-life imbalance, $F(1, 231)= 4.56, p= 0.034$, and Work to life conflict, $F(1, 231)= 15.10, p <0.001$; meaning that participants in Mexico experienced statistically significant higher Work-life imbalance and Work to life conflict than participants in Sweden. As for Life to work conflict no statistically significant difference was found between countries, $F(1, 231)= 0.39, p = 0.54$.

The main effect for gender was not statistically significant for any of three work-life conflict measures, namely Work-life imbalance, $F(1, 231)= 0.96, p= 0.33$; Work to life conflict, $F(1, 231)= 0.11, p= 0.74$; and Life to work conflict, $F(1, 231)= 0.09, p= 0.77$.

Comparisons across groups based on age, number of children and cohabitant status

Based on the third research question, a series of one-way main-effect ANOVAs were conducted to test whether age groups, participants with/without children, and cohabitant status were associated with the three work-life conflict measures, except for cohabitant status with work-life imbalance, wherein Kruskal-Wallis test was performed instead.

Means and Standard Deviations based on demographic characteristics and the three work-life conflict measures are provided in table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics based on demographic characteristics

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Measures</i>					
	<i>Work-life imbalance</i>		<i>Work to life conflict</i>		<i>Life to Work Conflict</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Gender (M, SD)</i>						
Male	20.7	5.9	4.5	1.2	2.4	0.64
Female	19.9	5.6	4.5	1.1	2.3	0.69
<i>Country (M, SD)</i>						
Sweden	18.7	5.3	3.9	1.1	2.3	0.61
Mexico	20.7	5.8	4.7	1.1	2.4	0.68
<i>Age (M, SD)</i>						
<=25	17.7	6.4	4.7	0.6	2.3	0.6
26-35	19.4	5.4	4.6	1.0	2.3	0.6
36-45	21.2	6.2	4.6	1.1	2.4	0.7
>45	20.4	5.4	4.1	1.2	2.3	0.6
<i>Children (M, SD)</i>						
Yes, one child	21.7	5.1	4.7	1.1	2.5	0.6
Yes, two children	21.9	5.2	4.5	1.0	2.5	0.7
Yes, three or more	22.0	6.6	4.6	1.3	2.8	0.5
No	19.0	5.9	4.4	1.2	2.2	0.7
<i>Cohabitant status (M, SD)</i>						
Single	19.0	6.2	4.5	1.2	2.2	0.7
Partner	21.0	5.4	4.5	1.1	2.4	0.6

A statistically significant main effect was observed that indicated a difference between Age groups in regards to Work to life conflict, $F(2, 231) = 1.73, p = 0.05$. The Tukey post-hoc test indicated that the mean score for participants older than 46 years old ($M = 4.1, SD = 1.2$) was lower when compared with participants categorized as 26 to 35 years old ($M = 4.6, SD = 1.0$).

Moreover, a statistically significant main effect was found between children groups in relation to Work-life imbalance, $F(3, 231) = 4.69, p = 0.003$. A Tukey post-hoc test indicated that the mean score for participants with one child ($M = 21.7, SD = 5.1$) was significantly higher than the mean score for participants with no children ($M = 19.0, SD = 5.9$). Additionally, the Tukey-test demonstrated that the mean score for participants with

two children ($M= 19.0$, $SD= 5.9$) was significantly lower than the mean score for participants with no children ($M= 21.9$, $SD= 5.2$).

Regarding work-life imbalance, and in relation to cohabitant status, when applying a Kruskal-Wallis test, a statistically significant main effect ($H(1) = 5.65$, $p= 0.02$) was detected, meaning that the mean score of single participants ($M= 19.0$, $SD= 6.2$) was significantly lower the mean score of participants with partner ($M= 21.0$, $SD=6.4$).

Furthermore, a significant main effect was also found concerning Life to work conflict, $F(1, 233) = 5.11$, $p= 0.02$, meaning that the mean score of single participants ($M= 2.1$, $SD=0.7$) was significantly lower the mean score of participants with partner ($M= 2.4$, $SD=0.6$).

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the experience of employees in the health-care industry based on three different work-life perspectives: work-life imbalance as a whole, work to life conflict, and life to work conflict. Specifically, an online survey study was conducted with 235 employees in Mexico and Sweden, with questions related to their personal and professional life. Due to the diverse aspects that encompass work-life conflict, it was considered important to divide it in three perspectives/measures; the subsequent statistical analysis was based on these three measures.

