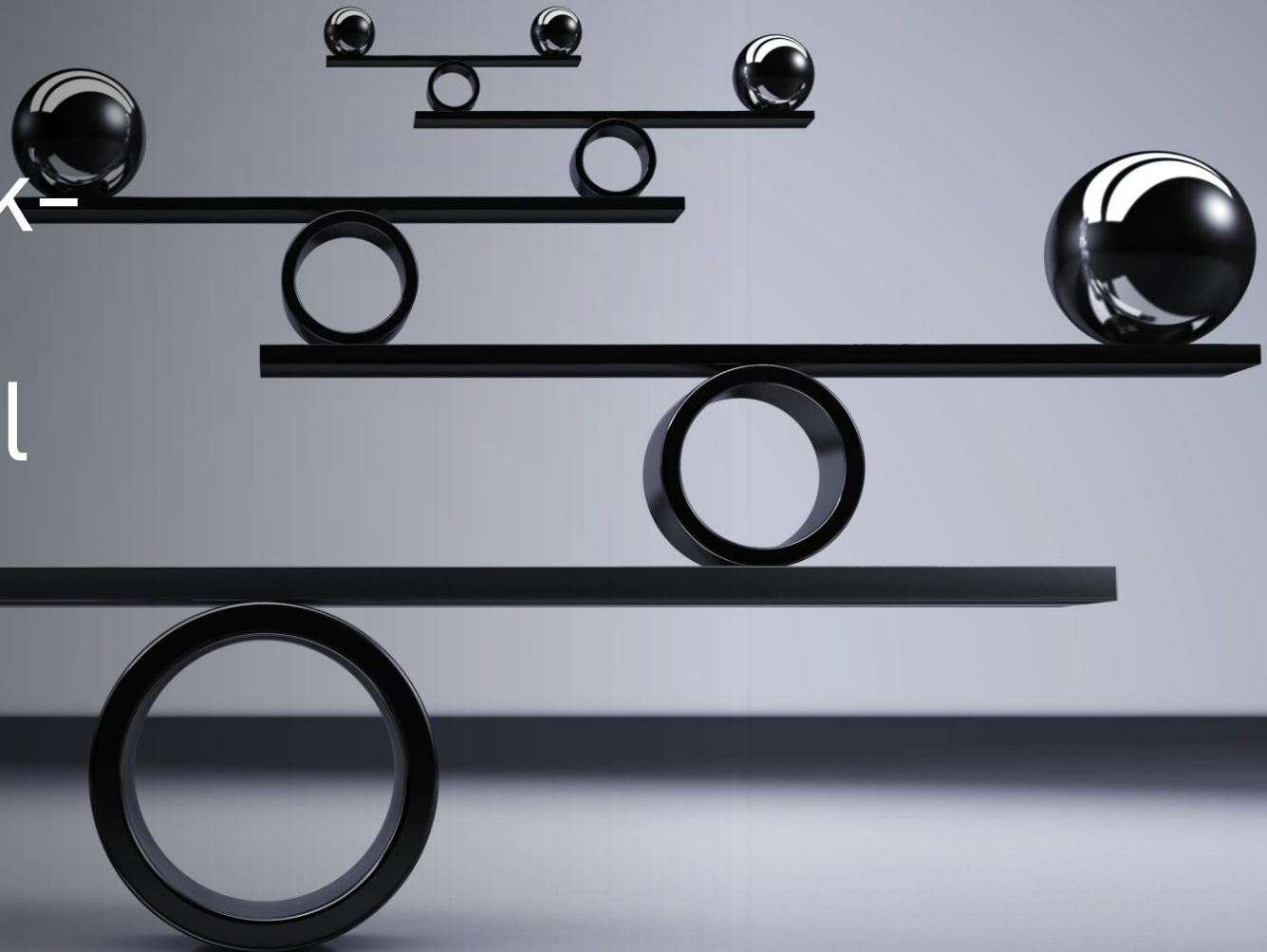


Balancing the Unbalanced: Work- Family Dynamics and the Emotional Toll on Parents



MARISA MATIAS

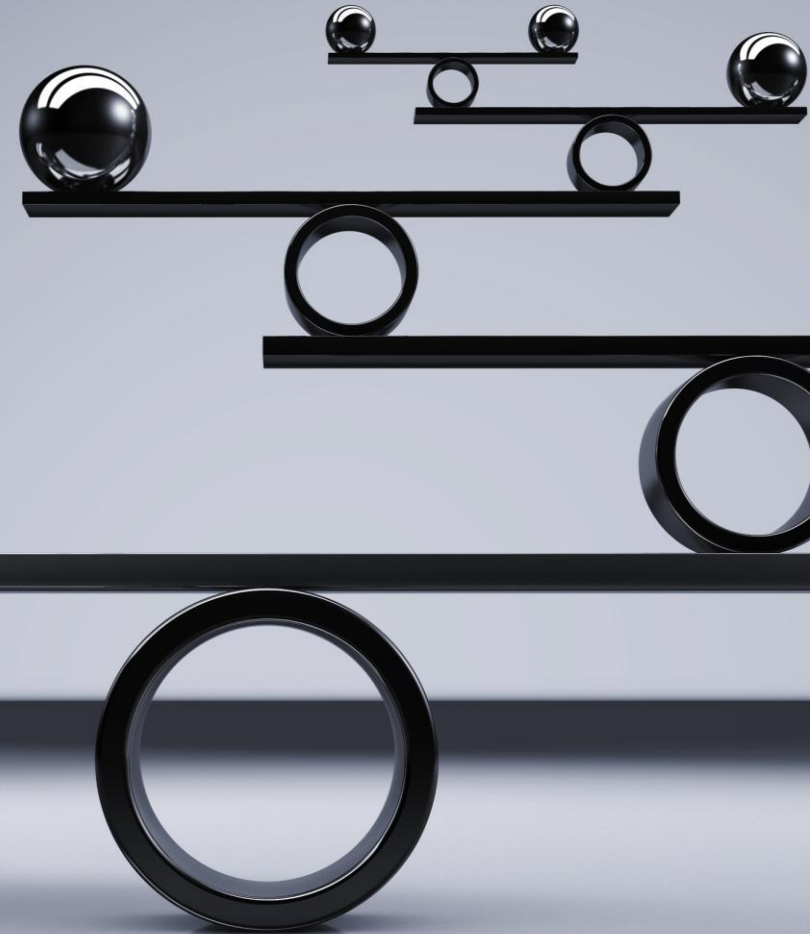
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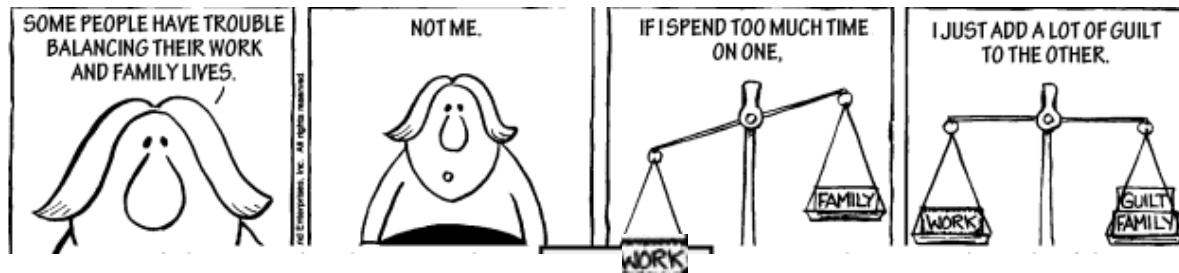
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5755-5096>

Overview

- Introduction:
 - The Everyday Reality of Balancing Work and Care
 - The Portuguese Context
- Conceptual Lens
 - A Family Systems Perspective
- Empirical Studies
 - Work-family conflict, psychological availability, and child emotion regulation
 - Links between work-family conflict, enrichment and adolescent well-being
 - Parenting Under Pressure: How Social and Family Expectations Contribute to Parental Burnout
- Connecting studies and Sum Up



Why is balancing work and family still so difficult?

