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Work-life ‘balance’ in Europe

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Abstract

Although work-life 'balance' is an EU policy priority, within Europe there are considerable variations in the nature and extent of supports that national governments have offered to dual-earner families. In general, the Nordic welfare states offer the highest level of supports, although other countries, such as France, have historically offered extensive childcare supports to working mothers. We examine national variations in reported levels of work-life conflict, drawing upon questions fielded in the 2002 Family module International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) surveys for Britain, France, Finland, Norway and Portugal. We find evidence of a 'societal effect' in the cases of Finland and Norway, in that significantly lower levels of work-life conflict are reported in these countries even after a range of factors have been controlled for. However, support for childcare in France does not appear to have had a similar impact. Further explorations of the data reveal that the domestic division of labour is relatively traditional in France, and that this is associated with higher levels of work-life conflict.

Key words: balance, conflict, societal effect, work-life

Introduction

The question of work-life 'balance' is attracting increasing attention at both the national and international level. This is largely a consequence of the increase in the employment of women, particularly mothers. Until the closing decades of the twentieth century, the question of work-life 'balance' was perceived as relatively unproblematic because of two widespread assumptions: a) the 'standard worker' was full-time – and usually a man, and b) women were conventionally assigned to the unpaid labour of caring and domestic work (Crompton, ed., 1999). Thus a 'balance' between market (employment) and caring work was resolved via the domestication of women, coupled, to varying degrees, with their formal and informal exclusion from market work.ⁱ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, this arrangement is in the process of re-articulation and attitudes to and policy perspectives on women's employment have undergone a profound transformation. From the 1960s onwards, 'second-wave' feminism sought to gain equality for women in the sphere of employment, and in the US, Europe and Antipodes, most of the formal barriers to women's participation in employment had been removed by the 1970s.

Rising levels of employment amongst women, however, were a consequence not only of changes in the attitudes and aspirations of women themselves, but also of developments in the wider economy. De-industrialisation and the shift to service employment have made considerable inroads into traditional male 'breadwinner' jobs, particularly in extraction and manufacturing industries (for example, in mining, metalworking, and engineering). Unemployment has risen, although fears of high and permanent levels of

long-term unemployment have not been completely realised, as service sector jobs have expanded. Nevertheless, many low-level service jobs are not well paid, and dual-earning has become an economic necessity for an increasing number of families. Indeed, across Europe, governments are seeking to encourage women's employment, even when their children are young. It is argued that women's employment outside the home will create more and new jobs to meet the requirements for the caring and domestic work once carried out (unpaid) by women. Women's earnings will also keep families out of poverty, as well as making a contribution to the rising costs of welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1999; 2002). Thus within the EU, work-life balance is a new policy priority.ⁱⁱ

Notwithstanding current assumptions as to the impact of 'globalisation' and the decline in the significance of the nation state, (e.g. Held et al., 1999), there are considerable variations in national strategies both in respect of women's employment and the level of support given for caring responsibilities. Within Europe, variations in the nature and level of women's employment are to some degree a reflection of these policy differences. However, it should be remembered that some countries with few supports for employed parents – notably Britain and the US – also have high levels of employment amongst women. The level of women's employment in individual nation states is not only a reflection of the availability of state-provided extra family supports for caring, but also of wider economic and labour market policies that will include tax systems, employment protections and regulation, etc. Although women's employment is rising in all of the OECD countries, therefore, nation states vary as to both the nature of their trajectories as well as the prevailing manner in which work-life 'balance' (or articulation) is achieved.

All too often, the topic of work-life balance is addressed largely in practical terms (Taylor, 2001; OECD, 2001). That is, if couples, somehow or other, manage to combine dual earning with caring responsibilities it is assumed that a 'balance' has been reached. However, individuals and families have to struggle with many pressures and tensions in order to combine employment and family responsibilities. In this paper, our major focus will be on national variations in levels of work-life conflict. Work-family conflict has been described as "the direct result of incompatible pressures from an individual's work and family roles" (Roehling et al., in Moen, (ed.), 2003), and we may anticipate that levels of work-life conflict will vary with national, individual and family circumstances. Our discussions will be informed by the 'societal' approach to comparative analysis (Maurice et al., 1986). This approach raises the question as to the extent to which 'universal' phenomena are in fact differentiated by '...cultural values and policies that are specific to particular societies' (Gallie, 2003: 61).