In response to the first research question, it was found that participants felt neutral about experiencing life to work conflict, and just slightly inclined to agree about experiencing work-life imbalance and work to life conflict. Since their scores landed close to the balance point between agreeing and disagreeing, it can be deducted that they do not experience work-life conflict as a whole.

As for the second research question, a difference between men and women based on their country of origin was expected since Mexico and Sweden are widely diverse in relation to gender roles conceptions. On the one hand, Sweden was self-proclaimed a feminine society (A Feminist Government, 2018), on the other hand Mexico was described by Castro (2012) as a society characterized by a paternalistic masculinity. However, there was no significant interaction effect detected between Gender and Country in none of the three work-life conflict measures.

Moreover, Gender showed no effect in neither of the measures, meaning that men and women did not differ in the way they experience neither work-life imbalance, nor work to life conflict and life to work conflict. These results come as a surprise, given the difference women and men experience in their working life on a daily basis in regards to equality, balance and social expectations (Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Delina & Raya, 2013). A possible explanation might be women's resilience and their habit to fulfill multiple roles, thus they do not feel the need to complain or even perceive imbalance and/or conflict between their work and their personal life (Doble & Supriya, 2010).

In regards to Country, there were clear differences between Mexico and Sweden, with participants in Mexico experiencing higher work-life imbalance and work to life conflict than participants in Sweden. Thus, regardless of gender, country of origin might explain whether participants experience work-life imbalance and work to life conflict, but it does not explain whether participants experience life to work conflict. Noticeably more participants in Mexico (68%) worked long hours than the percentage of participants in Sweden (44%). Moreover, when measuring social climate, participants in Mexico perceived their social climate not only competitive but also rigid and ruled based. The OECD (2017) indicators in relation to both countries support these results, where Mexico

scored considerably low in work-life balance and almost 30% of the employees experienced a long working schedule.

Another possible reason behind Country's significant effect in work-life imbalance and work to life conflict could be the differences between hierarchical structures in each country. Recalling Castro (2012), in Mexico, employees accept hierarchical order, thus it displays natural inequalities and subordinates are expected to be told what to do, resulting on a powerless vision of their position and relevance within their team and the company. On the other hand, Geert, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), described Swedish leadership as handled through coaching, where hierarchies are flat, power is decentralized, and employees expect to be consulted over managers' decisions, therefore empowering employees.

In regards to the third and last research question, by exploring the differences between demographic groups, diverse interesting information was found. For instance, the youngest participants group (i.e., younger than or equal to 25 years old) seemed to disagree about experiencing work-life imbalance than the older age groups (i.e., 26-35, 36-45, >45). Furthermore, the oldest participant group (i.e., participants older than 45 years old) experienced lower work to life conflict when compared with participants between 26 and 35 years old.

In addition, participants without children seemed to experience lower work-life imbalance when comparing them with participants with one or more children. This difference might be linked to the dissimilarity between single and participants with partner in work-life imbalance, since single participants were more inclined to disagree about perceiving it than those with partner.

The present study not only had various strengths but also limitations that are worth mentioning, before suggesting future research and reaching the conclusions.

Study's limitations

The present study did not specify which types of symptoms were typical antecedents of work-life conflict, however exploring them would have required longitudinal data, and this research was based on a survey to be solved at one point in time. Furthermore, the aim of the study was not to find causes but rather to describe experiences and explore the associations between them.

Given the purpose of the study, the social climate results were not explored further. Yet, in light of the variation in mean scores it would have been interesting to in greater detail investigate the meaning behind the differences between employees perspectives in Mexico and Sweden.

In regards to the data collection, on the one hand, in Mexico enough data was collected due to an agreement with a big health-care company that had been previously made. On the other hand, participants in Sweden resulted from various companies, and the sample turned out to be quite small ($n= 41$) compared to Mexico's sample ($n= 194$). The smaller Swedish sample sizes reflect that various companies in Sweden rejected the survey due to internal policy's restrictions. Thus the Swedish sample might not be as representative of the population in the health-care industry in Sweden as the Mexican study sample.

Study's Strengths

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first cross-cultural study focusing on work-life conflict among Mexican and Swedish men and women from a gendered perspective.

