

Conflict or enrichment? A comprehensive review of work family balance

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Abstract

Purpose – Work and family are two of life’s most significant aspects. Research on work-family balance (WFB) has been highly regarded, producing numerous findings. However, the research findings on this topic seem fragmented, and the theoretical foundation appears ambiguous. Therefore, this study aims to provide references for theory and practice by objectively analyzing the theoretical foundation, disciplinary backgrounds, research topics and future research directions of this field.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used bibliometric methods to analyze 1,466 articles on WFB from the Web of Science (WOS) core database published between 2000 and 2025.

Findings – The research findings suggest that role theory, boundary theory and conservation of resources (COR) theory are the core foundations of WFB. Social sciences, management and psychology are dominant disciplines, while environmental science and medicine are emerging disciplines.

Originality/value – This study has developed a knowledge framework for WFB and proposes future research directions. It provides an overview of the field and development prospects, serving as a reference for both theoretical research and management.

Keywords Work-family balance, Enrichment, Conflict, Gender neutral perspective, B-SLR

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The most important aspects of life are work and family. Work-family balance (WFB) is the ability to effectively manage time and energy between these two areas, finding a suitable equilibrium between work responsibilities and family obligations for the mutual growth of the individual, family and career. High satisfaction with both work and family indicates a successful balance, reflecting an individual’s psychological well-being (Lapierre *et al.*, 2018). Achieving WFB is crucial for individuals, organizations and society. For individuals, WFB enhances happiness, life satisfaction, family relationships, self-esteem and work



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motivation (Gumarac, 2024). Organizations should not only provide employees with a safe, healthy and equal working environment but also prioritize their WFB. Numerous studies show that WFB enhances productivity, boosts organizational commitment, increases job satisfaction, reduces turnover rates and provides a competitive advantage for businesses (Hasan et al., 2021; Kim, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). For society, the WFB can enhance social welfare, increase national well-being and promote gender equality (Li et al., 2024). The balance between work and family has gained attention in recent years due to its significant impact on individuals, organizations and society.

The concept of WFB, a key factor in the work-family relationship, is mainly viewed through two lenses: binary opposition and dual unity. The binary opposition is based on the depletion perspective; individuals face conflicts and stress due to differing role expectations in the workplace and family, particularly in dual-career families, single-parent households and those caring for elderly relatives. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict (WFC) as: “A form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect.” (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). However, the enrichment perspective suggests that individuals can benefit positively from engaging in multiple roles. For example, Ruderman et al. (2002) found that female brokers improved their attention and organizational skills while managing various responsibilities, leading to increased work efficiency (Ruderman et al., 2002). The enrichment perspective has opened up another angle on WFC and work-family enrichment (WFE). In conclusion, the depletion and enhancement perspective suggest that enrichment and conflict represent two extremes of a unified work family interface. However, to better understand the work-family interface, it is essential to integrate the depletion and enrichment perspectives (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Rothbard, 2001) to achieve balance by minimizing conflicts and maximizing enrichment. This perspective views conflict and enrichment as a dual unity, indicating that WFB should be analyzed from both subjective psychological and objective social structural levels. Figure 1 presents concept maps illustrating the binary opposition and dual unity of WFB, emphasizing the evolution of this concept.

To better understand research on WFB, scholars have increasingly used systematic methods to review findings for specific groups and periods. For instance, Graham and Smith (2022) conducted a scoping review of 69 WFB studies on athletes, concluding that sports industry participants need to enrich their lives and foster positive organizational behaviors to achieve this balance (Graham and Smith, 2022). However, they focus on sports practitioners which limits the applicability of the findings. Some scholars have examined the WFB of teleworking employees during COVID-19. An analysis of 42 articles indicates that remote work affects employees’ WFB differently, and there are boundaries of action. However, this study’s limitation is its focus solely on the COVID-19 period without predicting future research trends in WFB (Elbaz et al., 2023). To address this limitation, P Khatri et al. (2025)



Figure 1. Conceptual map of work-family balance
Note(s): Viewing work-family balance from the dialectical perspectives of depleting and enriching
Source: Authors’ own work

conducted a qualitative analysis of 49 articles on WFB using a systematic literature review and suggested that future research should move beyond “balance” to achieve “fulfillment” (Khatri *et al.*, 2025). However, this research focuses solely on future theoretical exploration, neglecting a review of past fundamental theories and lacking knowledge framework in the field of WFB.

Although meta-analysis, systematic literature review, and scoping review are important methods, bibliometric analysis of WFB research can collect data on a larger scale. Therefore, Zaitouni *et al.* (2024) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 1,190 articles on WFB from 2000 to 2020 (Zaitouni *et al.*, 2024). They found that gender and family life topics were the most developed, while themes like job security, flexible working arrangement, personal productivity and work-life conflict (WLC) have expanded beyond traditional research areas. This study provides scholars with a broad perspective and research framework but lacks attention to WFB in the post-COVID-19 context. In fact, the pandemic has significantly changed our work and lifestyle (Ng *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, focusing on WFB after the epidemic is crucial.

Summarizing previous research, we identify key limitations in review studies on WFB. First, the theoretical foundation is fragmented. Prior studies have not adequately reviewed major theories such as the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, conservation of resources (COR) theory and boundary theory, leading to a limited understanding of essential concepts related to WFB. Second, the disciplinary backgrounds are unclear. Previous research has focused on specific groups and periods, lacking a comprehensive discussion of the multidisciplinary aspects of WFB. This has resulted in a limited understanding of the overall WFB picture. Thirdly, the historical development of the research topic is ambiguous. While previous studies have reviewed WFB, how have these topics evolved? Are there still interdisciplinary research topics? Have these research topics highlighted gender differences? The previous discussions appear to be insufficient. Fourth, the research hotspots are unclear. Previous studies used limited methods and analyzed only about 100 articles, leading to overlooked achievements and a subjective understanding of research hotspots and future directions.

In light of the above limitations, we have summarized the research questions of this study as follows:

- RQ1. What is the theoretical foundation of WFB?
- RQ2. What are the disciplinary backgrounds of WFB?
- RQ3. What are the research topics in WFB?
- RQ4. What future research directions exist for WFB?

To address the above research questions, we employed a quantitative bibliometric method and utilized the bibliometric-systematic literature review (B-SLR) framework for our design. We conducted a comprehensive analysis of WFB literature from the Web of Science (WOS) core database over the past 25 years. Through this analysis, we answered four research questions regarding theoretical foundation, disciplinary backgrounds, research topics, and future research directions in WFB literatures.

The use of bibliometrics allows for the quantification, networking and visualization of large-scale literature data to reveal hidden collaboration patterns, co-citation relationships and keywords evolution. This method offers a clear perspective and objective insight into the development of literature in this field.

The distribution of paragraphs in this article is as follows:

- The first part provides an introduction to the study, presenting the concept of WFB, summarizing past research achievements and impasses, and raising questions for this study.
- The second part introduces the theoretical foundation of WFB, including role theory, boundary theory and COR theory, addressing the first question: “What is the theoretical foundation of WFB?”
- The third part outlines the methodology, employing the PRISMA principle for data screening according to B-SLR requirements.
- The fourth part presents the results and discussions. It includes descriptive statistical analysis comparing journals and categories, collaboration analysis focusing on individuals vs. institutions focus, co-citation analysis examining gendered vs. gender-neutral perspective, and co-occurrence analysis addressing conflict vs. enrichment logics. The descriptive statistical analysis answers the second question: “What are the disciplinary backgrounds of WFB?” The latter three analyses collectively address the third question: “What are the research topics in WFB?”
- The fifth part outlines the knowledge framework and future research directions. Following the tenth step of B-SLR, it outlines the WFB knowledge framework, including disciplinary backgrounds, research topics, research hotspots and relevant theories. It also proposes future research directions and recommended literatures, effectively addressing the fourth question: “What future research directions exist for WFB?”
- The sixth part addresses implications and limitations, covering theoretical, practical, and social implications, as well as the study limitations of the text.