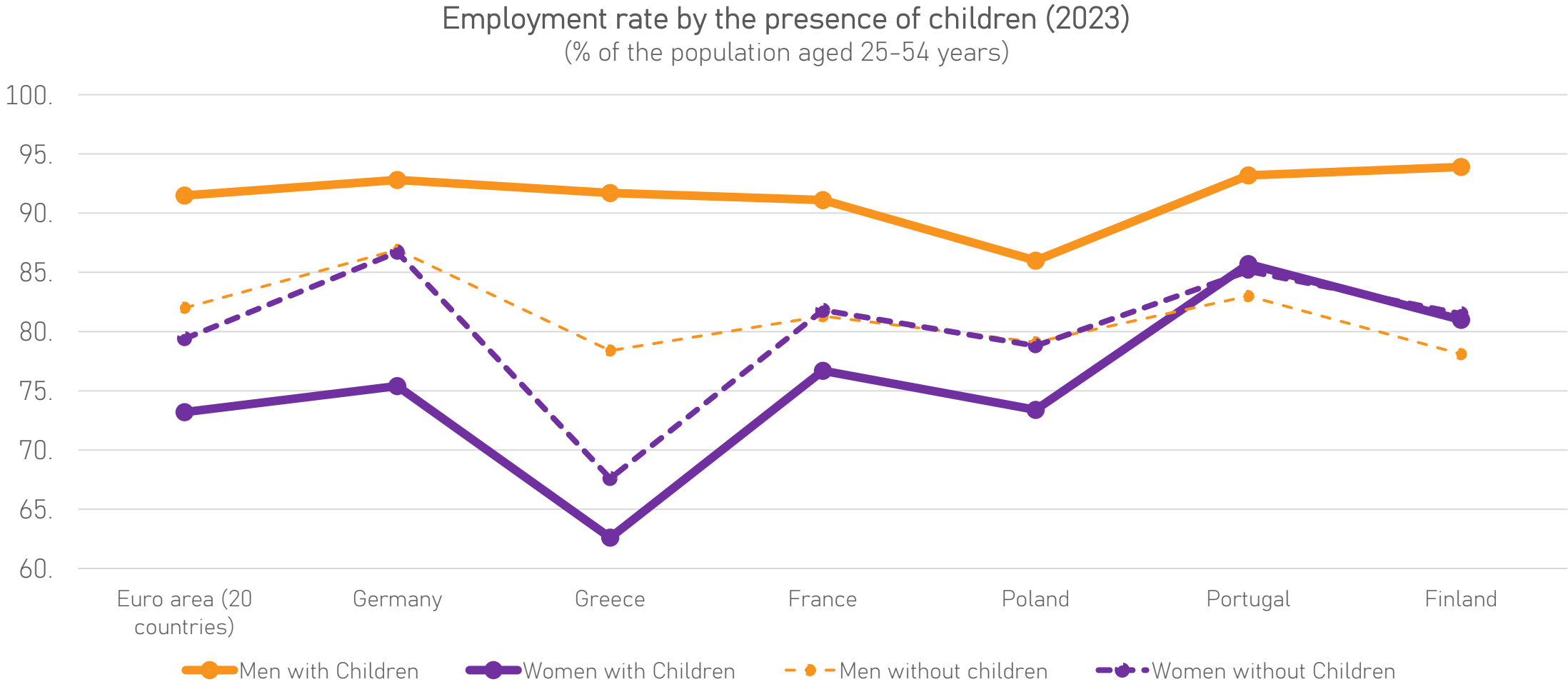


- Ana and Miguel live in Porto with their two young children. Ana works rotating shifts as a nurse, often coming home exhausted from night duty. Miguel has a demanding office job, with long hours and constant emails. Their days are a constant puzzle: school schedules, last-minute childcare, relying on grandparents when they can. Evenings are rushed, conversations are short, and tensions build quietly. They both believe in sharing parenting equally. But most days, it doesn't feel that way.

How is balancing work and family in Portugal?

- **Dual-earner norm**
 - Mothers work long hours, have continuous work trajectories
- **Intensification of parenting**
 - Traditional representation of roles: essentialist beliefs
- **Limited sharing of unpaid roles**
 - Women do the majority of childcare and household tasks (including in dual-full-time earners households)
- **Two full-time roles: work and care**
- **Limited institutional support**
 - Childcare (and eldercare) facilities are limited in coverage, schedules and cost
 - Extended family is still a major resource