Furthermore, it is one of the few studies that have examined to what extent work-life conflict is influenced by gender, rather than simply combining a sample of men and women for the purposes of analysis. Another strength includes the focus on other social roles beyond family, which is a major limitation within this area of research. Thus, it addresses Dempster (2003) suggestion for researchers to explore beyond work-family balance and include other life roles.

Moreover, the present study explored work-life conflict due to various aspects in life, such as work-life imbalance, conflict due to work responsibilities, and conflict due to life responsibilities and leisure activities. It seemed important to consider that some participants might experience conflict not by the work itself, but by the lack of time and /or energy to put more emphasis on their job's performance. Work might generate more satisfaction or seem more important than private life for some people, thus compensating for the lack of balance (Doble & Supriya, 2010).

Additionally, focusing on companies within the same industry (health-care) enabled having a sample of participants with similar work characteristics regardless of the major and obvious differences between countries (welfare system, social security, parental leave, cultural background, organizational culture), making it more likely for the study to produce relevant results.

Future studies

The results of this study provided an important insight into the meaning and consequences of cultural background in the way people experience work-life conflict. It is undeniable that the labor market is becoming more global, meaning that it is more likely to hire employees from different nationalities within one country. Therefore, further cross-cultural research should be performed in order to explore diverse work-life conflict

experiences. Findings based on this and similar research could unify strategies to give a smooth transition and positive experience to foreigner employees, as they become part of international companies.

As previously mentioned, women have been in constant disadvantage within organizational settings compared to men, having for instance lower job positions, lower wages, less job opportunities within certain type of industries and so on (Korabik et al., 2008). However, in the present study they did not seem to experience higher work-life conflict than men. Future studies could explore further why women in the health-care industry do not seem to express discontent or complain more than men, it might be due to societal expectations (Delina & Raya, 2013).

In addition, work-life conflict based on other demographic characteristics was also purposefully investigated. Two demographic characteristics had an effect in how participants experienced work-life conflict, i.e. single participants versus participants with partner, and participant with children versus participants without children. These findings also contributed to the insights of the present study. However, they require further research to determine whether the difference between experiences of work-life conflict according to those demographics could permeate all research in organizational psychology, and not just be applied in one type of industry.

Conclusion

My main purpose of the present study was to investigate whether employees in Mexico and Sweden experience work-life conflict based on three different perspectives. They experienced work-life imbalance and work to life conflict to some degree, being just slightly inclined to agree in regards to both measures. Moreover, they scored neutral in regards to life to work conflict, meaning that they neither disagreed, nor agreed about

experiencing conflict in work due to their life activities. Hence, as a group, participants did not seem to experience an extensive amount of work-life conflict, if any at all

Additionally, the difference between men and women in these two countries was explored. However, no significant difference was found between countries in relation to the participants' gender. Men and women in both countries experienced work-life conflict similarly. Nonetheless, regardless of participants' gender, Swedes and Mexicans did differ in relation to work-life imbalance and work to life conflict. It was demonstrated the participants from Mexico experience a higher work-life imbalance and work to life conflict than the participants in Sweden.

Other demographic characteristics also had an influence in the participants' experience, such as age with the oldest participants experiencing lower work to life conflict, participants with no children experiencing lower work-life imbalance, and single participants experiencing lower work-life imbalance compared to those with partner.

Diverse results were relevant based on the research questions of the study. Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of developing further cross-cultural research in the health-care industry. The question remaining to be answered would be: what about other fields and industries?

References

- A Feminist Government (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.government.se/government-policy/a-feminist-government/>
- Barnett, R. C., & Baruch, G. K. (1985). Women's involvement in multiple roles and psychological distress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49(1), 135–145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.49.1.135>
- Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., & Williams, L. J. (2000). Construction and Initial Validation of a Multidimensional Measure of Work-Family Conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56(2), 249–276. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1713>
- Castro, M. R. (2012). Time Demands and Gender Roles: The Case of a Big Four Firm in Mexico. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(5), 532–554. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2012.00606.x>
- Delina, G., & Raya, R. P. (2013). A study on Work-Life Balance in Working Women. *IRACST - International Journal of Commerce, Business and Management (IJCBM)*, 2(5), 274–282.
- Demerouti, E., Derks, D., Lieke, L., & Bakker, A. B. (2014). New ways of working: Impact on working conditions, work--family balance, and well-being. *The Impact of ICT on Quality of Working Life*, 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8854-0>
- Dempster, F. (2003). Life Course. *8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference Steps Forward for Families: Research Policy and Practice.*, 1–28.
- Dex, S., & Bond, S. (2005). Measuring work-life balance and its covariates. *Work, Employment and Society*, 19(3), 627–637. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017005055676>
- Doble, N., & Supriya, M. (2010). Gender differences in the perception of work-life balance. *Management*, 5, 331–342. Retrieved from <http://ideas.repec.org/a/mgt/youmng/v5y2010i4p331-342.html>
- Godbole, N., & Lamb, J. (2013). The Triple Challenge for the Healthcare Industry : Compliance. *10th International Conference and Expo.*