In a recent article, Gallie (2003) has demonstrated that a 'societal' effect, in respect of the quality of working life, would seem to be in operation in the Scandinavian countries. Starting from the 1970s, explicit programmes for the improvement of working life had been developed in the Scandinavian countries. Drawing on the findings of a Europe-wide survey, Gallie demonstrates that, using a variety of measures of work quality, the Scandinavian countries were distinctive in respect of the quality of work tasks and participation in decision-making within the organisation. That is, even after a range of other factors were controlled for, the Scandinavian countries scored 'better' in respect of

these factors. In this paper, we explore whether the Scandinavian ‘societal’ effect that Gallie has established in respect of the quality of working life can also be identified in respect of work-life conflict, given the more generous dual-earner family supports to be found in the Scandinavian welfare states (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). It should be emphasised that the identification of a ‘societal’ effect does not depend on demonstrating the precise manner in which cultural values and policies make their impact. Rather, the strategy is to establish whether significant country (i.e. society) differences remain even after a range of other factors, known to have an impact on the phenomenon under scrutiny, have been taken into account.

We will explore this question via a comparison of two Scandinavian welfare states (Finland and Norway), characterised by highly supportive work-life policies, with three other European countries, Britain, France and Portugal. We will first examine the impact of a number of factors that cut across national differences. Weekly working hours, sex, social class, age, the presence or absence of children in the household may all be anticipated to have an impact on levels of work-life conflict. The same factor may have a different impact in different countries – that is, as well as cross-national continuities, the ‘societal’ approach suggests that we should also expect there to be country-specific differences, depending on both recent histories as well as long-established norms and assumptions, particularly, as we shall see, in relation to gender roles and the division of domestic labour.ⁱⁱⁱ

National variations

Our first task will be (very briefly) to discuss comparatively the circumstances of women's employment, and the nature of state supports for mother's employment and caring responsibilities, in the five countries under investigation. The Nordic welfare states (Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark) have been described as 'encompassing' welfare states (Korpi, 2000), in which generous levels of universal welfare support are made available by virtue of citizenship entitlements (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Welfare supports extend to family supports, and the Nordic states all rank high as far as support for the 'dual-earner' family model is concerned, with good provision of public day care services and eldercare, as well as paid parental leave and caring entitlements (Korpi, 2000). As Gornick and Meyers have demonstrated, these policies have had a measurable impact across a number of indicators. For example, in Scandinavia, poverty rates amongst families with children are very low, and women's employment rates are high (Gornick and Meyers, 2003: 74, 66).

In this paper, we present evidence for two of the Nordic countries, Finland and Norway. Norway has in the past been seen as somewhat exceptional amongst the Nordic countries, in that the provision of state childcare services developed later than in other Nordic states (Leira, 1991). However, childcare provision in Norway increased rapidly during the 1990s, and the government aims to achieve universal coverage by 2005 (Ellingsaeter, 2003; Leira, 2002). In contrast, Finland developed universal childcare services from the 60s and 70s onwards, and Pfau-Effinger (1999) argues that the culture of 'state

motherhood' in Finland is highly supportive of mothers' full-time employment. Both countries also offer 'cash-for-care' (that is, direct cash payments to parents). 'Cash for care' policies have sometimes been seen as supporting more traditional family arrangements, as it is usually the mother who takes up such benefits. However, employment levels amongst both Finnish and Norwegian women are high, at 67.3% in Finland and 73.8% in Norway.

In the Scandinavian countries, 'second-wave' feminism has had a considerable influence on policy, and as Anttonen has argued, Scandinavian universalism '...has been important in the process of feminising social citizenship' (2002: 75). Thus, in the later decades of the twentieth century in the Scandinavian countries, state provisions for dual-earner family support and childcare were developed in a political context which was seen as making a positive contribution to women's equality (described as 'state feminism'; see Hernes, 1987). Moreover, family policies have not been directed simply at mothers, but at mothers *and* fathers. In the Nordic states, therefore, state supports for dual-earner families have been accompanied by efforts to encourage men to undertake a greater share of domestic work, particularly in respect of childcare.

Although the French welfare state would not be described as 'encompassing', this country is also characterised by extensive state-sponsored childcare provision (Hantrais, 1993). French family policy has sought to channel supports directly to families with children, and nearly all French children between the ages of three and six, and a substantial minority of two year olds, attend state nursery schools. There is further state

provision for under twos in *crèches collectives*, as well as tax relief on childcare expenses. In France, much of the support for mothers' employment has been pro-natalist in its inspiration, rather than being concerned with women's equality as such (Jenson, 1986). Nevertheless, childcare supports in France have done much to help women into employment, particularly full-time employment (Dex and Walters, 1989). Lewis (1992) has described France as a 'modified male breadwinner' state, in which women have benefited, albeit indirectly, from the care and support directed at children, and 56.4% of French women are in employment, the majority of whom work full-time.