2. Theoretical foundation

WFB has garnered significant attention in management, sociology, economics, and psychology. Researchers utilize various theories to examine WFB, such as social cognitive theory (Oatley and Bolton, 1985), role theory (Biddle, 1986), boundary theory (Clark, 2000), COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), institutional theory (Baek *et al.*, 2012), family systems theory (Cox and Paley, 1997), theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), etc. The theoretical foundation of WFB is chaotic and inconsistent due to its interdisciplinary nature. To clarify this, we focus on the core of the work-family relationship: competition for individuals’ time, energy, space, behavior and role expectations across work and family domains. Given this, we categorize the theoretical basis of WFB into role theory, boundary theory, and COR theory to address the first research question: “What is the theoretical foundation of WFB?”

2.1 Role theory

A role signifies the behavioral patterns expected of an individual in society based on their status. Role theory includes role conflict theory and role accumulation theory, which examine the work-family relationship from depletion and enrichment perspectives, respectively. From the perspective of depletion, individuals must juggle multiple roles and identities, switching between them daily. These roles often conflict with one another, leading to role conflicts (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The latest survey of Israeli parents reveals that conflicts among school, work and family negatively impact role balance (Kulik, 2025). This underscores the adverse relationship between role conflicts and WFB, confirming the binary opposition. From the enrichment perspective, an individual’s commitment in one area (work/family) can provide emotional and efficiency benefits in another (family/work) (Wayne *et al.*, 2004). When advantages from one domain enhance the other, an enrichment effect occurs. Recent research indicates that WFB can be achieved through either high

depletion with high enrichment or low depletion with high enrichment (Rothbard *et al.*, 2021), supporting the dual unity. Overall, role theory suggests that individuals' work and family roles are interconnected, leading to blurred boundaries, which leads to role overlap and subsequently role conflict and role accumulation.

2.2 Boundary theory

Boundary theory (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000) examines how individuals psychologically and physically transition between roles. It suggests that people create and uphold boundaries between different roles to simplify and organize their environment. Boundaries help individuals prioritize important areas over secondary ones. Recent research on boundary theory explores the work-family interface for entrepreneurial women. Unlike binary opposition views, they do not see work and family as separate domains. When entrepreneurial activities are integrated into family life, conflicts between work and family decrease (Huq and Arenius, 2024). The traditional boundary theory defines the separation between work and family to minimize conflicts. In contrast, the dual unity perspective blurs these boundaries, promoting balance between the two.

2.3 Conservation of resources theory

The COR theory posits that individuals aim to maintain and enhance their valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). The potential or actual loss of these resources threatens individuals, mainly due to role demands and the energy needed to meet those expectations. COR theory suggests that when resources are lost, individuals feel stressful and invest extra resources to protect the existing resource. Resource depletion and enrichment are central to the COR theory, which focuses on resource transformation. Work to family conflict depletes employees' resources for managing family issues while also requiring them to gather resources to cope with these problems. Consequently, employees allocate their resources according to role demands and environmental pressures to address work-family challenges. The COR theory is frequently used in work-family interference research. Recent studies based on this theory examine how employees attain WFB through resource utilization. Findings indicate that supportive supervisors, family support, and social support, as key individual resources, facilitate WFB and enhance life satisfaction and happiness (Rahman *et al.*, 2025). COR theory, unlike role theory and boundary theory, emphasizes how individuals use existing resources to attain WFB. Consequently, it has gained significant attention in recent research on work-family relationships.

3. Methodology

To define the research scope and screening criteria, we adhered to the B-SLR methodological framework (Marzi *et al.*, 2025) and conducted a transparent review following PRISMA guidelines. This included seven components: inclusion and exclusion criteria, search query definition, database selection, data selection process, risk of bias assessment, bibliometric approach, and analysis process.

3.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Selected literature must come from high-quality core databases to enhance research quality and credibility.
- The selected articles or reviews must closely relate to WFB content, with the terms “work,” “family” and “balance” clearly present in the title or abstract. This includes

phrases like “work-family balance” or “family-work balance,” or the three words may appear separately, but must still address their relationship. Suppose the relationship between work and family is discussed in terms of “conflict,” “boundary,” “enrichment,” “relationship,” “imbalance,” “facilitation,” “interface” and their interrelations. In that case, it is still considered as related topic in the WFB field.

- We expanded the literature selection to include articles published from January 1, 2000, to June 30, 2025.
- Bibliometric software can recognize text patterns and English.

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles that are announced, retracted or withdrawn will be excluded due to their lack of analytical value.
- Articles with a weak direct connection to WFB and lacking terms like “conflict,” “boundary,” “enrichment,” “satisfaction,” “imbalance,” “facilitation,” “interface” and “relationship” will be excluded.
- Exclude duplicate data identified by bibliometric software.

3.2 Search query definition

The literature screening formula for WFB is as follows:

- The topic is “work*” Near/3 “famil*” Near/3 “*balanc*”;
- The document type is “Article” “Review”;
- The language is “English”; and
- The publication date is “2000-01-01” to “2025-06-30.”

3.3 Database selection

We selected Science Citation Index (SCI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) in WOS as the databases for the literature in the field of WFB.

Firstly, WOS is a globally recognized high-quality literature database that offers information on publishers, time spans, authors, regions and references. Secondly, SCI/SSCI/AHCI encompasses exceptional literature across various disciplines that meet our inclusion criteria and serve as a key source for bibliometric research.

In addition, Scopus is a widely used international database. We did not utilize it because:

- Bibliometric tools often struggle to analyze literature from multiple databases. For instance, the CiteSpace software we selected cannot simultaneously analyze literature from both WOS and Scopus.
- Overlapping data in Scopus and WOS limits the credibility of the analysis results.
- Numerous bibliometric studies align with our selected database, further confirming its accuracy.

3.4 Data selection process

We followed the PRISMA guidelines (Page *et al.*, 2021) for literature screening, as illustrated in Figure 2. In line with the principle of independence, the two authors collected data and made judgments separately. They then compared their results, resolving any discrepancies through a third author. The inclusion criterion was “this paper is related to WFB.” The transparent screening process is as follows:

- Two independent authors used the earlier search formula to retrieve 1,524 articles from the WOS core database. Duplicate and incomplete records were removed, and after review, no duplicates or incomplete articles were found.
- The two authors imported the authors, titles, publication sources, and abstracts of 1,524 articles into Excel. Using IF statements and subjective judgment, they assessed the relevance of titles and abstracts based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. After independent screening by both authors and arbitration by a third person, 58 irrelevant articles were identified and excluded.
- Qualification assessment was conducted on the remaining 1,466 articles. This involved creating an “input” folder, importing data into CiteSpace and identifying unreadable articles. Ultimately, all articles were deemed qualified for analysis.

A total of 1,466 articles were included.

3.5 Study risk of bias assessment

To evaluate research bias, we established two groups for screening and validating text data:

- (1) We defined “WFB” for both groups and asked them to collect relevant texts.