- Haslam, D., Filus, A., Morawska, A., Sanders, M., & Fletcher, R. (2014). *The Work–Family Conflict Scale (WAFCS): Development and Initial Validation of a Self-report Measure of Work–Family Conflict for Use with Parents. Child psychiatry and human development* (Vol. 46). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-014-0476-0>
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind. McGrawHill*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11569-007-0005-8>
- Hofstein, A., Shore, R., & Kipnis, M. (2004). Research Report: Very Happy People. *International Journal of Science Education*, 26(1), 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950069032000070342>
- Joshi Sethi, U. (2014). Influence of Work Life Balance on Organisational Commitment: A Comparative Study of Women Employees Working in Public and Private Sector Banks. *European Journal of Business and ManagementOnline*, 6(34), 2222–2839.
- Korabik, K., McElwain, A., & Chappell, D. B. (2008). HANDBOOK. Integrating gender-related issues into research on work and family. *Handbook of Work-Family Integration: Research, Theory, and Best Practices*, 456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-372574-5.50015-6>
- Rantanen, J., Kinnunen, U., Mauno, S., & Tillemann, K. (2011). Introducing Theoretical Approaches to Work-Life Balance and Testing a New Typology Among Professionals. *Creating Balance?: International Perspectives on the Work-Life Integration of Professionals*, 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-16199-5>
- Sav, A., & Harris, N. (2013). Gender in Management : An International Journal Article information :
- Smith, K. T. (2010). Work-life balance perspectives of marketing professionals in generation y. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 31(4), 434–447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332969.2010.510724>
- Smola, K. W., & Sutton, C. D. (2002). Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(SPEC. ISS.), 363–382. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.147>

- Sturges, J., & Guest, D. (2004). Work / life balance early in the career. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14(4), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2004.tb00130.x>
- Weyer, B. (2007). Twenty years later: explaining the persistence of the glass ceiling for women leaders. *Women in Management Review*, 21(5), 376–392.
- Woodworth, R. J., O'Brien-Malone, A., Diamond, M. R., & Schüz, B. (2016). Happy Days: Positive Psychology interventions effects on affect in an N-of-1 trial. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 16(1), 21–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2015.07.006>

Appendix

Work-life conflict in the healthcare industry

On the following pages, you will find questions and statements about your work and the corresponding balance in your personal life.

All responses will be recorded anonymously. Your participation is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time before or while answering the survey.

Take your time answering every question. When applicable, type your answer, otherwise choose the alternative that best describes your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you for taking the time to answer!

1. Company

* 2. Country

* 3. Gender

* 4. What is your age?

* 5. What is your cohabitant status?

* 6. Do you have children below 18 living at home?

Yes, one child

Yes, two children

Yes, three or more children

No

10. In the next section, you will be required to rate several statements regarding the importance of your private-life activities. Work through them and answer accordingly.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My home responsibilities often hinder my performance at work	<input type="radio"/>				
Due to my preoccupation with societal activities, I find it difficult to complete work in time	<input type="radio"/>				
I normally have to exceed the amount of leave I am eligible to take during the year	<input type="radio"/>				
The amount of hours I work per week fit with my private life	<input type="radio"/>				
I miss out quality time with my family and friends because of my long working schedule	<input type="radio"/>				

11. Based on your experience, rate your impression of the organizational climate in your work unit.

	Very little or not at all	Rather little	Somewhat	Rather much	Very much
Competitive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encouraging and supportive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Distrustful and suspicious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relaxed and comfortable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rigid and rule-based	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>