Although working parents in Britain have largely been expected to make their own childcare arrangements, women's labour force participation rates have been rising since the 1950s and stood at 66 per cent in 1984 (as compared to an EU 15 average of 55.5% (LFS, 2002)). The rate then increased markedly during the 1980s, reaching 72 per cent by 2001, and the participation rates of mothers with young children changed rapidly. In 1990, the economic activity rate amongst mothers with a child under 5 was 48 per cent, but by 2001 this had risen to 57 per cent (Dench et al., 2002). Much of the increase in women's employment in Britain has been in part-time work (which stood at 44% in 2001), and this trend is stable (ibid: 44). After the Netherlands, British women have the highest levels of part-time employment in Europe. One of the reasons why part-time work expanded rapidly in Britain in the 60s, 70s, and 80s is because the statutory regulation of British employment is relatively weak, in contrast to other European countries such as France and Germany. In these countries, job protections have historically included the maintenance of the necessary hours to generate a living

(‘breadwinner’) wage.^{iv} Contemporary government policies in respect of the labour market in Britain would still be described as ‘neo-liberal’ (Burchell et al., 2002), and labour market flexibility of all kinds is encouraged and promoted. The British government opted out of the social chapter of the EU Maastricht treaty (1992), and a partial exemption was gained in respect of working hours (in fact, Britain has the longest average hours of (full-time) work in Europe).

As noted, there has historically been little by way of state provision for working mothers and carers in Britain (Moss, 1991). However, with the election of the ‘New Labour’ government in 1997, for the first time in British history, family policy was placed at the centre of the political agenda (Lewis, 2001). A major governmental objective was and is the reduction of child poverty. This was to be largely achieved through an increase in parental employment, and social inclusion has been defined in terms of access to paid work. Cash transfers to low-paid working parents (Working Families Tax Credit) have been introduced, and these include allowances for childcare costs. The topic of ‘work-life balance’ has been placed on the political agenda (DTI, 2000; 2003). However, to date, the government has contributed little to direct assistance with childcare, and the growth in childcare places has largely taken place in the private sector. In addition, the government has also relied on exhortation rather than legislation in persuading employers to adopt ‘family-friendly’ employment policies.

Portugal also has a higher (61.2%) proportion of women in employment than the EU average. The level of full-time employment amongst Portuguese women is also high, and

67% of two earner households are both working full-time. Under the Salazar regime (that lasted until 1974), women in Portugal were legally subject to their husbands and formally barred from a wide range of occupations. However, as Portugal is a country of out migration, women were needed in the labour force in the home country, and two incomes were in any case required to keep families out of poverty. The level of state welfare spending in Portugal is low and families are legally responsible for the support of their kin. Portugal would be described by Esping-Andersen (1999) as a ‘familistic’ welfare state, and therefore not particularly supportive of women’s employment (although as previously stated, levels of full-time employment amongst Portuguese women are high). In spite of recent changes, only low levels of state-provided childcare are available – although (and perhaps as a legacy of the past corporatist dictatorship) the level of childcare provision by employers is relatively good (OECD, 2001).

In contrast to the Scandinavian countries, in Britain, France and Portugal there is no evidence of state policies that explicitly encourage men to take on a larger share of domestic work. Historically, state policies in respect of the family have tended to endorse the rights and authority of the husband over the wife (Pateman, 1989). In Portugal, under the corporatist dictatorship, for example, wives were held responsible for domestic duties and legally subject to their husbands, and in France, an attenuated legal framework of ‘private’ (i.e. domestic) patriarchy persisted into the 1960s (Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2000). In the case of France, other research has suggested that, despite a long history of state support for working mothers, and family-directed benefits, both gender stereotyping in respect of employment, and the domestic division of labour, are more conventional (or

traditional) than might have been expected (Windebank, 2001; Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2000).

Explanations of this gender traditionalism have drawn in particular on French thinking about 'difference' and 'equality', which is imbued with Republican universalism. In France, universal 'equality' is associated with the rejection of 'difference'. Thus, any claim to special treatment by particular groups is seen as a claim for unequal (i.e. more advantaged) consideration.^v For example, although French women have equal rights to men in employment, the implementation of these policies has not been accompanied by any special measures (i.e. affirmative action) to redress previous gender imbalances in employment and the labour market.^{vi} In some contrast to other national contexts (for example, Britain and Scandinavia), the topic of 'equal opportunities' has not had a particularly high profile in France. Perhaps as a consequence, attitudes to the gendered division of labour are rather conventional in France (at least in comparison to the British case; see Crompton and Le Feuvre, 2000).