Dual-earner norm



Source dataset: EUROSTAT lfst_hheredty

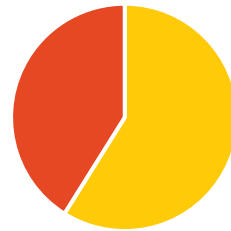
Time use data

Time in paid employment



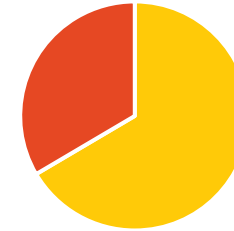
■ Mulheres ■ Homens

Time in care work



■ Mulheres ■ Homens

Time in household work

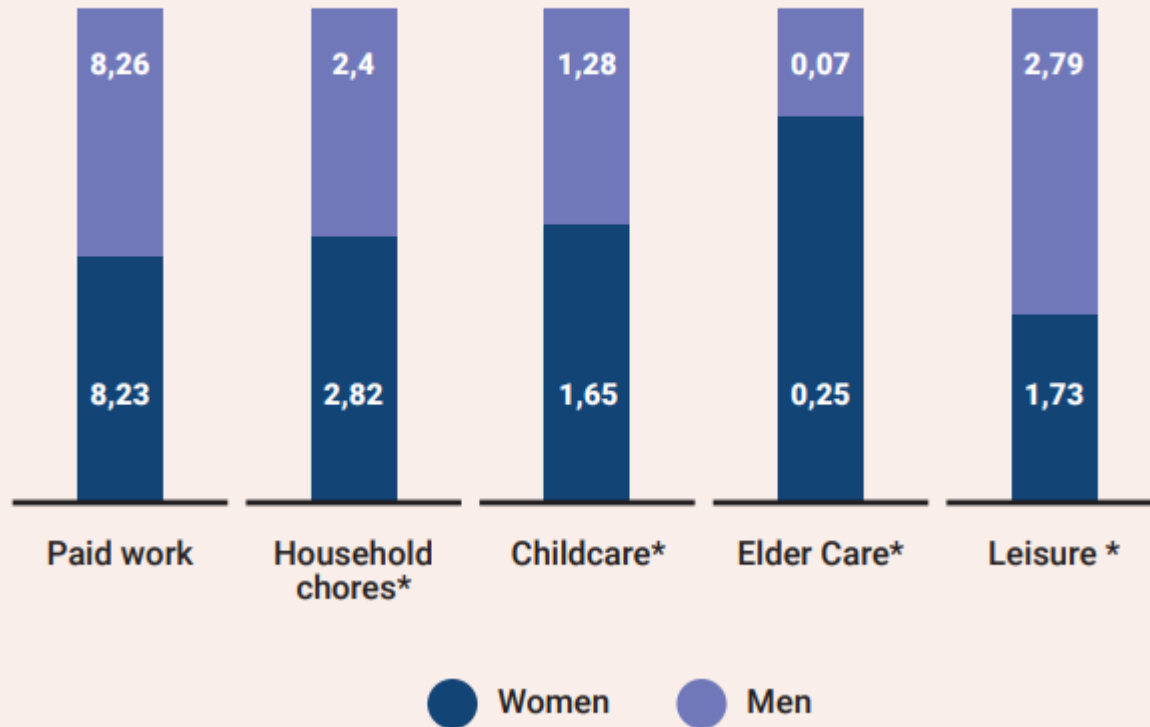


■ Mulheres ■ Homens

Hours: minutes	Women	Men
Paid work	8.35	9.02
Care work	3.14	2.19
Household work	3.06	1.54
	14.55	13.15

~25 days per year

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY SPENT ON PAID WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES



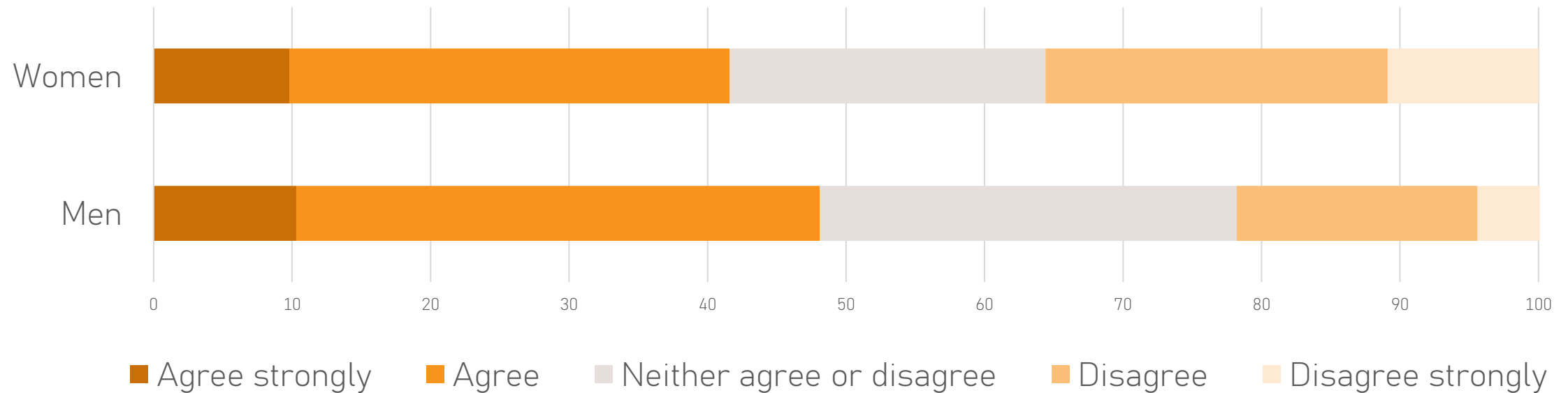
Time use data when in telework (2024)

Project: Homework

<https://homework.fpce.up.pt/>

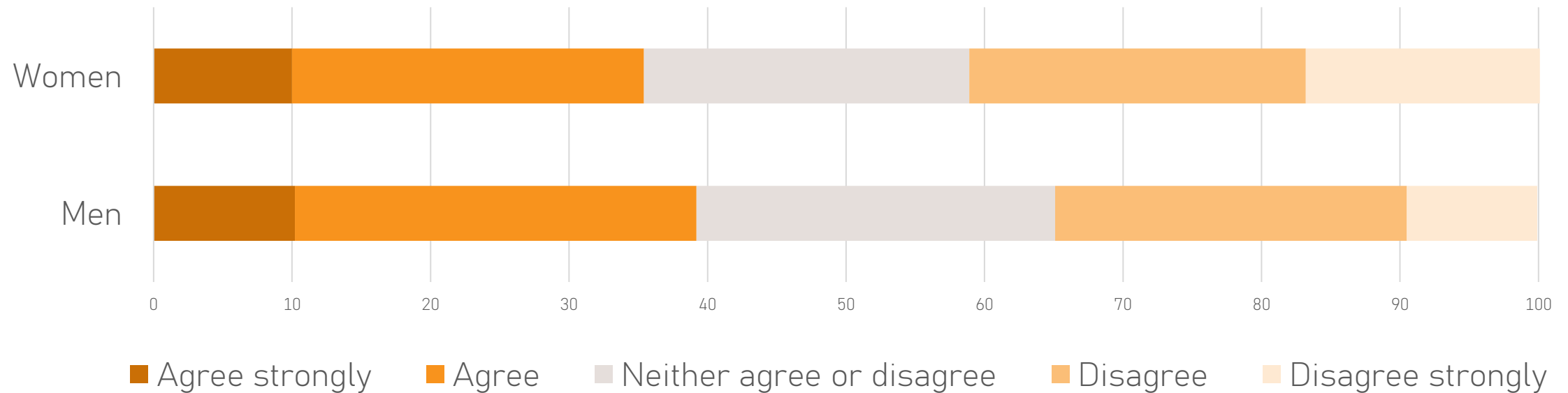
Gender Family Role Attitudes

A young child (up to elementary school age) may suffer if their mother works outside the home.

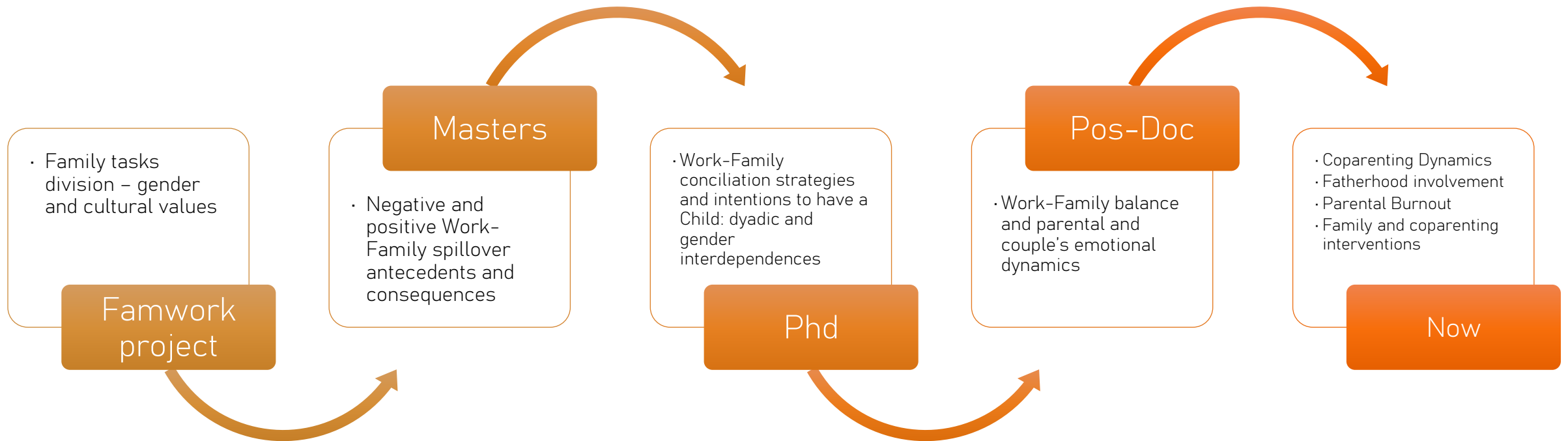


Gender Family Role Attitudes

All things considered, family life suffers when women work outside the home full-time.