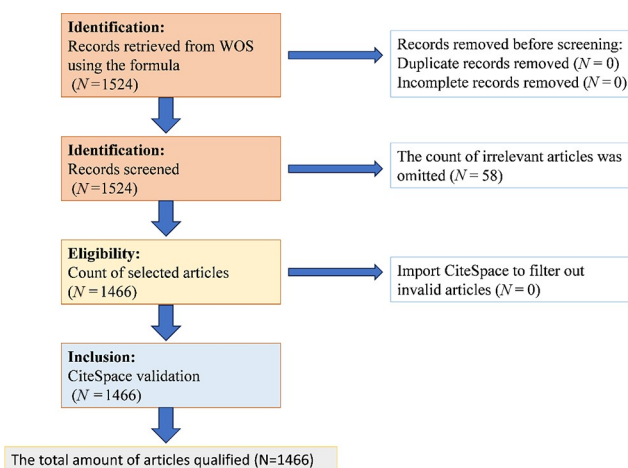


Figure 2. PRISMA process

Note(s): In line with B-SLR requirements and the PRISMA principle for data screening, we adhere to the fourth step of B-SLR: data screening and cross-checks, as well as the fifth step: data cleaning and export. This corresponds with the eighth step: selection process, and the ninth step: data collection process from PRISMA 2020 statement. N denotes the number of articles

Source: Authors’ own work

- (2) After data screening (Figure 2), both groups identified 1,466 articles, consistent with our initial findings. This suggests a relatively low risk of bias in this article.

3.6 Bibliometric approach

Several tools are available for bibliometric analysis, including HistCite, Bibliometrix, VOSviewer and CiteSpace. We have selected CiteSpace as our primary tool. HistCite, like CiteSpace, clearly shows research field trends but has limited software compatibility. Bibliometrix is an R-based software renowned for its strong visualization and flexibility. However, it has high technical requirements and a complex installation process. VOSviewer can create various visualizations like CiteSpace, but its node interactivity is limited and may not accommodate complex analyses. CiteSpace effectively analyzes literature across disciplines and visually explores relationships like collaboration, co-citation and co-occurrence. Therefore, the choice of CiteSpace is based on a comprehensive comparison.

We chose the advanced version of CiteSpace 6.3 R1. The operation steps are as follows:

- Remove duplicates from the txt data in “input” and import it into “output”;
- Create a “New Project” and set LRF = 3; L/N=5; LBY=8; e = 2.0;
- Select “Time Slicing” from 2000-01 to 2025-06, with “Years Per Slice” set to 1;
- In “Text Processing”, choose Title, Abstract, Author, Keywords, and Keywords Plus;
- For “Selection Criteria”, select K = 25, Top N = 50, and Top N% = 10%;
- In “Pruning”, choose “Pathfinder”, “Pruning sliced networks”, and “Pruning the merged network”;
- Depending on the analysis of different sections, select different “Node Types”, such as author, institution, keyword, etc.;

Click “GO!” to conduct the visualization analysis.

3.7 Analysis process

We conducted a bibliometric analysis of WFB literature using CiteSpace. The primary analytical methods employed are as follows:

- Statistical analysis: statistical analysis of journals and categories underpins bibliometric research in this field, offering crucial data support for this study.
- Collaboration analysis: this section provides a collaborative analysis of authors and institutions, emphasizing the collaborative links among various research subjects within a common theme.
- Co-citation analysis: conduct a co-citation analysis of journals and references to highlight their interrelationships.
- Co-occurrence analysis: this section analyzes co-occurrence keywords and keyword bursts. It summarizes the evolution of hot topics and forecasts future trends.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis: journals vs. categories

This section presents a descriptive statistical analysis of WFB literature from the past 25 years. It explores the disciplinary distributions based on publication journals and

categories analysis, addressing the second research question: “What are the disciplinary backgrounds of WFB?”

4.1.1 Publication journal analysis. The analysis identifies 1,466 articles on WFB across 201 journals. Among these, 64 journals published five or more articles, accounting for 31.84%, indicating a wide distribution and diversity of publications. [Table 1](#) lists the top 10 journals by publication volume. We calculated their 5-year Impact Factor (IF) to evaluate academic influence, determined the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) quartile for relative positioning within the discipline, and analyzed the percentage of publications per journal. The findings are as follows:

Journals in the social sciences are prominent, with three key journals—*Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Family Issues* and *Journal of Family Studies*—publishing 39, 29 and 14 studies on WFB, respectively. These journals examine WFB from the family’s viewpoint ([Andréasson et al., 2023](#); [Martucci, 2023](#); [Yeung and Li, 2023](#)).

Management journals have emphasized WFB for employees, notably the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (5-year IF: 10.7) and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (5-year IF: 6.9). In recent years, 27 and 21 articles on this topic were published. These journals explore employees’ WFB from perspectives including the workplace ([Hill et al., 2003](#)), work culture ([Clark, 2001](#)) and personal career planning ([Bayazit and Bayazit, 2019](#)).

The field of environmental science has started to focus on work-family balance (WFB). Journals such as the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health and Sustainability* have published 25 and 23 papers on this topic, respectively. These studies often examine WFB about employee health ([Loezar-Hernandez, M, 2023](#)) and corporate sustainable development ([Lin et al., 2024](#)).

It is worth noting that some interdisciplinary fields have also begun to focus on WFB. For instance, *Frontiers in Psychology*, a journal from the field of psychology, published 34 papers on this topic, ranking second; *Work – A Journal of Prevention Assessment Rehabilitation*, a journal from the field of medicine, published 20 papers in this area; and *PLoS One*, a journal from an interdisciplinary field, published 14 papers.

Table 1. Publication journal statistics

Ranking	Journal	Count	5-Year IF	Quartile	%
1	<i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i>	39	5.6	Q1	2.660
2	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	34	3.7	Q1	2.319
3	<i>Journal of Family Issues</i>	29	2.1	Q2	1.978
4	<i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i>	27	10.7	Q1	1.842
5	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health Sustainability</i>	25	4.8	Q2	1.705
6	<i>Sustainability</i>	23	3.6	Q2	1.569
7	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	21	6.9	Q1	1.432
8	<i>Work-A Journal of Prevention Assessment Rehabilitation</i>	20	1.7	Q3	1.364
9	<i>Journal of Family Studies</i>	14	2	Q2	0.955
10	<i>PLoS One</i>	14	3.2	Q2	0.955

Note(s): The journal count, five-year impact factor and quartile rankings were obtained from the Web of Science. Percentage = (Count/1,466)×100%, rounded to three decimal places

Source(s): Authors’ own work

4.1.2 *Publication category analysis.* The distribution of journals by discipline offers insights into WFB research fields, but it does not reveal the specific disciplines of the papers published in these journals. Therefore, we performed descriptive statistics on the disciplines of 1,466 papers (see Table 2).

The results show that the social sciences discipline has the highest attention to research on WFB. Among the top ten disciplines, sociology, family studies, women studies, and social sciences interdisciplinary published a total of 432 papers, accounting for 29.468%, ranking first.

In addition, management, business, economics, and industrial relations labor focus significantly on WFB, comprising 28.308% of the total. The fields of applied psychology and multidisciplinary psychology in the discipline of psychology also pay considerable attention to this topic, comprising 18.145% in total.

Public environmental occupational health, a branch of environmental science, has emerged as a discipline focused on WFB and is gaining scholarly attention. To date, 190 papers have been published in this category.

4.1.3 *Discussion of journal analysis and category analysis.* Through our analysis of publication journals and categories, we found some intriguing results:

- Social science, management and psychology are dominant disciplines that have long studied WFB. They have explored this topic from the perspectives of family, workplace and individual psychology over time.
- The balance between work and family is emerging in environmental science. Analysis reveals that only two journals—*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health and Sustainability*—have published a mere 48 papers on this topic. In contrast, there are 190 papers in the field of environmental science. This highlights a research gap in environmental science regarding this subject and journal selection. *Sustainability* and *The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* may have a limited impact within the field of environmental science, leading scholars to prefer more influential journals in other disciplines.
- Although medical journals are beginning to explore WFB, there is still a lack of research on this topic in this field. Table 1 shows that medicine journals have started

Table 2. Number of publications by categories

Ranking	Category	Count	%
1	Management	215	14.667
2	Public environmental occupational health	190	12.961
3	Psychology applied	163	11.119
4	Family studies	155	10.573
5	Sociology	124	8.459
6	Psychology multidisciplinary	103	7.026
7	Women's studies	78	5.321
8	Social sciences interdisciplinary	75	5.116
9	Business	68	4.638
10	Economics	67	4.570
11	Industrial relations labor	65	4.434

Note(s): The category is derived from a statistical analysis of 1,466 articles in the Web of Science. Percentage = (Count/1,466)×100, rounded to three decimal places

Source(s): Authors' own work

addressing WFB, but [Table 2](#) indicates that such papers do not yet dominate this area. This suggests that scholars can pursue cross-disciplinary research on WFB within the medical field.