The five countries under examination in this paper, therefore, show considerable variation in the nature and extent of supports they offer to dual-earner families, as well as in the normative policy context within which these supports have been developed. The two Nordic welfare states offer the most substantial level of support, and 'state feminism' has played an important part in shaping them. Although France is by no means a 'universalist' welfare state, nevertheless, the level of childcare support offered to mothers is relatively extensive and of long standing. However, these supports have been directed

at children and mothers, rather than with the aim of promoting gender equality as such. In Britain and Portugal, dual-earner family supports are relatively modest (although improving). Given these rather different national contexts, if a ‘societal’ effect is discernible, we might expect that levels of work-life conflict will be lowest in the Scandinavian countries and highest in Britain and Portugal, with France located somewhere in between.

Factors affecting work-life conflict

Our analysis draws on the Family 2002 module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).^{vii} A work-life conflict scale^{viii} was constructed, using four items from the survey (respondents were asked to indicate for each item whether this occurred several times a week, several times a month, once or twice, or never. Higher scores indicate higher work-life conflict).

I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done.

It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job.

I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done.

I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities.

Our analysis will focus on full-time employees only. This is because in Britain, as we have seen, a substantial proportion of women work part-time, and not surprisingly, part-time employment is associated with a lower level of work-life conflict. In fact, the British ISSP sample had a significantly higher proportion (34%) of part-time

female employees than in the other countries under investigation, and we therefore control for this factor in our analyses.

At an individual level, a number of factors may be anticipated to contribute to work-life conflict. Work-life conflict is a product of both employment and domestic stresses, as we found in all five countries (although stress at home had a lesser impact on overall levels of work-life conflict than stress at work).^{ix} Despite their widespread entry into employment, women still undertake a greater share of caring and domestic work, and we might therefore anticipate higher levels of work-life conflict amongst women than men. A comparison of means demonstrated that levels of work-life conflict were indeed significantly higher for (full-time) women (mean 7.55) than for men (mean 7.27; $t = -3.423$; d.f. = 3552; $p < 0.001$). The presence of children in the household might be expected to increase levels of domestic work and responsibility, and thus levels of conflict. Levels of work-life conflict were significantly greater when there was a child in the household (mean 7.59) than in childless households (mean 7.21; $t = 4.75$; d.f. = 3312.417; $p < 0.001$).

Occupational class also had an effect on work-life conflict (ANOVA $F = 5.035$; $p < 0.01$), with professional/managerial workers (mean 7.54) having significantly higher work-life conflict than either intermediate workers (mean 7.26; $p < 0.05$) or manual workers (mean 7.29; $p < 0.05$). A correlational analysis of work-life conflict by age also showed that younger full-time respondents reported higher work-life conflict than older full-time employees (Pearson $r = -0.044$; $p < 0.01$). The extent of

individual working hours has also been demonstrated, not surprisingly, to have a significant impact on work-life conflict (Berg et al., 2003; White et al., 2003). Our analysis showed that individual respondents' weekly hours of work were significantly associated with work-life conflict (Pearson $r = 0.204$; $p < 0.001$). Weekly working hours were associated with higher work-life conflict for all individual countries (Table 1).

Table 1: Work-life conflict by weekly working hours and country: full-time respondents only

<i>Mean</i>	<i>Britain</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Portugal</i>
Hours	44.59	40.03	40.17	42.62	43.34
(S.D.)	(10.38)	(6.19)	(8.44)	(9.66)	(12.43)
Worklife	7.73	6.88	7.61	7.01	7.70
(S.D.)	(2.37)	(2.07)	(2.48)	(2.18)	(2.79)
Corr.	0.190***	0.146***	0.308***	0.195***	0.120***

Code: Hours = hours worked; Worklife = work-life conflict; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 1 also summarises the national variations in work-life conflict amongst the ISSP respondents. Results suggest that particular country contexts would seem to have a measurable impact on work-life conflict (ANOVA $F = 20.040$; $d.f. = 4$; $p < 0.001$). The level of reported work-life conflict was highest in Britain and lowest in the two Scandinavian countries. Indeed, levels of conflict were significantly lower in Finland and Norway than in the other three countries, as might be suggested by 'societal effect' arguments. However, France was closer to Britain and Portugal than

Finland or Norway, although levels of work-life conflict were marginally lower in France than in Britain or Portugal. It would seem, therefore, that the institutional and policy context in countries such as Finland and Norway *does* have a positive impact on individual levels of work-life conflict. However, state support for working mothers in France does not seem to have a similar impact.

Although these findings can only be tentative, they do suggest that state policies designed to facilitate the dual-earner model of employment and family life, as in the Nordic countries, have a positive impact on individual levels of work-life conflict. A series of separate regressions for each country (not reported here) showed that in all five countries, working hours were the most significant predictor of work-life conflict (being female and having a child in the household were also significant for all countries). A further regression on the whole sample, incorporating country, individual working hours, sex, child in household, age and social class variables, showed that living in Finland or Norway was significantly associated with lower levels of work-life conflict (Table 2).