My focus across time on this issue



Theoretical Framework – Families as Systems

Family System Theory – The family is viewed as a dynamic system of interdependent individuals and overlapping relationships

Mesosystem: The critical intersection between the microsystems of work and family

Circular Dynamics: Stress in one domain is not isolated, it triggers feedback loops that affect the entire family unit

Spillover and Crossover

Theoretical Frameworks

Role conflict theory (work-family conflict; negative spillover)
Time and energy are limited and fixed (scarcity hypothesis)

Role expansion/promotion theory (work-family enrichment; positive spillover)
Engaging in multiple roles provides more gains than strains

Spillover – Intrapersonal transference of emotions, attitudes, skills and behaviors that can occur in the direction of work to family, being either negative (conflict – **WFC**) or positive (enrichment – **WFE**) (Lambert, 1990).

Crossover: Transference of emotions, attitudes and behaviors from a domain to another, among intimately connected individuals (Westman, 2001; Westman & Etzion, 2005; Westman & Vinokur, 1998).
Crossover always preceded by spillover (Tisdale, 2012; Westman & Etzion, 2005).

Workplace Family Support, Parental Satisfaction, and Work–Family Conflict: Individual and Crossover Effects among Dual-Earner Couples

Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 2015, 56, 212–222

Coping with work and fa

MARISA MATIAS

Center for Psychology



Work & Stress

An International Journal of Work, Health & Organisations

ISSN: 0267-8373 (Print) 1464-5335 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/twst20>

Relationships between work–family dynamics and parenting experiences: a dyadic analysis of dual- earner couples

Joana Marina Vieira, Marisa Matias, Frederick G. Lopez & Paula Mena Matos

Parents’ Work-Family Experiences and Children’s Problem Behaviors: The Mediating Role of the Parent–Child Relationship

Joana M. Vieira,



Personal Relationships, (2017). Printed in the United States of America.
Copyright © 2017 IARR; DOI: 10.1111/per.12198

Work–family conflict, psychological availability, and child emotion regulation: Spillover and crossover in dual-earner families

Triestories of Parental Engagement in Early Childhood Among Families: Effects on Child Self-Control



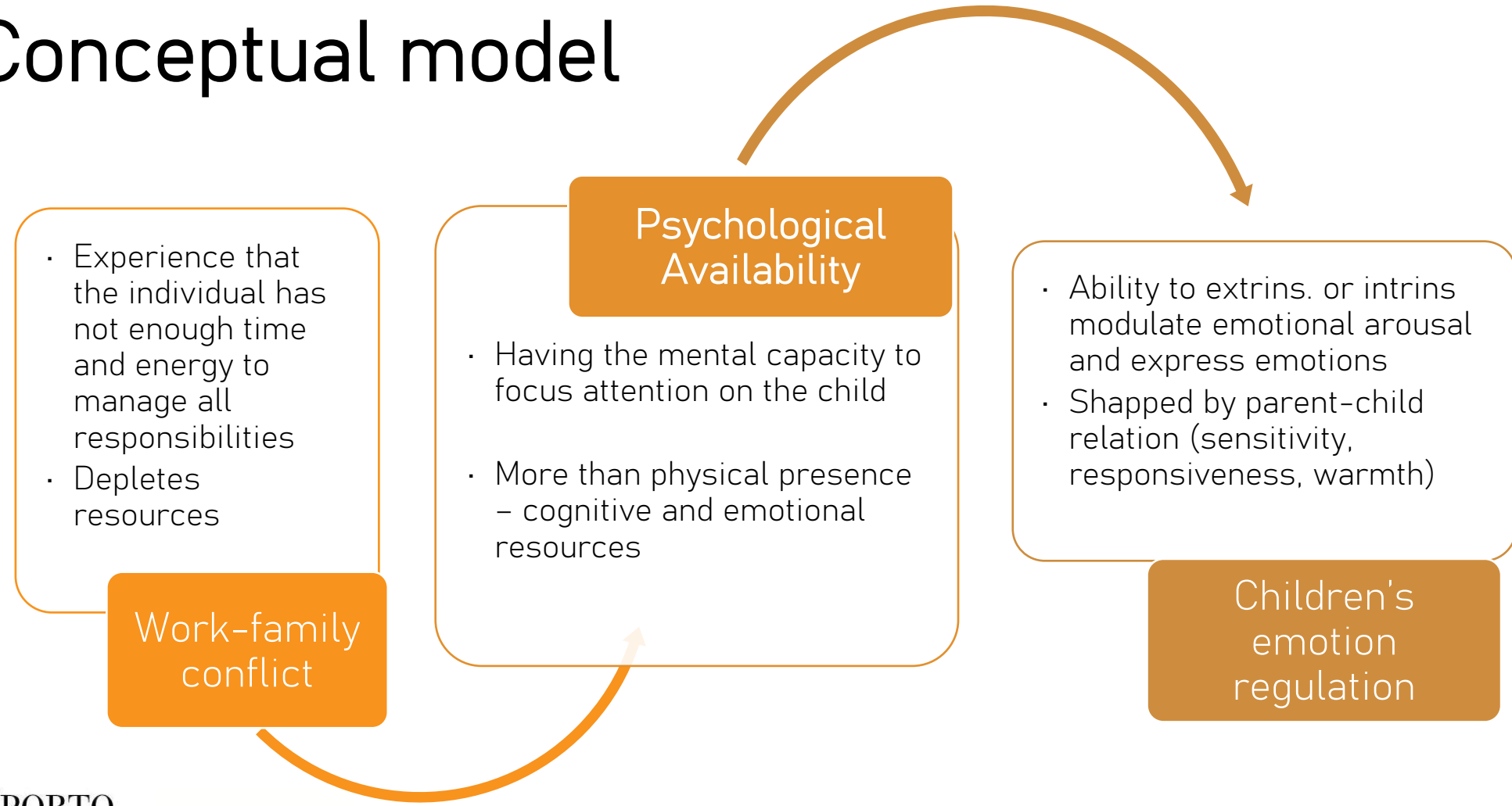
Matias,
1

Karine Verschueren
KU Leuven

Paula Mena Matos
University of Porto

Work–family conflict, psychological availability, and child emotion regulation: Spillover and crossover in dual-earner families

