



## Work-family conflict, self-efficacy, and emotional exhaustion: A test of longitudinal effects



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### ABSTRACT

Based upon the revised Job Demands and Resources Model (2008) we aim first, to test the relations between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion across time and second, to determine the role of professional self-efficacy in this relation. A longitudinal study was conducted in two times, with a year of interval in a Spanish Army sample ( $n = 242$ ). To test the causal relations between work-family and emotional exhaustion three models are tested: normal causal, reversed causal, and causal reciprocal. To test the role of professional self-efficacy in the relation between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion four alternative models are tested: independence, antecedent, mediation, and independence plus antecedent models. Structural Equation Modeling results confirm the simultaneous reciprocal effects model as it fits the data better than the normal causal or the reverse causal models. This result suggests a spiral process, where work-family conflict predicts emotional exhaustion and at the same time emotional exhaustion increases work-family conflict. Likewise, this article contributes to clarifying the role of self-efficacy in the complex relationship between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion.

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### Conflicto familia-trabajo, autoeficacia y cansancio emocional: un análisis de los efectos longitudinales

#### RESUMEN

A partir del modelo revisado Demandas-Recursos Laborales (2008) este artículo pone a prueba dos objetivos: primero, analizar la relación entre el conflicto trabajo-familia y el agotamiento emocional a través del tiempo y, segundo, identificar el papel de la autoeficacia profesional en esta relación. Se trata de un estudio longitudinal con dos recogidas de datos separados por un año en una muestra de militares españoles ( $n = 242$ ). Se ponen a prueba tres modelos sobre la relación longitudinal entre el conflicto trabajo-familia y el cansancio emocional: el modelo causal normal, el modelo causal reverso y el modelo causal recíproco. A su vez, para probar el papel de la eficacia profesional en la relación entre el conflicto trabajo-familia y el cansancio emocional se analizan cuatro modelos alternativos: modelo de independencia, modelo antecedente, modelo de mediación y modelo de independencia más antecedente. Aplicando modelos de ecuaciones estructurales los resultados confirman la hipótesis de que el modelo causal recíproco ajusta mejor que los modelos causal normal o reverso para dar cuenta de las relaciones entre el conflicto trabajo-familia y el agotamiento emocional a través del tiempo. Estos resultados sugieren un proceso de desarrollo en espiral de forma que el conflicto trabajo-familia predice el agotamiento emocional y, a su vez, el agotamiento emocional aumenta la percepción del conflicto trabajo-familia. Asimismo, el artículo contribuye a esclarecer el papel de la autoeficacia en la relación entre el estrés y el agotamiento emocional.

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#### Palabras clave:

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Nowadays, in modern societies, work and family are the most important facets in both women and men's lives, and conflictive demands arising from them have turned out to be one of the five emerging psycho-social risks in today's occupational world (European Agency on Health and Safety at Work, 2010). Work-family conflict (WFC) has been defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which both work and family pressures are mutually incompatible domains in some aspects (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Analyses confirm the negative relationship between work-family conflict and various indicators of stress and occupational health (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011) and burnout (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010).

Burnout development process has provoked a great deal of interest in researchers and professionals over the last 20 years (Diestel & Schmidt, 2010). Emotional exhaustion and cynicism, the key elements of burnout are considered a response to permanent work stress. The study of burnout is important because it is negatively associated with several organizational outputs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, propensity to quit (Alarcon, 2011; Lee, Lim, Yang, & Lee, 2011), and mental health (Linnerooth, Mrdjenovich, & Moore, 2011; Morgan et al., 2011).