Table 2: Multiple regression on work-life conflict for all countries (full-time respondents only)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Living in Britain ¹	-0.148	-0.027	-1.066
Living in Finland ¹	-0.868	-0.133	-5.670***
Living in France ¹	-0.088	-0.016	-0.636
Living in Norway ¹	-0.799	-0.139	-5.540***
Professional/managerial class ²	0.275	0.058	2.829**
Intermediate class ²	0.015	0.003	0.123
Being female	0.531	0.111	6.053***
Child in household	0.478	0.100	5.879***
Age	-0.007	-0.034	-2.008*
Hours worked	0.056	0.226	12.604***
<i>Constant</i>	<i>5.115</i>		<i>18.511</i>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. ANOVA F = 31.797; p<0.001. Adjusted r² = 0.087.

¹ Living in Portugal was the reference category

² Manual class was the reference category

These findings, we suggest, may be paralleled with those of Gallie's (2003) cross-national investigation of the quality of working life in Europe. As we have seen, he found that in the Scandinavian countries, respondents reported a significantly higher quality of work task than in other European countries. Gallie argues that this finding may be attributed to the cumulative impact of Scandinavian policies (from the 1970s onwards)

directed at the enhancement of variety, autonomy and decision-making amongst employees. In a similar vein, it may be suggested that work-family and ‘woman-friendly’ policies in Finland and Norway have had a similar, and positive, impact in reducing levels of work-life conflict in these countries, and that a ‘societal effect’ may be identified.

However, as we have seen, in France, despite a high level of state support for working mothers, overall levels of work-life conflict are comparable to those in Britain and Portugal, where levels of state support are low.^x We will explore this question further by directing our attention to another major factor that might be anticipated to have an impact on work-life conflict - that is, the division of domestic work within the household. As feminists have long argued, in order for equality between the sexes to be achieved, it is necessary to address not only the gendered division of labour in the ‘public’ sphere of market work, but also in the ‘private’ sphere of work and family life. Similarly, for men *and* women to achieve a work-life ‘balance’, attention needs to be directed at the gendered allocation of work within the household, as well as in the market. In the next section, we will explore these questions via an examination of national differences in the domestic division of labour, and their impact on work-life conflict.

The impact of the domestic division of labour

A domestic division of labour (DDL) index was computed from five questions from the ISSP survey:

In your household, who usually does the:

Laundry

Cares for sick family members

Shops for groceries

Household cleaning

Prepares the meals

(always me, usually me, about equal, usually spouse/partner, always spouse/partner)

By convention, these would be considered ‘women’s’ tasks. Scores were allocated in accordance with this assumption. Thus a ‘most traditional’ score (where all of the tasks are usually carried out by the woman) would be 25.^{xi} Average scores for all five countries are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean scores of domestic division of labour (DDL) for each country (full-time respondents only)

<i>Country</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Britain	514	18.61 (3.23)
Finland	452	18.23 (2.67)
France	575	19.23 (3.22)
Norway	545	18.19 (2.67)
Portugal	276	20.49 (3.18)
Total	2363	18.81 (3.08)

ANOVA $F = 35.066$; $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests showed that Portugal and France had significantly higher DDL scores than the other 3 countries.

The two Scandinavian countries have the least traditional DDL scores.^{xii} In respect of the domestic division of labour, post hoc tests showed that France is closer to Portugal (which has the most traditional division of domestic labour) than to Britain, and the difference between the DDL means of France and Portugal and the other three countries is statistically significant.

Domestic labour, attitudes, and behaviour: the case of France

We have already suggested that gender attitudes are more traditional in France, and this would be confirmed by the evidence of a relatively traditional division of domestic labour described in Table 3. In a similar vein, Windebank's qualitative comparative study of domestic labour and parenting in Britain and France found that French men contributed less than British men:

...in the French sample, there were numerous men who were available to look after children during the week when their partner was employed (e.g. teachers who did not work in the school holidays or on a Wednesday afternoon) but nevertheless, did not take responsibility for childcare even when they were free. This was not the case in any of the British sample where sequential scheduling of jobs was used to minimise formal childcare provision...(Windebank 2001: 287).

Windebank suggests that the greater involvement of British men in childcare and domestic work is in fact a consequence of the greater flexibility in labour markets, and

lack of support for childcare, in Britain as compared to France. She suggests that British men have been in a sense 'forced' into domesticity in order to enable their partners to work, which is becoming, increasingly, a financial necessity for British households. In contrast, French men have been enabled to 'fall back' on state childcare provision if their partners are in employment.