Conceptual model



Simplified model

6 items e.g. I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities

WFC
Father

Child's gender

Child's temperament

Number of children

WFC
Mother

Psychological
Availability
Father

Psychological
Availability
Mother

7 items e.g. After a day's work, I am fully available to listen to my child

7 items e.g. Exhibits wide mood swings

Child's
Lability
+
Child's Emotion
Regulation

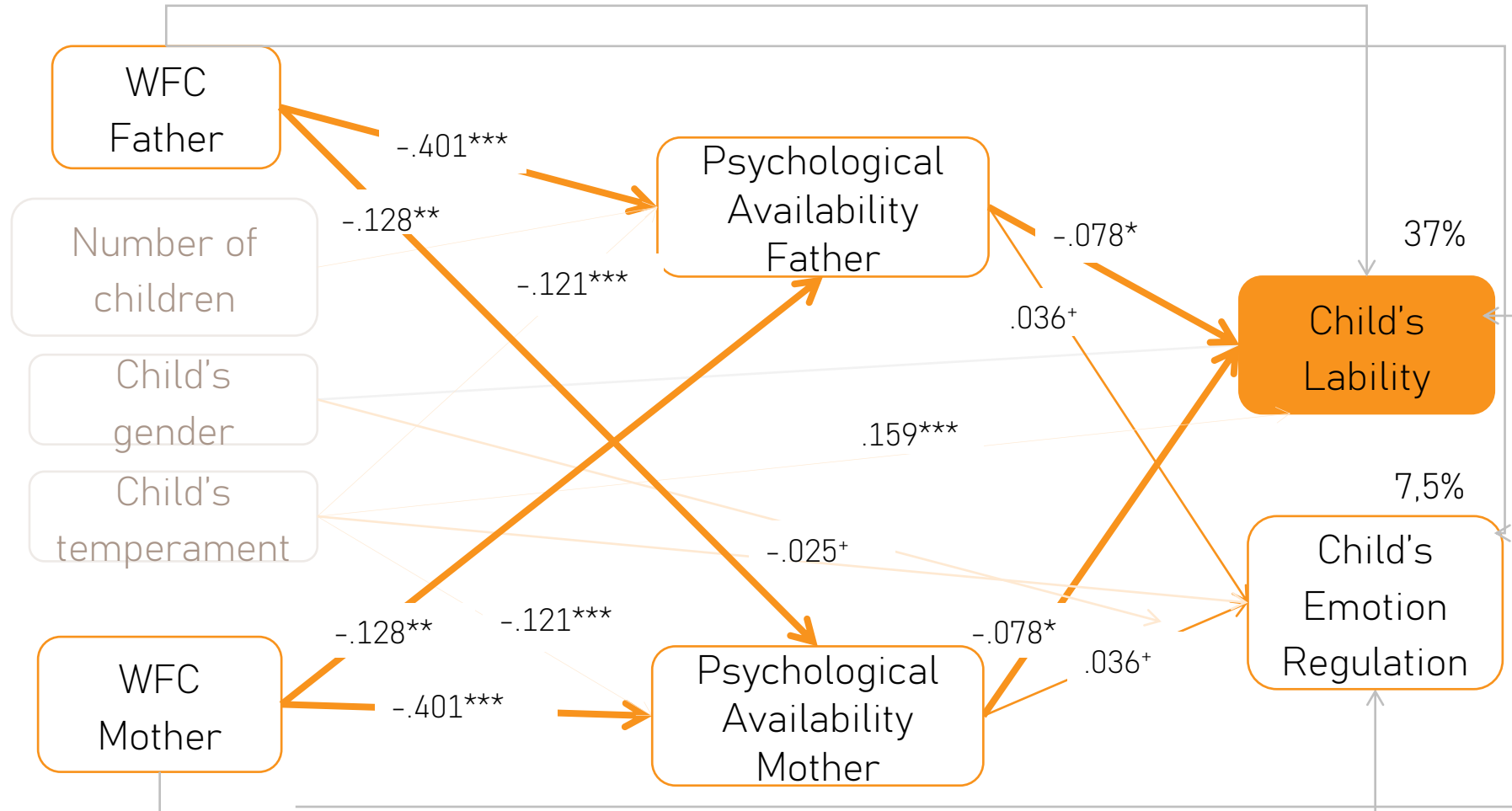
7 items e.g. Displays negative emotions (anger, fear, frustration, distress) in an appropriate manner

Participants

- **138** heterosexual **dual-earner** couples with preschool children
- Recruitment – Public (n=48) and private (n=90) preschools
- Age – 23 to 51 (Mean – Fathers: 37, Mothers: 35 years)
- Living together for **10** years (SD = 3.72)
- Nr. of children: **1 (52%)**, 2 (45%), 3 (3%)
- Children's age: $M = 51.67 \sim 4$ years , $SD = 10.52$, range – 34-72 months).
- Education
 - Mothers – 43,3% (12 years of education)/ **56.7%** (university degree)
 - Fathers – 60.8% (12 years of education) / **39.2%** (university degree)
- Work
 - **Full time workers** (93.6% of fathers and 92.4% of mothers)

Results – Full model

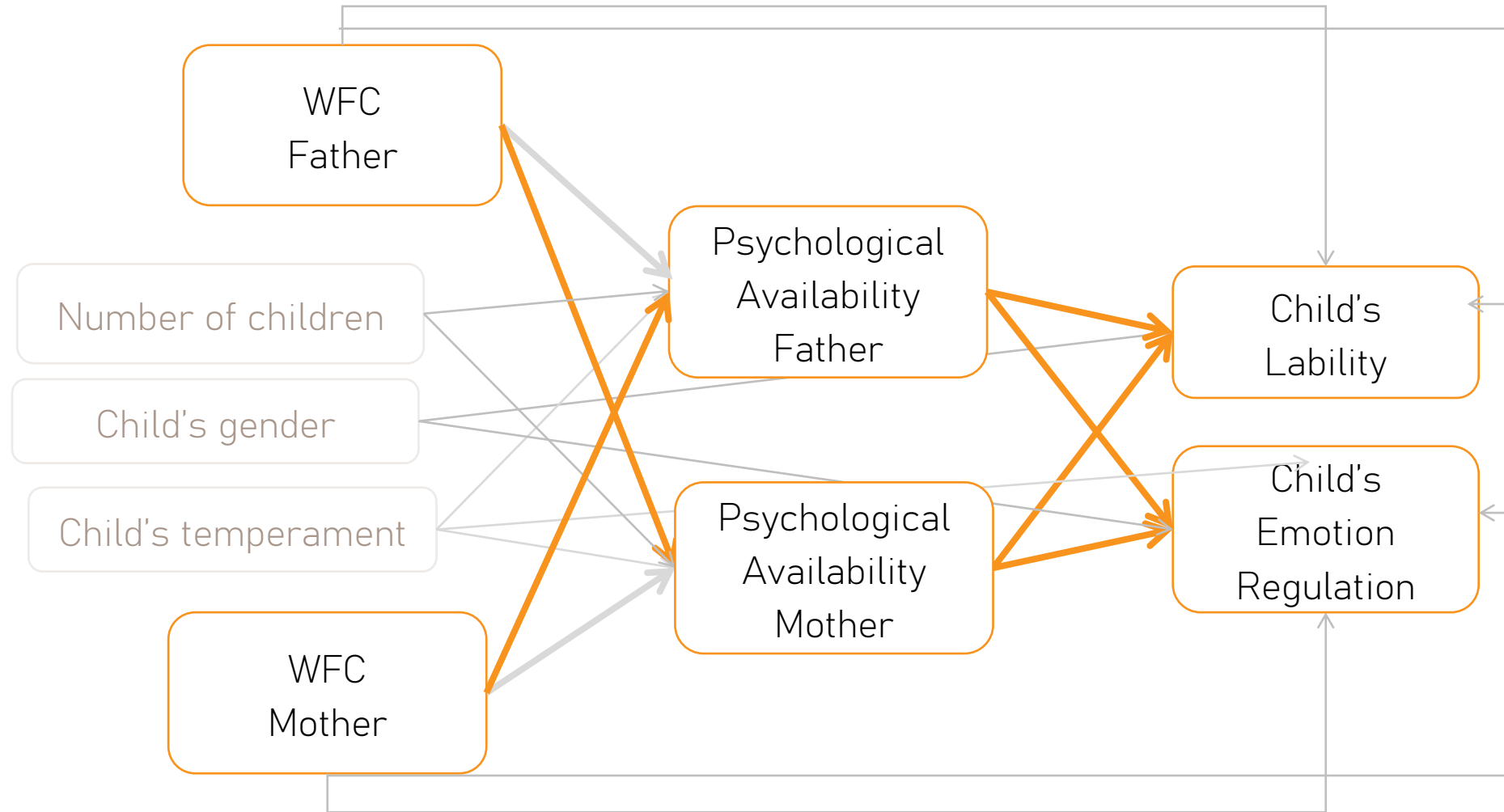
Grey arrows – non significant paths
 *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ + $p < .08$