Although the conflict between work and family demands has traditionally been linked to research on gender differences (Noor & Zainuddin, 2011), over the last few years its importance has also been shown in other collectives (e.g., professional soldiers) (Vinokur, Pierce, & Lewandowski-Romps, 2009). The military profession has several job stressors that specifically affect it, and also shares some others with the rest of occupations. Among the various stress sources, the ones derived from the relation between family life and work play a prominent role for this occupational group. Traditionally, research shows five main working conditions linked with military life that exert some impact on family life (i.e., risk of injury or death, geographic mobility, separations, residence in foreign countries, and normative pressures). Some recent studies show the relevance of the relationship between work and family. These studies report an increase in job demands and, consequently, in work stress, e.g., more operations and missions in which professional soldiers participate and demographic changes including larger numbers of married and dual-career couples and more family demands. According to Gee (2007), the professional military way of life is becoming more complex, especially considering that in the majority of military couples both members are engaged in their own profession and neither is willing to give up working. Research also suggests that separation due to military service affects family relationships and the mental well-being of military personnel (Martins & Lopes, 2012) and their families (Manon, 2014; Saltzman et al., 2011). More specifically, 52% of the British military professionals surveyed reported dissatisfaction with the impact of their job on their family life. Dolan and Ender (2008) suggested the *paradox of the family*, since family is not only a source of support, but also a source of stress in the American Army. More concretely, these authors consider the family as a group of significant people for providing support and happiness but also stress and tension, especially in young unmarried soldiers. In their longitudinal study, Bridger, Brasher, Dew, and Kilminster (2008), found a significant relationship between work-family conflict and psychological tension. In another longitudinal research conducted on 257 police officers, Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, and Winefield (2010) back up the hypothesis that job demands increase conflict both in labor and family contexts causing an increment in emotional exhaustion. They explain these effects based on the Theory of Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 2002), as high levels of work demands consume personal resources as well as increase exhaustion levels. In fact, several researchers consider this theory as the best model in order to explain burnout and some studies have also demonstrated its application to

work-family interaction (Langballe, Melbye, Siw, Aasland, & Falkum, 2011).

According to COR Theory (Hobfoll, 2002), emotional exhaustion is the first sign in the process of burnout development (Alarcon, 2011; González-Romá et al., 1998). Over the last years a lot of longitudinal studies have been carried out on burnout but few of them have linked it with work and family demands. Innstrand, Langballe, and Falkum (2011) found that conflict between family life and work was one of the stressors related to burnout two years after the first data gathering, whereas another study in a sample of civil servants Lizano and Barak (2012) found that job stress and work-family conflict are associated with emotional exhaustion development.

The present paper aims to shed some light on the relation between work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and professional efficacy over time in a sample of Spanish soldiers.

### Directionality and Reciprocity between Work-family Conflict and Emotional Exhaustion Overtime

According to Zapf, Dormann, and Frese (1996) longitudinal studies represent a breakthrough since they allow causality and directionality analysis to be made among variables, something that is not possible in cross-sectional studies, which are more frequent in psychological research. Across time it might be possible that a reciprocal influence between two variables generate spiral relationships between them. For instance, with regard to the relationship between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion, Hall et al. (2010) supported the hypothesis that emotional exhaustion increases the perception of work-family conflict, namely *reverse causality* and quote various studies in this direction. Thompson, Kirk, and Brown (2005) pointed out that occupational stress influences family environment from the emotional exhaustion in their members so that the most exhausted ones also experience more obstacles to fit work and family together. Mikkelsen and Burke (2004), in a study with 766 police agents also found a reverse relationship, so that exhaustion and cynicism arose as powerful predictors of work-family conflict. Furthermore, Innstrand, Langballe, Espnes, Falkum, and Aasland (2008) in a survey of 2,235 people from eight different professions reported results in line with the bi-directionality of the relationship between stress derived from work-family relations and emotional exhaustion. Nevertheless, more research is needed with regard to reverse causality. COR Theory (Hobfoll, 2002), suggests that a reverse causal effect is possible between higher levels of burnout, so that burnout employees could perceive their jobs as increasingly stressful (Melamed, Armon, Shirom, & Shapira, 2011). In a longitudinal study with 257 police officers, Hall et al. (2010) using structural equations found some support to the simultaneous reciprocal effects as the most complete model that fits best, in contrast with the normal causal model and the reverse causality model. Carlson, Ferguson, Hunter, and Witten (2012), in their study on abusive supervision of 328 workers, conclude that relationships between work-family conflict and burnout are reciprocal and point out at a loss spiral, as COR theory postulates.

### The Role of Self-efficacy in the Relationship between Work-family Conflict and Emotional Exhaustion

The Demands and Resources Model (JD-R) by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) is one of the most relevant explanatory models of the stress influence on work and occupational health. Current meta-analytical studies show the relevance of the reformulated JD-R model to predict burnout (Crawford, Le Pine, & Rich, 2010; Lizano & Barak, 2012; Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2010). The JD-R model consider various individual as well as

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