However, in relation to our argument, the crucial question is whether or not variations in the domestic division of labour are in fact associated with work-life conflict. A regression (not reported here) incorporating country, working hours, sex, child in household, age, social class and DDL variables suggested that a more traditional division of domestic labour was, in fact, associated with higher levels of work-life conflict. However, a separate analysis by individual country showed that a more traditional DDL was a significant predictor of work-life conflict only in France (Table 4).

Table 4: Multiple regression on work-life conflict for France (full-time respondents only)

<i>Predictor variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Age	0.026	0.108	2.475*
Working hours	0.085	0.298	6.825***
Professional/managerial class ¹	0.260	0.052	1.070
Intermediate class ¹	-0.280	-0.051	-1.022
Being female	0.739	0.150	3.149**
Child in household	0.616	0.123	2.934**
DDL	0.078	0.102	2.363*
<i>Constant</i>	<i>0.830</i>		<i>0.946</i>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; ***p<0.001; ANOVA F = 12.747; p<0.001. Adjusted r² = 0.138.

¹ Manual class was the reference category.

This still leaves the question, however, as to *why* a more ‘traditional’ gender division of domestic labour might be associated with work-life conflict in France. The processes whereby a more ‘traditional’ domestic division of labour might contribute to work-life conflict are likely to be complex. In particular, it might be anticipated that at an individual level, attitudes to gender roles will have an impact – for example, a highly ‘traditional’ domestic division of labour might not be a source of conflict if both parties are of the opinion that this is ‘the right thing to do’. The amount of time spent on domestic work is also likely to contribute to conflict. We found that for the sample as a whole, for full-time women, but not men, the more the hours spent on domestic work, the higher the level of work-life conflict.^{xiii}

As we have seen, respondents in France report relatively high levels of work-life conflict (despite a 'favourable' childcare context), together with a significantly more 'traditional' division of domestic labour than in Britain, Finland, and Norway. It would seem that the question of domestic labour might be more of an issue in France than in the other four countries. However, French women do not, on average, carry out significantly longer hours of domestic work than women in Finland, Norway or Britain (Portuguese women carry out significantly more hours of domestic work than women in the other four countries). Thus we considered the possibility that a contradiction between attitudes and practice in relation to domestic work might be a source of conflict. For example, an individual might have 'liberal' or 'non-traditional' gender role attitudes, but be involved in a rather traditional domestic division of labour, and this *could* be a source of resentment. Conversely, as we have already suggested, if both attitudes and behaviour are traditional, then domestic traditionalism might not be a source of resentment.

Gender role attitudes (GRA) were measured using a single variable: 'A man's job is to earn money, a women's job is to look after the home and family'. Seventy six per cent of Finnish full-time employees, and 86% of Norwegian, expressed liberal gender role attitudes, that is, by 'disagreeing' or 'strongly disagreeing' with the statement. In Britain and France, 74%, and in Portugal, 67% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement.

In France, therefore, 'general' gender role attitudes are relatively liberal. However, the domestic division of labour is relatively traditional. French women do not carry out significantly more hours of domestic work than British women, so we explored further

the possibility that reported contradictions between gender role attitudes (whether more or less ‘liberal’) and the domestic division of labour (whether more or less ‘traditional’) might be a source of conflict, particularly in France. A cross-tabulation of GRA with a dichotomised version of the DDL scale generated four categories which were coded as follows: more liberal gender role attitudes, less traditional division of labour (congruent liberal); more liberal gender role attitudes, more traditional division of domestic labour (incongruent DDL); less liberal gender role attitudes, less traditional division of domestic labour (incongruent GRA); and less liberal gender role attitudes, more traditional division of domestic labour (congruent traditional).

The national samples in Finland and Norway had the highest proportion of ‘congruent liberals’ (34% Finland, 37% Norway), and in both countries, this group reported the lowest levels of work-life conflict. For the five countries taken together, the mean score for congruent liberals was 7.03, significantly different from the congruent traditional mean of 7.81. That is, in all countries, whereas congruent liberalism was associated with a significantly lower level of work-life conflict, in contrast (and disconfirming our earlier suggestion), the ‘congruent traditional’ category was *not* associated with a lower level of work-life conflict. These findings serve to support the feminist argument that work-life ‘balance’, as indicated by level of work-life conflict, is an outcome of the allocation of work in the home, as well as in the marketplace. They suggest that those respondents who have achieved a ‘congruent liberal’ balance in respect of their domestic lives are also likely to have achieved more of a work-life ‘balance’.