4.2 Collaboration analysis: individual vs. institutional focus

This section analyzes themes related to individual and institutional research by examining author and institutional collaboration. In addressing the third research question, “What are the research topics in WFB?“, it explores the connections and distinctions between individual and institutional research regarding their themes and perspectives.

4.2.1 Individual focus. Through cluster analysis of the author’s collaborations, we find that individual collaboration research mainly focuses on the definition of the concept and theoretical development of WFB.

Firstly, the definition of the concept of WFB. The binary opposition indicates that the work-family interface is characterized by either conflict or enhancement. However, [Carlson and Frone \(2003\)](#) argued that conflict and enrichment are inseparable ([Carlson and Frone, 2003](#)). Therefore, he defined WFB as the interaction between work and family roles, achieved through low conflict or high enrichment. The proposal of this viewpoint resolves the long-standing conflict between work-family conflict and enrichment, while clarifying the concept of WFB. Based on this, [Wayne et al. \(2017\)](#) further refined the concept of WFB by integrating boundary theory, COR theory, and the JD-R model ([Wayne et al., 2017](#)). They propose that WFB is hierarchical. When one’s attitude toward the allocation of resources between work and family roles is balanced, balance satisfaction is achieved; when one’s interdependent self-evaluation of meeting shared expectations across work and family roles is balanced, balance effectiveness is achieved.

Secondly, regarding the theoretical development of WFB. Berta Schnettler and Ligia Orellana have established a broad and close collaboration, involving numerous collaborators (see [Figure 3](#)). This team has long focused on the link between WFB and family satisfaction. Utilizing family systems theory and the spillover-crossover model, they examine how parents’ WFB affects family members’ satisfaction. Research indicates that a mother’s WLB significantly impacts adolescents’ well-being. This contradicts findings from European and American researchers suggesting that women in dual earner families face significantly more WLB stress than men ([Schnettler et al., 2022](#)). The team found that work-family imbalance may arise from lower family satisfaction, reduced income, and heightened depression and anxiety among parents ([Beckers et al., 2021](#); [Orellana et al., 2022](#)).

Finally, K Michele Kacmar’s research team, based on Hobfoll’s COR theory, examined the WFB in dual earner families (see [Figure 3](#)). The team studied how individual work-related resources impact WFB. For instance, a supportive spouse can promote shared interests, alleviate stress transfer, reduce marital tension, and improve family satisfaction. A harmonious workplace and work enthusiasm enhance WFB ([Wan et al., 2022](#)). Research on WFB primarily examines the spillover effect of workplace resources into family life, highlighting the importance of work-related resources in understanding the work-family interface grounded in COR theory.

4.2.2 Institution focus. Through analyzing institutional collaboration clustering, research mainly focuses on the effects of regional research, physical health, and social support on WFB. The details are as follows:

Firstly, the institution’s regional research focuses on WFB. [Figure 4](#) shows that the University of London (14 articles, 0.16) has the highest centrality, indicating its leading position in this field. Analyzing its collaborative articles can reveal cutting-edge research

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WoS: C:\Users\Windows\Desktop\IJCMA\output
Timespan: 2000-2025 (Slice Length = 1)
Selection Criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=3.0, L/N=5, LBY=8, e=2.0
Network: N = 675, E = 387 (Density=0.0017)
Nodes Labeled: 1.0%
Pruning: Pathfinder
Modularity Q = 0.9861
Weighted Mean Silhouette S = 1
Harmonic Mean(Q, S) = 0.993

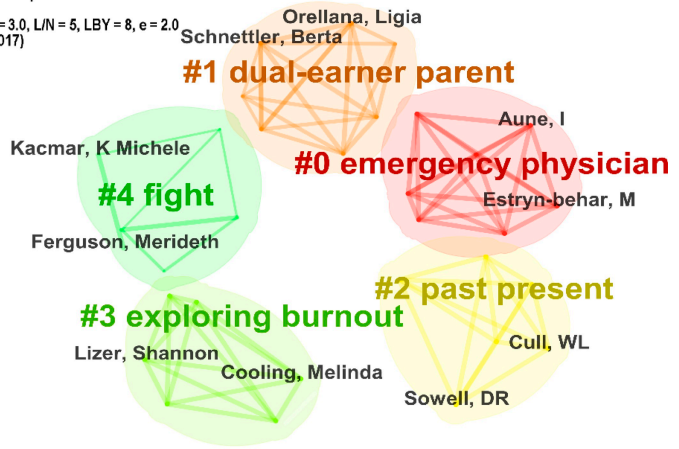


Figure 3. Author collaboration clustering

Note(s): Using CiteSpace for “T” clustering visualization, five selected clustering groups were obtained. Nodes = 675, Links = 387

Source: Authors’ own work

CiteSpace, v. 6.3.R1 (64-bit) Advanced
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WoS: C:\Users\Windows\Desktop\IJCMA\output
Timespan: 2000-2025 (Slice Length=1)
Selection Criteria: g-index (k=25), LRF=3.0, L/N=5, LBY=8, e=2.0
Network: N=478, E=580 (Density=0.0051)
Nodes Labeled: 1.0%
Pruning: Pathfinder
Modularity Q=0.7966
Weighted Mean Silhouette S=0.9507
Harmonic Mean(Q, S)=0.8669

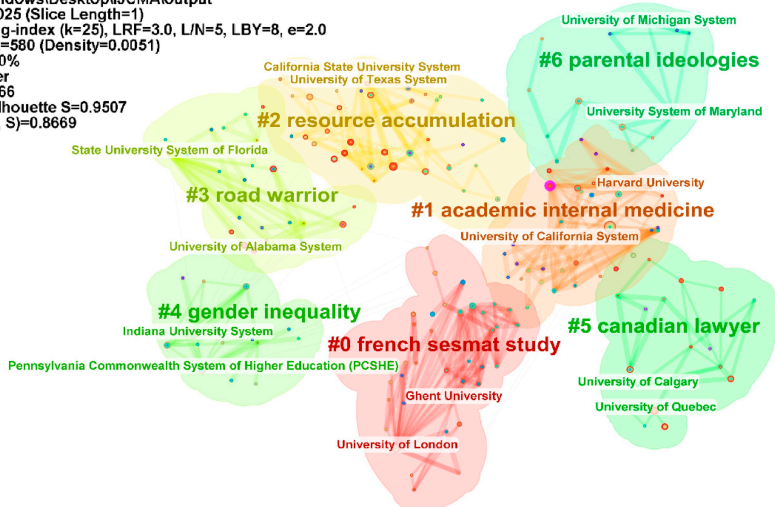
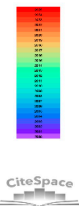


Figure 4. Cluster of institution collaboration

Note(s): Using CiteSpace for “T” clustering visualization, there are 14 clusters in total, with the top 7 selected for analysis. Nodes = 478, Links = 580

Source: Authors’ own work

directions in this area. Upon reviewing the University of London's collaborative research, we note its focus on regional studies. For instance, a study of the UK middle-aged population found that individuals aged 45–59 for females and 45–64 for males with multiple roles have low participation in both paid work and consistent family care (Evandrou *et al.*, 2002). The low number of dependents in this group may be the reason. In other words, children have grown up, and the elderly are either healthy or gone. A study on UK middle-aged individuals (aged 45–59) found that dual earner families had lower social participation, while those providing 20 hours of weekly care for dependents had higher social engagement (Glaser *et al.*, 2006). The regional research findings show that the UK has prioritized WFB through social policies like childcare services, care leaves and flexible working hours. The UK adopts a gender-neutral approach to mitigate tensions from gender inequality (Lewis and Campbell, 2008).