Fathers' and mothers' paths were invariant.

$\chi^2_{(13)} = 17.34$; $p = .184$; $c^2/df = 1.334$; CFI = .976; RMSEA = .049

Results – Indirect Effects



All indirect effects via partners' psychological availability were significant

Key takeaways

- We confirmed **parental availability for children to be an important mediator** between parents' work-family conflict and children's emotion regulation skills
- These indirect links occur mainly through the partner's psychological availability, evidencing partner effects (crossover)

Family systems perspective – the experience of one member reverberates in the family

– Spillover and crossover matter!

- No gender differences – crossover is bidirectional

No support for the notion that fathers are more vulnerable in parenting (fathers are nowadays more actively involved with children)

Key takeaways

- **Psychological Availability** – important linking mechanism
 - Heightened stress in WF balance deplete individuals and partners from resources, leading them to be less psychologically available for their children
 - More important to lability than to emotion regulation

Without an available parent, children will have more trouble developing emotion regulation skills, as well as other socio-emotional skills.

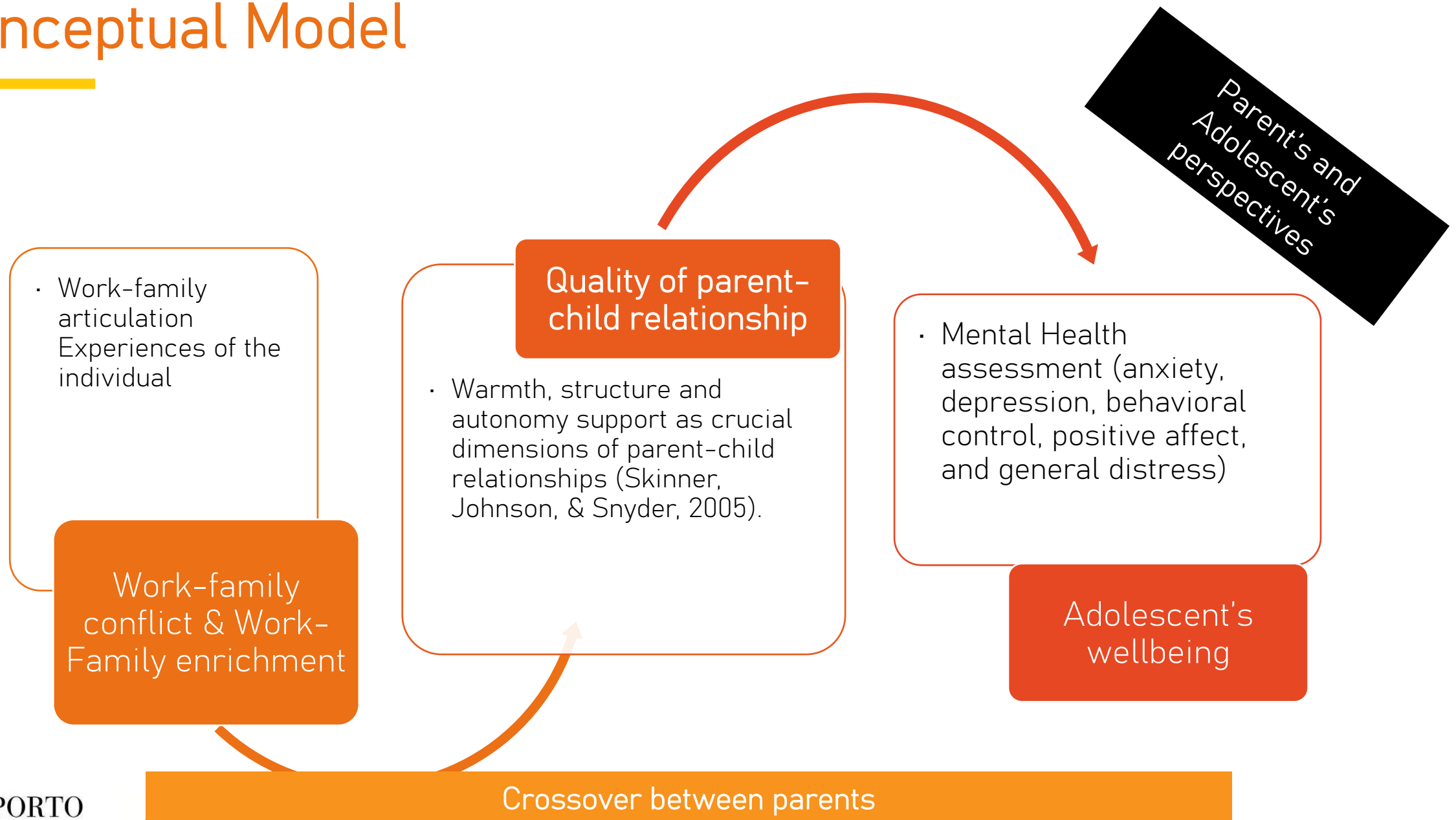
Matias, M. & Recharte, J. (2021). Links between work–family conflict, enrichment and adolescent wellbeing: Parents and children’s perspectives. *Family Relations*, 70 (3), 840–858.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12453>