However, for separate countries, levels of work-life conflict within the congruence categories was significantly different for France only (Table 5), lending further confirmation to our suggestion that in the case of France, the domestic division of labour is a particularly important factor contributing to work-life conflict.^{xiv}

Table 5: Means of work-life conflict for congruence categories*, France (full-time employees only)

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Congruent liberal	151	6.71 (2.24)
Incongruent DDL	237	7.69 (2.45)
Congruent traditional	125	7.98 (2.48)
Total	514	7.47 (2.45)

ANOVA $F = 11.365$; $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests showed that congruent liberals had significantly lower worklife conflict scores than both other groups.

* As only 32 of the French respondents fell into the ‘incongruent GRA’ category, we have excluded this category from this table.

Working hours and work-life conflict

Amongst full-time employees, weekly working hours were the strongest predictor of work-life conflict for all countries. We should not lose sight of the fact that amongst the five countries studied, it was the British respondents who reported the highest level of work-life conflict (Table 1), and British full-time workers work the longest hours in Europe. In the British ISSP survey, an additional question: ‘In your sort of job, do you think that people work longer hours these days than they used to?’ was asked. Not only did 60% of full-time respondents in Britain think that people did work longer hours, but

those ‘agreeing’ or ‘agreeing strongly’ reported significantly higher levels of work-life conflict (mean 8.14) than those who ‘disagreed’ or ‘disagreed strongly’ (mean 6.71). Amongst the countries under discussion in this paper, reported hours of work are shortest in Finland, and weekly hours of work are also relatively low in France (which has a statutory 35-hour week). Although weekly hours of work in Norway are longer than in France, nevertheless, reported levels of work-life conflict are significantly lower in Norway.

We have suggested that a (positive) ‘societal effect’ may be in operation in the case of Norway, and that in France, the domestic division of labour may be identified as contributing to increased levels of work-life conflict. However, in Britain, working hours are long and state supports for dual-earner families are only modest – although, after Finland and Norway, the domestic division of labour is least traditional in Britain. This suggests that in Britain, although changes in gender role attitudes and in the domestic sphere have taken place, nevertheless long hours of work and a lack of external (state) supports for dual-earner families serve to keep levels of work-life conflict high.

Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have explored the impact of a number of factors having an impact on work-life conflict. We have focused in particular on the effects of working hours, sex, the presence or absence of children, social class, age and the domestic division of labour, as well as the country (or ‘societal’) effect.^{xv} Our evidence can only be tentative, as our data

are cross-sectional and therefore cannot provide causal evidence of the impact of policy developments. However, our findings do suggest that in Finland and Norway, there is evidence of a ‘societal’ effect in operation. Although in many ways, these two countries are very different, they are both countries with ‘encompassing’ welfare states, in which governments have developed and implemented policies designed not only to facilitate dual-earner families and thus work-life ‘balance’, but also to encourage men to assume a larger share of caring and domestic work. Reported levels of work-life conflict are lower in these countries, and the domestic division of labour is less traditional.

Although our evidence is by no means comprehensive, we have also been able to explore the relationship between the patterning of the domestic division of labour and work-life conflict. Feminists have long insisted that caring and other forms of unpaid work within the domestic sphere should be regarded as ‘work’ (e.g. Glucksmann, 1995). By convention, women carry out the larger part of domestic work, although the extent of the gender differential varies considerably between different countries. We found that in general, the presence of a more ‘traditional’ division of domestic labour made a contribution to increased work-life conflict, and that this was particularly marked in the case of France. France is a country with relatively ‘liberal’ gender role attitudes, but a rather traditional division of domestic labour. Although supports for mothers’ employment are good in France, these have not been linked, historically, with a gender equality agenda. Thus domestic gender traditionalism in France is associated with significantly higher levels of work-life conflict, whether or not gender role *attitudes* are ‘traditional’ or ‘non-traditional’. The particularities of the domestic sphere in France have

been noted by other authors (Windebank, 2001; Gregory and Windebank, 2000), and indeed, the case of France may be cited as evidence of a gendered ‘societal effect’ - although in this instance the focus would be on embedded cultural assumptions in relation to domestic responsibilities, rather than specific policy developments.

Gendered assumptions as to the sexual division of labour, particularly in respect of the division of labour in the domestic sphere, persist in all societies. However, the extent of embedded gender traditionalism varies considerably, as is demonstrated by one of our five case study countries - Portugal. The allocation of domestic tasks is highly traditional in Portugal, and Portuguese women carry out many more hours of domestic work than women in the other four countries. However, in aggregate, the prevailing division of domestic labour in Portugal does not have a significant impact on work-life conflict scores (in some contrast to France). The Portuguese case raises complex issues that we explore in greater depth elsewhere (Lyonette et al., 2005). Occupational class differences in work-life conflict are more significant in Portugal, and other research (Vala et al., 2003) has demonstrated that the Portuguese (in all social groups) place a greater emphasis on the relative importance of ‘family’ in general than in other European countries.