Secondly, the institution's research emphasizes individual physical health. Figure 4 shows that the University of California System has a significant number of nodes in both the academic internal medicine and resource accumulation clusters, highlighting its extensive collaboration and influence in WFB. The University of California System analyzed data from the General Social Survey's quality of life and found that work-family imbalance can lead to work stress, adversely affecting physical health (Yang *et al.*, 2023). During the COVID-19 period, medical personnel face mental health challenges due to work stress, communication pressures and concerns for their own and their families' health. Therefore, scholars recommend incorporating WFB into the organizational development strategies of medical institutions (Shockey *et al.*, 2024).

Finally, institutional research explores how social support affects WFB. A key institution in this area is the California State University System. Their findings indicate that organizational support can effectively reduce WFC for expatriate employees and enhance their overall happiness. Notably, informal organizational support and power are crucial for achieving WFB (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001; Rofcanin *et al.*, 2020). Remote work is a key form of organizational support. Recent research indicates that leadership commitment to remote work arrangements can greatly enhance federal employee satisfaction (Kwon and Jeon, 2020). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, WFB positively correlated with remote work performance and predicted employees' willingness to continue working remotely post-pandemic (Ameen *et al.*, 2023).

4.2.3 Discussion of individual focus and institution focus. After analysis, we note differences in research perspectives between individual and institutions. Individual research starts with a micro view, focusing on defining the WFB concept and its theoretical development. For instance, Wayne *et al.* (2017) integrated boundary theory, COR theory, and the JD-R model to enhance the development of WFB theory. Therefore, WFB reflects an individual's attitude toward resource allocation and meeting role expectations in both the workplace and family. The individual's research contributes to the dual unity studies on conflict and enrichment. However, institutional research takes a macro view, examining regional policies and social structures that impact WFB. For example, a University of London study on middle-aged individuals in the UK indicates that WFB policies are reducing gender inequality and minimizing gender differences in this area. The research on remote work by California State University offered a theoretical foundation for policy-making but overlooked gender differences. This suggests that institutional studies prioritize translating theoretical WFB research into policies for achieving gender equality.

On the other hand, we have observed a gap between individual and institutional research perspectives. Thus, we recommend that WFB studies integrate micro and macro views to overcome disciplinary barriers and enhance existing theoretical frameworks. It is noteworthy

that the University of California System is exploring the impact of work-family imbalance on individual physical health by integrating medicine and organizational behavior. This research suggests that incorporating multidisciplinary theories into WFB studies, especially concerning gender differences, can enhance the disciplinary background and research scope of this field.

4.3 Co-citation analysis: gendered vs. gender-neutral perspective

This section analyzes co-citation clusters of journals and literature to explore the relationship between gender differences and gender neutrality in WFB, addressing the third research question: “What are the research topics in WFB?”

4.3.1 Gendered perspective. A significant number of studies on WFB focus on gender inequality, particularly regarding women’s role expectations, workplace disparities, and the impact of social support in addressing these issues. The co-citation clustering in Figure 5 highlights the prevalence of this theme, including clusters such as #0 gender wage gap, #3 gendered path, and #1 supervisor support.

Firstly, regarding studies on role expectations. Co-cited author RC Barnett studied stress from WFC, emphasizing how overlapping roles—like the mismatch between parents’ work hours and children’s school dismissal times—cause anxiety for working parents (Barnett et al., 2010). The author argues that shorter working hours can enhance marriage quality and maternal satisfaction, resulting in lower turnover rates among female employees

CiteSpace, v. 6.3.R1 (64-bit) Advanced
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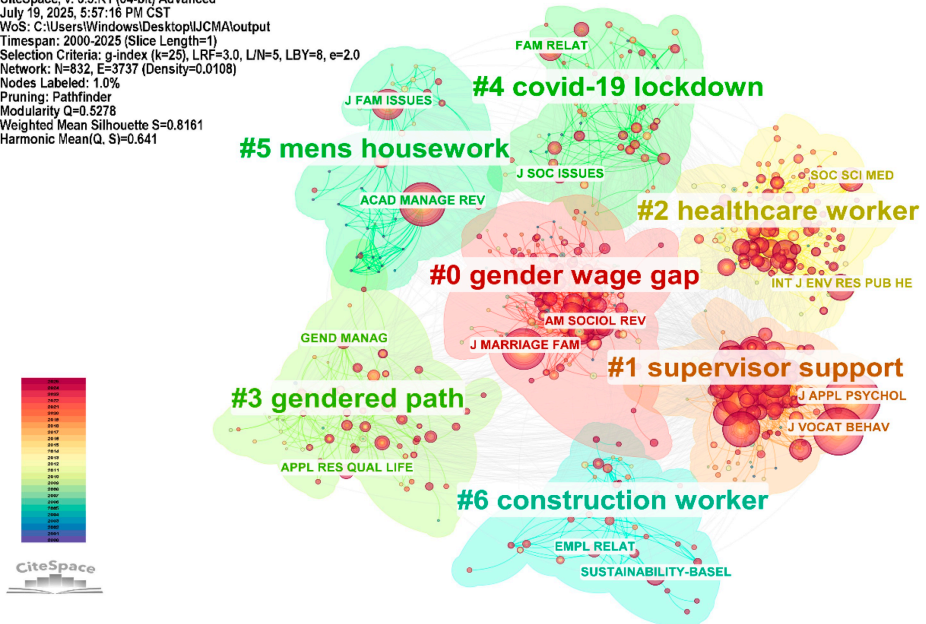


Figure 5. Cluster of journal co-citation
Note(s): Using CiteSpace for “T” clustering visualization, we identified 12 clusters and selected the top 7 for analysis. Nodes = 832, Links = 3,737
Source: Authors’ own work

(Barnett *et al.*, 2005). This phenomenon underscores gendered role expectations, prioritizing motherhood over career development. It assumes child-rearing is mainly a woman's duty and neglects research on fathers' comparable roles. The co-cited journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America highlights that achieving gender equality is challenging and notes a slowdown in its development in the USA (England *et al.*, 2020). These studies highlight the significance of gender role theory in WFB, revealing that traditional labor divisions result in increased discrimination and reduced career persistence for women. They offer valuable insights for gender research within the WFB field.

Secondly, research on women in the workplace is necessary. This topic addresses workplace discrimination against working mothers, highlighting the unequal treatment of women. M Blair-Loy's study on gender imbalance reveals that high-intensity work undermines female employees' caregiver roles, leading to decreased job satisfaction for women after childbirth (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2019). This underscores the conflict between professional women and caregivers, highlighting the motherhood penalty. Countries have studied workplace discrimination against professional women. The USA, emphasizing women's rights, has explored how family responsibilities contribute to this issue, aiding in the balance of work and family life (Williams and Cooper, 2004). Canada's diverse economy has led to a rise in female entrepreneurs. Consequently, the challenge of balancing work and family while achieving self-worth has become a prominent research focus (Rehman and Frisby, 2000). The study revealed differences in time allocation between self-employed and employed mothers in Spain. Self-employed mothers managed to balance parenting and work through flexible arrangements, shifting from passive adaptation to active solution creation. This adds to research on COR theory and boundary theory within flexible working systems (Gimenez-Nadal *et al.*, 2012). The enduring theme of "working mother" highlights the gender inequality women face in the workplace.