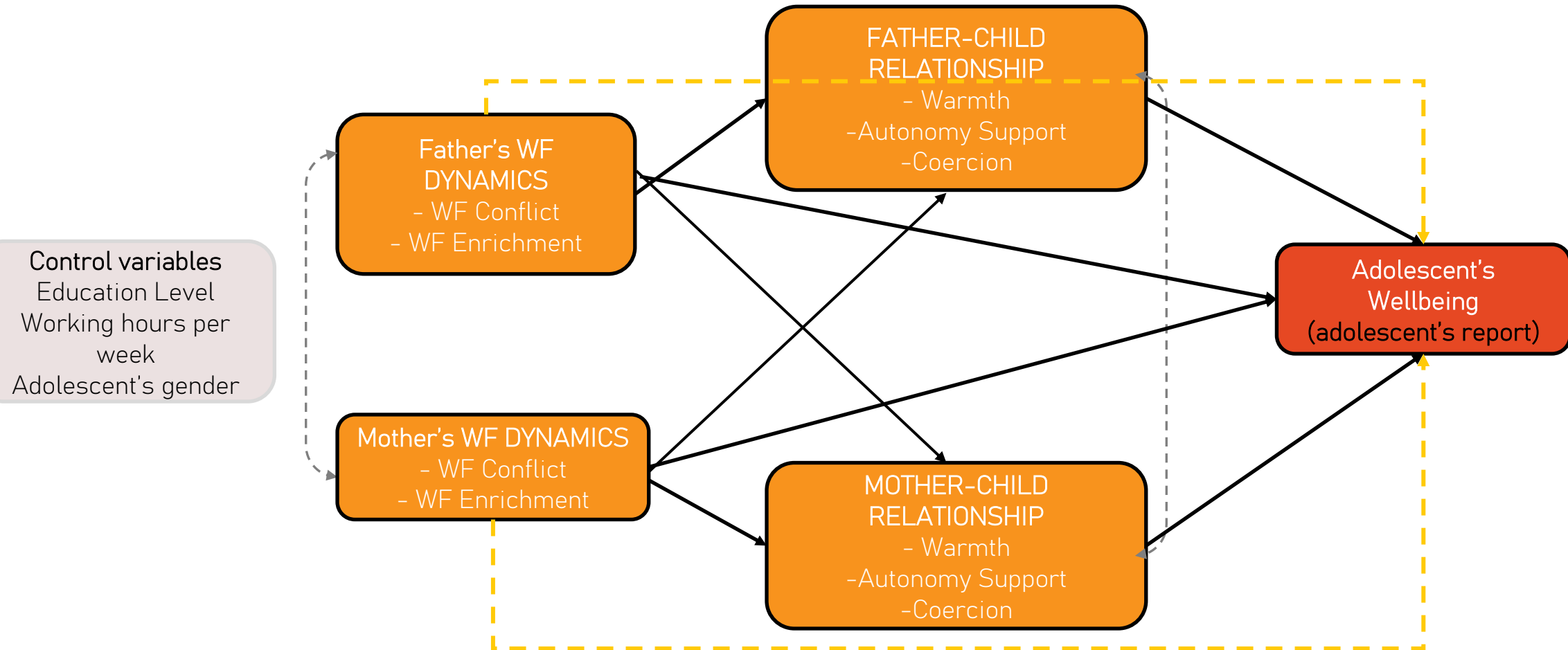
MARISA MATIAS  AND JOANA RECHARTE *University of Porto*

Links Between Work–Family Conflict, Enrichment,
and Adolescent Well-Being: Parents’ and
Children’s Perspectives