In conclusion, the increase in women’s claims to equality, as well as in the level of women’s (particularly mothers’) employment are universal trends as far as western-influenced countries are concerned. Thus the proportion of dual-earner households is increasing. Nevertheless, despite these ‘global’ trends, the evidence presented in this

paper suggests that the consequences of these trends for work-life conflict are shaped not only by state policies, but also by the variable persistence of embedded, and gendered, norms relating to the division of labour between men and women.

Footnotes

ⁱ This arrangement may not have been 'fair', but it did serve to ensure social reproduction (Folbre, 1994).

ⁱⁱ (COM (2001) 313) *Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality*, singles out gender equality and work-life organisation and work-life balance as issues worthy of special attention. It is recognised that the European Social (policy) Model should be maintained while at the same time being "modernised." Thus the emphasis in COM (2001) 313 is on the *quality* of work. It is argued that "Increasing quality by providing a better work-life balance, and by increasing the attractiveness of work, may contribute to increasing the overall employment rate and the employment rate of women and older workers (p. 8).

ⁱⁱⁱ This tendency has been described as national 'path dependency'. See Esping-Andersen (1999).

^{iv} The initial expansion of part-time jobs was also cheap for British employers in that National Insurance contributions were not levied on short hours part-time work.

^v This position has guided recent legislation on the wearing of religious symbols in state (secular) schools, in particular, headscarves for Muslim girls.

^{vi} In 1983, the Loi Roudy attempted to persuade companies to develop gender equality programmes, but with limited success. See Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000).

^{vii} For a description of the ISSP programme, see Davis and Jowell (1989); also Jowell, Brook and Dowds (1993). In 2002, interviews were carried out with a stratified random sample of 2312 in Britain, 1353 in Finland, 1903 in France, 1475 in Norway, and in 1092 in Portugal. Questions on work-life conflict were asked of employees only (1015 in Britain, 652 in Finland, 1017 in France, 799 in Norway and 516 in Portugal).

^{viii} Cronbach's alpha .73; factor analysis showed one factor with an Eigen value of 2.2, explaining 56% of variance.

^{ix} Work stress was measured by responses to 2 items: "there are so many things to do at work, I often run out of time before I get them all done" and "my job is rarely stressful" (strongly disagree to strongly agree); factor analysis showed 1 factor, Eigen value 1.268, explaining over 63% of the variance; Cronbach's alpha for the 2 items .463, indicating low reliability. Correlation with worklife conflict (5 countries): Pearson's $r = .413$; $p < .001$.

Family stress was measured by responses to 2 items: "there are so many things to do at home, I often run out of time before I get them all done" and "my life at home is rarely stressful" (strongly agree to strongly disagree); factor analysis showed 1 factor, Eigen value = 1.252, explaining over 62% of the variance; Cronbach's alpha for the 2 items = .4028, indicating low reliability. Correlations with worklife conflict (5 countries): Pearson's $r = .407$; $p < .001$.

^x There are, of course, other instances, most notably in the ex 'state socialist' countries of Eastern Europe, in which extensive state childcare provision did not (and has not) in fact served to reduce the 'double burden' of women. In the 'state socialist' countries, women's 'equality' was interpreted in strictly materialist terms as access to employment, and, for example, Stalin declared the 'woman problem' to have been 'solved' once Russian women achieved economic participation at the same level as that of men (Einhorn 1993). As many feminist commentators have argued, in the Eastern bloc, the absence of state interest in and attention to gender inequalities in the domestic sphere (apart from a relatively brief period

after the 1918 revolution) meant the persistence of substantial gender inequalities despite women's full employment.

^{xi} DDL scores ranging from 5-25; higher scores indicate more traditional DDL. Factor analysis showed 1 factor, Eigen value 2.699, explaining over 54% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha for all 5 items =0.7860.

^{xii} Gershuny and Sullivan (2003) have compared the extent of 'traditionalism' in the domestic division of labour in 'liberal' and 'social democratic' societies, and found them to be broadly similar. However, it may be suggested that the underlying explanation for a lack of domestic traditionalism is rather different for the two societal 'types'. See Crompton, forthcoming.

^{xiii} For women, hours of domestic work are significantly associated with the DDL scale – i.e., the more 'traditional' the division of domestic labour, the longer the hours of household work for women. In our subsequent analysis, therefore, we will use the DDL scale alone.

^{xiv} It should be noted that work-life conflict was lower for congruent liberals in all countries, although the difference between category means was not necessarily statistically significant.

^{xv} We are conscious of the fact that, although all of these factors are significant, for the five countries taken together, relatively little of the variance is explained. Thus many other factors, including attitudinal variables, will also be contributing to variations in work-life conflict. These factors will be explored in future publications.

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