Finally, research on social support and gender inequality. The 2021 article by V Braun in Qualitative Research in Psychology has been cited 39 times and holds a centrality of 0.04, indicating its significant influence in the field. The cited literature surveyed working mothers' work-family situations, finding that support from childcare, employers, colleagues and family boosts job satisfaction and improves WFB (Wiens *et al.*, 2023). In addition, social support from family, friends and the community—such as emotional, material and companionship—can enhance a mother's psychological resilience, reduce stress and help achieve WFB (Yuan *et al.*, 2022). Organizational support, such as paid leave and child care subsidies, can reduce workplace pressure on women, lower child-rearing costs and promote WFB (Coyle *et al.*, 2023).

4.3.2 Gender-neutral perspective. Under the theme of WFB, compared with the gendered perspective, the gender-neutral perspective focuses more on how to better achieve gender equality (see Figure 6). For instance, in the clustering themes of Figure 6, #0 family-supportive supervisor behavior, #1 work-family policy use and #5 family support can all help achieve #3 gender equality. Therefore, to be associated with the research of gendered perspective, we also divide this part into three aspects: role expectations, workplace, and social support.

First, role expectations. The role expectations for gender equality emphasize the contributions of both men and women, rather than focusing solely on women's roles in the workplace and family amidst gender inequality. The co-cited literature in cluster #3 gender equality in Figure 6, using a multi-level mixed-effects logistic model, found that both women and men in countries with higher gender inequality are more likely to experience work-family interference. Moreover, men in these countries face greater WFC (Kaufman and Taniguchi, 2019). This research

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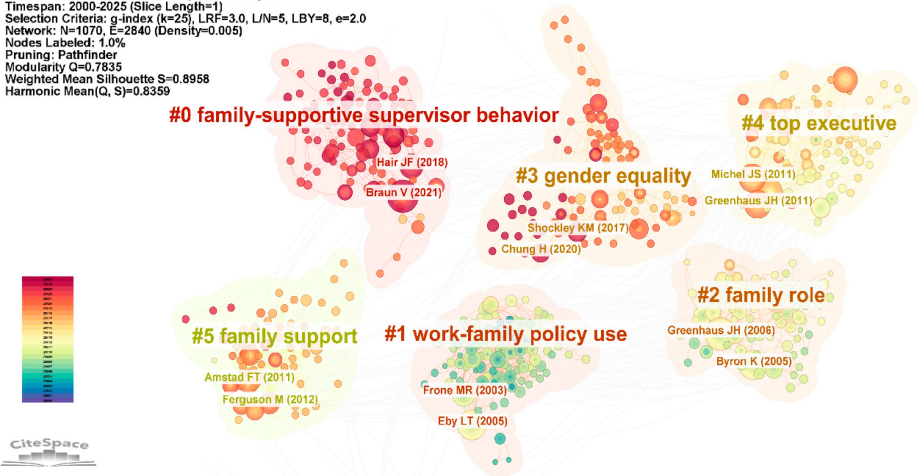


Figure 6. Cluster of reference co-citation

Note(s): Using CiteSpace for “T” clustering visualization, we identified 20 clusters and selected the top 6 significant ones. Nodes = 1,070, Links = 2,840

Source: Authors’ own work

confirms that regional culture influences gender equality and WFB. In countries with higher gender inequality, traditional gender roles lead women to assume more family responsibilities, increasing their likelihood of experiencing work to family conflict and family to work conflict. This indicates that achieving WFB requires equal sharing of responsibilities between spouses and promoting gender equality (Schaber *et al.*, 2025). The findings show that gender differences in roles significantly contribute to WFC, aligning with WFC theory, which states that “role demand conflicts and resource constraints lead to conflict.” However, when mothers manage more household chores and fathers oversee family finances (Wang, 2025), this division of labor enhances WFB and fosters gender equality.

Secondly, workplace research. Flexible work arrangements are essential for balancing work and family (Geszler, 2020). From a gender equality perspective, women often assume more family responsibilities with flexible work, while men typically broaden their work scope. Both genders contribute equally to work and family, challenging traditional roles (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020). A survey of managers’ fathers showed that their ability to work from home and enjoy flexible arrangements stemmed from higher status and stable, affordable income (Geszler, 2020). In addition, organizations are promoting gender equality through human resource management practices. Literature in cluster #3 gender equality suggests training employees to prevent gender bias, fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment (Gino and Coffman, 2021), and providing paternity leave for men (Gartzia *et al.*, 2018). Men in the workplace face pressures similar to those of women. While family responsibilities may hinder women’s career development, married men with children often encounter heightened competition due to family pressures, disrupting the WFB (Michel *et al.*, 2011). Research on workplace gender equality indicates that both men and women experience WFC. These studies highlight how traditional gender roles hinder WFB, reinforcing the theory of gender norms and advocating for gender equality.

Finally, social support for gender equality. Social support in this context includes three areas: family, organizational, and policy support. The research highlights equal resource access for both men and women. Research indicates that dual-earner parents, who encounter the challenge of balancing family and work responsibilities, must optimize the allocation of resources in both domains to enhance their overall satisfaction with family life (Orellana *et al.*, 2021). Spousal support boosts the willingness to work from home, while family instrumental support, such as sharing chores and childcare, aids in balancing work and family (Wang and Yu, 2024). In the workplace, supervisor support, as an organizational resource, can mitigate the adverse effects of role demands on WFB (Haar *et al.*, 2019). In the past two decades, South Korea's gender equality policies have significantly increased women's representation in the civil service. As a result, family-friendly policies that promote WFB have emerged (Kim, 2008).

4.3.3 Discussion of gendered vs. gender-neutral perspective. Firstly, gender inequality and gender neutrality have different research focuses. The theoretical basis of gender inequality lies in the conflict perspective, highlighting how traditional gender roles impede women's family responsibilities and career advancement. This includes women's primary role in child-rearing, motherhood penalties and barriers to promotion (Brüggemann, 2024; Killewald and Cricco, 2025). In contrast, the theoretical basis of gender neutrality emphasizes shared responsibilities between men and women through gender reconstruction and social support, such as paternity leave for men, involvement in child-rearing and flexible working hours (Gartzia *et al.*, 2018; Guo *et al.*, 2025). Ultimately, establish a win-win balance for family and life, as well as between men and women.

Secondly, gender inequality and gender neutrality are mutually causal. In countries with gender inequality, both men and women experience WFC, showing that an unequal environment harms the welfare of both genders (Michel *et al.*, 2011). However, the adoption of flexible working hours for female employees has worsened the gender labor division and inequality. Research indicates that women, as primary unpaid caregivers, see their economic contributions diminished and undervalued (Björk-Fant *et al.*, 2024). Research on gender equality aims to socialize family responsibilities through policy design. In fact, both types of research are revealing the same issue: the social value of labor force reproduction needs to be recognized. Solving this core problem is the key to breaking through gender equality.

4.4 Co-occurrence analysis: conflict vs. enrichment logics

We continued to address the third research question through co-occurrence analysis: "What future research directions exist for WFB?" The hot topics and development of conflict and enrichment logics are analyzed. Through keyword co-occurrence and burst analysis, conflict emerges as an early and dominant keyword in WFB research. However, scholars are shifting their focus toward the theme of enrichment with the exploration of WFB research.

4.4.1 Conflict logics. The co-occurrence analysis of keywords indicates that research on conflict in WFB began in 2000 (see Figure 7). Clark (2000) introduced the boundary theory, which initiated research on WFC. This theory examines the division and creation of the domains of work and family (Clark, 2000). Based on boundary theory, scholars began to explore the link between gender role orientation and WFC from a gendered perspective. Research indicates that women perceive both work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts more significantly (Zayed *et al.*, 2021). However, men can only experience significant family-to-work conflicts (Donald and Linington, 2008). This finding enhances the study of gender differences. Another survey of male hourly workers found that men experience low WFC in a family-supportive work environment despite longer hours (Grandey *et al.*, 2007). This research highlights organizational support while reaffirming the persistence of gender

Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

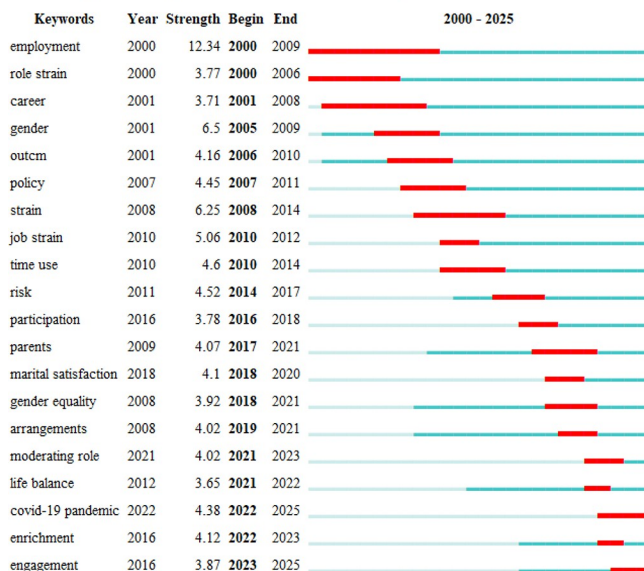


Figure 8. Top 20 keywords with the strongest bursts

Source: Authors' own work

emotional spillover) are precursors to WFE (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Therefore, offering instrumental and emotional support is crucial for WFE. A survey of full-time parents in China found that the positive influence of work on family consistently improves attitudes toward both work and life (Lu *et al.*, 2009). The same conclusion, WFE is associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, was confirmed for full-time parents in India (Aryee *et al.*, 2005). In studies on mediating effects, WFE has been identified as a mediator between organizational factors and outcomes, including family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) (Odlle-Dusseau *et al.*, 2012), burnout, and work performance (Giancaspro *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, research on WFE provides a novel perspective on the motherhood penalty and gender difference studies (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Hobfoll, 1989). According to WFE and COR theories, workplace and family resources mutually reinforce. Leadership is a vital resource for individuals, aiding managers to achieve WFE. Additionally, motherhood enrichment can facilitate their advancement to senior positions (Dominguez-Soto *et al.*, 2025). A study on working mother volunteer youth sport coaches shows that women take on three roles: mother, worker, and coach. The findings suggest that being a mother and a coach are similar, allowing both roles to enrich each other therefore (Leberman and LaVoi, 2011).

4.4.3 *Discussion of conflict and enrichment logics.* Early scholars used boundary theory and the JD-R model to explore the negative effects of conflicts stemming from unclear role boundaries or difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities based on the conflict logics. Research hotspots focus on gender inequality and the role of ICT. Although organizational support has alleviated gender inequality, there are still challenges in achieving gender equality. Moreover, information technology blurs the border between work and family. Future research should examine the boundaries of ICT usage.

Emerging research adopts enrichment logics, guided by COR and WFE theories, highlighting proactive strategies for acquiring, protecting, and enriching resources. This represents a significant shift from conflict defense to proactive prevention. Research hotspots examine how WFE impacts organizational outcomes, individual behaviors, and families. Recent research challenges the idea of a motherhood penalty, suggesting that motherhood can positively impact work roles. This provides a new perspective for future studies, which can validate this conclusion among mothers across different occupations and family structures.

5. Frameworks for work-family balance and future research directions

We establish a knowledge framework for WFB and outlined future research directions according to B-SLR, including main topics and theories based on journal vs category analysis, individual vs institution focus, gendered vs gender-neutral perspective, and conflict vs enrichment logics. This framework highlights the disciplinary backgrounds, research topics, research hotspots, and relevant theories in WFB research addressing the RQ1, 2 and RQ3. Additionally, Table 3 outlines future research directions and recommended literature for further studies, effectively addressing the fourth question: “What future research directions exist for WFB?”

5.1 Knowledge framework of work-family balance

- A review of the literature indicates that sociology, psychology, and management are frequently applied in WFB research. In particular, role theory, boundary theory, and COR theory are extensively adopted in WFB studies (See Figure 9). The dominant disciplines of WFB are social sciences, psychology, and management. Social sciences explore gender differences, social support, and the impact of WFB on family relationships (England et al., 2020; Rofcanin et al., 2020; Yeung and Li, 2023). Psychology examines how work-family interference impacts an individual’s psychological capital and mental health (Barreck and Marchand, 2025; Hosseini et al., 2024). Management studies typically examine WFB through workplace perspectives (Hill et al., 2003), work culture (Clark, 2001) and personal career planning (Bayazit and Bayazit, 2019). The emerging fields are environmental science and medicine. They studied the impact of physical health and well-being on work-family relationships (Benton et al., 2025; Hamsyah et al., 2024). Interdisciplinary research has explored the link between work and family, including a study on decent work in Sustainable Development Goal 8 and WFB (Yan et al., 2025), as well as the

Table 3. Recommendations for future research directions

Themes	Topics for future research	Related literatures
Individual vs. Institution focus	1. Employment sustainability 2. Social sustainability	Kobayashi et al. (2018); Galvez et al. (2020)
Gendered vs. Gender-neutral perspective	1. Boundaryless work system 2. Motherhood penalty	Mukherjee et al. (2025); Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel (2020)
Conflict vs. Enrichment logics	1. The dual-edged sword effect of ICT 2. Micro-boundaries between work and family	Hewapathirana and Almasri (2021); Sonnentag and Braun (2013)

Note(s): ICT = Information and Communication Technology

Source(s): Authors’ own work

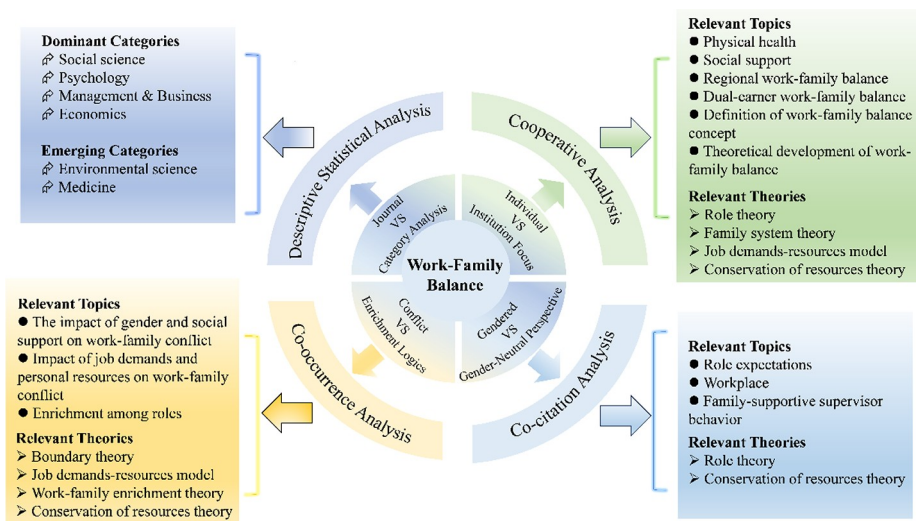


Figure 9. Work-family balance knowledge framework
Source: Authors' own work

relationship between work-family interference and corporate sustainability (Lin *et al.*, 2024).

- Individual studies on WFB mainly draw from COR theory and role theory. They propose that conflict and enrichment are interconnected, challenging the traditional binary opposition view. This perspective enriches theoretical research and lays a foundation for empirical studies (Ferguson *et al.*, 2016; Wayne *et al.*, 2017). However, the research on institutional collaboration examines how to translate WFB from theoretical studies into policy-making for achieving gender equality (Evandrou *et al.*, 2002; Rofcanin *et al.*, 2020). Although collaborative research has been ongoing across various fields, disciplinary barriers still persist. We urge scholars and institutions to improve communication and collaboration, eliminate barriers, and explore WFB from various perspectives.
- Gender has long been a contentious issue in balancing work and family. The gender role theory posits that traditional labor divisions increase discrimination against women, leading to lower career persistence as they attempt to meet expectations at work and home (England *et al.*, 2020). However, research indicates that dividing family responsibilities between men and women can enhance gender equality (Schaber *et al.*, 2025). Gender discrimination in the workplace is clear, such as motherhood penalties, income decline, and limited promotion opportunities (Brüggemann, 2024; Killewald and Cricco, 2025). However, regarding gender equality, women often take on more family responsibilities while men focus on economic duties. To challenge the stereotype of gender roles, both men and women should contribute equally at work and at home (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020). Social support is crucial for achieving WFB and gender equality. Family, organizational, policy, and community support can effectively reduce WFC (Haar *et al.*, 2019; Yuan *et al.*, 2022). The research from a gendered and gender-neutral

perspective highlights the social value of labor reproduction. Unpaid family labor has been a significant contributor to gender inequality. Recognizing the value of unpaid labor by both men and women can help bridge the WFB gap.

- Conflict and enrichment are key themes in WFB. Early research focused on conflict, but later studies recognized that family and work roles can enhance each other, leading to the establishment of WFE theory as a foundational perspective (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Research on WFB from a conflict logics perspective explores how gender differences affect the boundaries between work and family (Zayed *et al.*, 2021). After the pandemic, the increased use of information technology in the workplace has shifted research focus to ICT's effects on work-family boundaries and its challenges to WFB (Leung and Zhang, 2017). The enrichment logic from COR theory posits that an individual's family and work roles are mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting (Hobfoll, 1989). This viewpoint offers a new perspective on analyzing the motherhood penalty, highlighting how resource acquisition and accumulation intersect across various roles based on positive psychology.

5.2 Future research directions

We established six emerging research directions and related literatures based on the identified individual vs institutional focus, gendered vs gender-neutral perspectives, and conflict vs enrichment logics (see Table 3):

- Under the key themes of individuals and institutions focus, future research can concentrate on employment sustainability and social sustainability. Under the topic of employment sustainability, future research could explore how gig economy workers maintain WFB while achieving job sustainability. We recommend using both qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify capabilities that support a flexible workforce in achieving employment sustainability and adapting to technological workplaces. Under the topic of social sustainability, past research on WFB has mainly focused on gender equality and health within sustainable development goals. Future studies could incorporate social equity and decent work, broadening the measurement of WFB to encompass wider social development beyond family, work, and organization.
- For gendered and gender-neutral perspective, future research could examine boundaryless work systems and the motherhood penalty. Under the topic of boundaryless work systems, future research may consider investigating the types of employees who can thrive in the evolving technological landscape and increasingly flexible job responsibilities, what skills enable them to gather resources in their professional and personal lives, and how these systems promote gender equality. For the topic of motherhood penalty, future research could explore whether and how subjective factors like gender discrimination or objective ones, such as economic status, influence working mothers. It could also investigate their employment motivations based on personal desires or economic pressures. Additionally, it could assess whether supportive maternity policies can alleviate the negative impacts of childbirth on working mothers.
- Future research could explore the dual-edged sword effect of ICT and examine micro-boundaries between work and family within conflict and enrichment logics. The widespread adoption of ICT in the workplace post-COVID-19 has blurred the

lines between work and family life. Future research could explore ICT's dual impact on WFB. On the one hand, ICT enables flexible work arrangements, enhancing remote working and improving WFB. On the other hand, it merges professional responsibilities with family obligations, as managing work tasks at home becomes common, undermining family time and increasing WFC. The micro-boundaries between work and family refer to the boundaries employees establish during non-working hours to separate their work roles from family roles (Sonnentag and Braun, 2013). Traditional boundary theory divides employees' time and energy into work and non-work resources, while micro-boundaries further specify non-work resources (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Sonnentag and Braun, 2013). Future research could investigate the core concepts, theoretical frameworks, and measurement tools of work-family micro-boundaries and their impact on individual work behaviors and attitudes.

6. Implications and limitations

6.1 Theoretical implications

Our research has advanced the theoretical and practical development of WFB through a 25-year literature review.

Firstly, we used the B-SLR method to analyze 1,466 studies on WFB systematically. We combined content analysis and quantitative analysis to thoroughly review the research in this area, mapping out its theoretical foundation, development trajectory, and evolving hot topics.

Secondly, through collaboration, co-occurrence, and co-citation analysis, we identified three main themes in the existing literature. They are institutional and individual focus, gendered and gender-neutral perspective, as well as conflict and enrichment logics. This classification improves understanding of key topics in WFB and highlights areas for further exploration, including sustainability, boundaryless work systems and microboundaries between work and family. It also guides post-pandemic research in this field.

Finally, we construct the WFB knowledge framework, outlining the disciplinary backgrounds, research topics, hotspots and relevant theories in WFB research. It can serve as a roadmap for future studies and offer insights to enhance the understanding of WFB.

6.2 Practical implications

Our systematic review study offers valuable insights for individual resilience. Firstly, employees can flexibly manage their time to balance work and family responsibilities, reducing temporal conflict and maintaining high job satisfaction and happiness. Secondly, female employees with significant family responsibilities can seek childcare or elder care services to reduce WFC. Alternatively, they can share family duties with their husbands to promote gender equality. Male employees with children often experience increased economic pressure. They are encouraged to take an active role in parenting, facilitating their wives' return to work, and alleviating family burdens, or to acknowledge their wives' unpaid labor, which can enhance family happiness. This approach can improve work resilience and performance.

Our systematic review study also provides valuable insights for organizational managers. Firstly, a healthy WFB for employees is crucial for organizational stability and performance. Therefore, companies should promote family-friendly talents to managerial roles. Managers can provide gender equality training and foster a positive work environment to reduce turnover, enhance loyalty, and lower human resource costs. Secondly, based on existing legal marriage and maternity leave, organizations should adopt family-friendly practices like

flexible work arrangements, intergenerational care programs, career transition plans, and childcare services to attract talent and drive company growth.

6.3 Social implications

From a social perspective, our systematic review indicates that social support significantly enhances WFB. Thus, this study offers a theoretical foundation for policymakers. Specifically, WFB significantly influences fertility intentions and economic development. Many countries, particularly South Korea and Japan, face persistently declining fertility rates, which are closely linked to economic growth. One of the keys to solving this problem is achieving a WFB through family-friendly policies. Our research offers specific recommendations for policymakers, including extending paternity leave, providing childbirth subsidies, implementing flexible parental leave, and fostering shared family responsibilities.

6.4 Research limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- The constraint of time selection. The literature included in this study spans from January 1, 2000, to June 30, 2025, thereby excluding data prior to 2000. This omission may lead to the neglect of some foundational articles that could have been relevant for analysis.
- Language limitation: this study exclusively focused on English publications, thereby excluding non-English articles. This approach may have resulted in the omission of some high-quality research and distinguished authors who publish in languages other than English.
- Limitations of bibliometric methods: this study primarily examines articles with high citation counts published in recent years, which may underrepresent less-cited research.

Additionally, works by independent researchers and institutions might be overlooked, as well as content with low co-citation frequency and co-occurrence. Furthermore, the data sources are limited to SCI, SSCI, and AHCI, potentially neglecting significant literature from other databases.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in full compliance with all relevant ethical guidelines and standards. Given the nature of the work, which focuses on work-family balance, no human subjects, animal experiments, or sensitive data were involved. Therefore, no specific ethical approvals (e.g. from institutional review boards) were required.

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