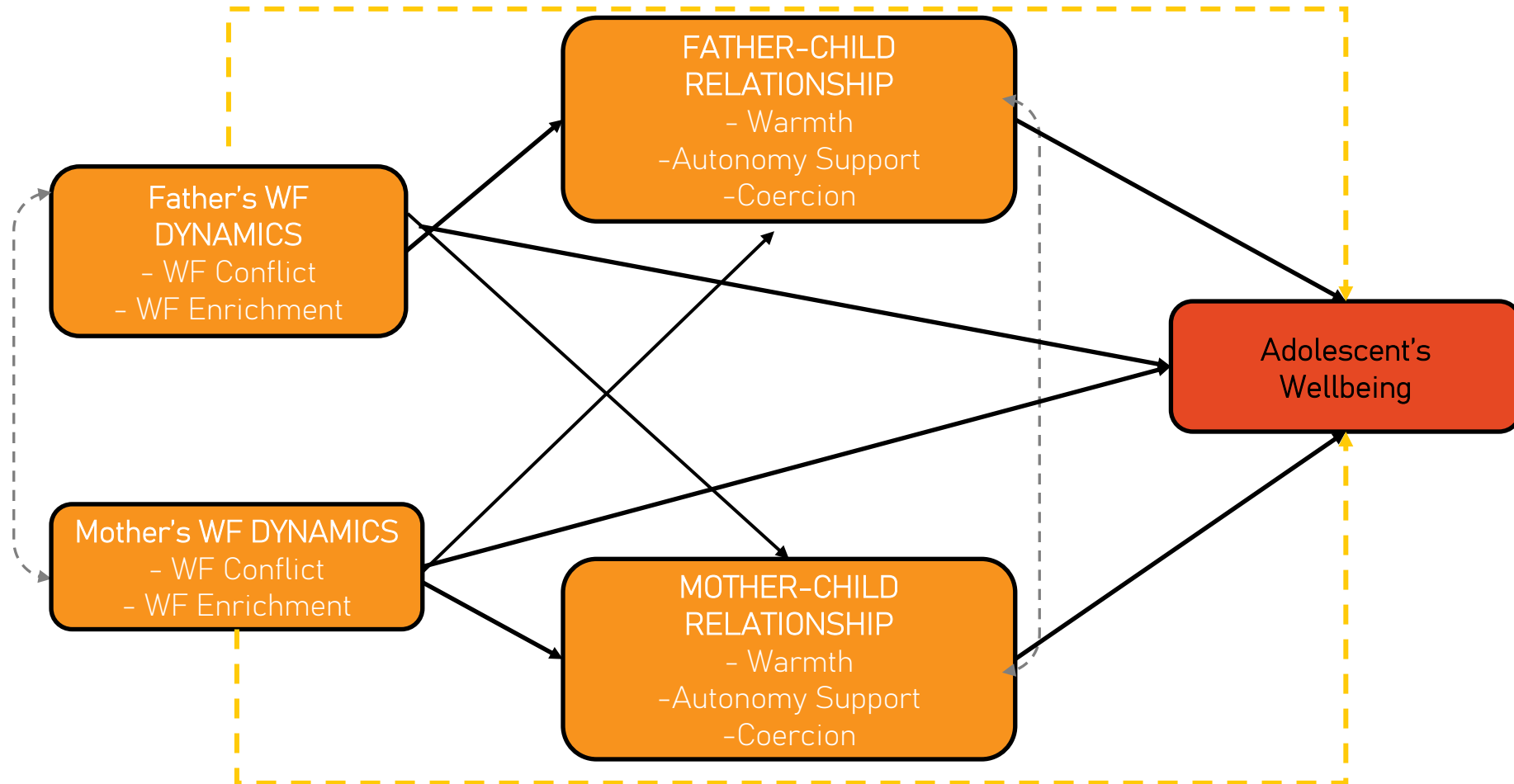
Conceptual Model



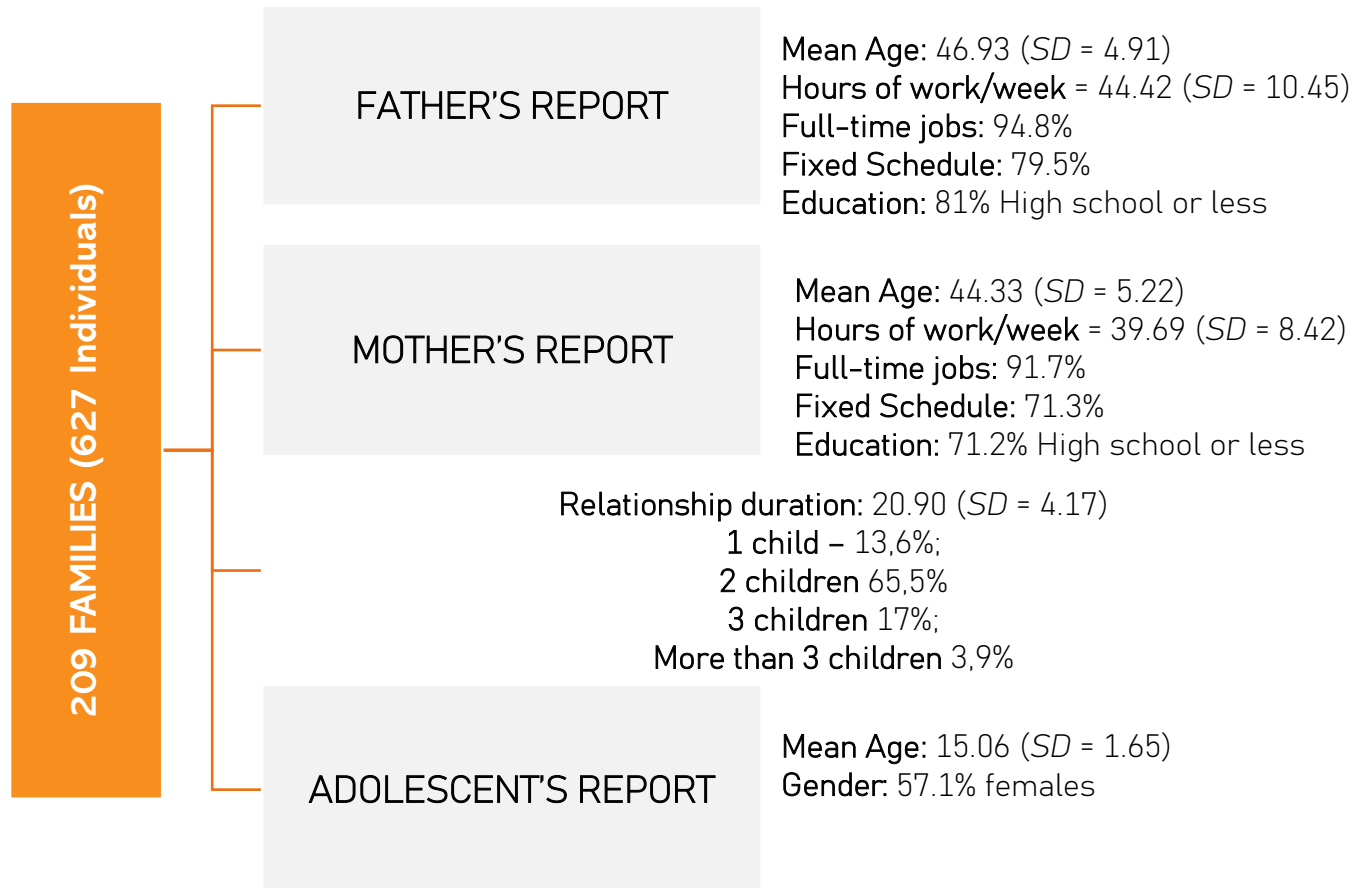
Simplified model – Parent's Report



Simplified model – Adolescent's Report



Participants and Procedures



DATA COLLECTION

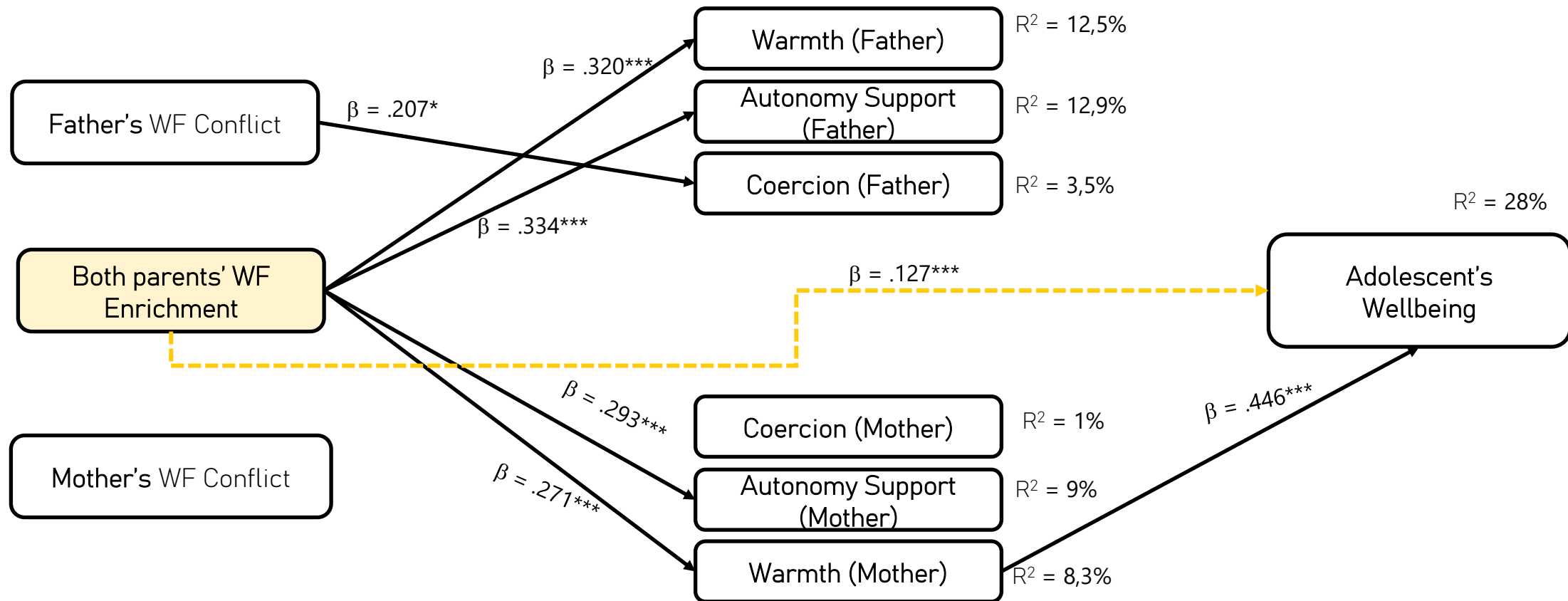
- convenience sampling ($N = 50$)
- public middle high-school ($N = 129$)
- sports club ($N = 30$).

Step by step:

- Authorization by several ethics committees
- Permission of institutions and families
- Deliver three inquiries and three informed consents in an envelope – paper and pencil
- Return in a sealed envelope

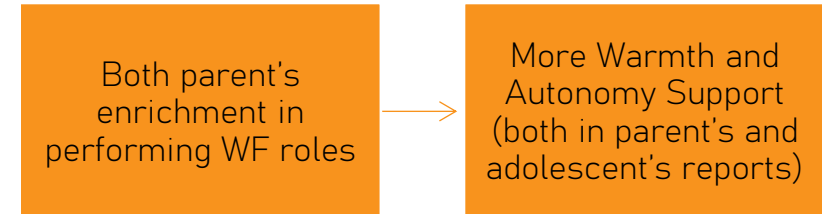
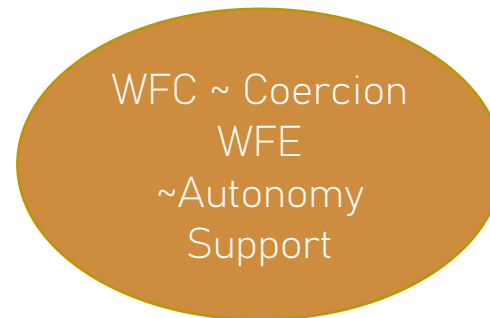
Response rate – 80.6%.

Results (simplified) – Adolescent's Report



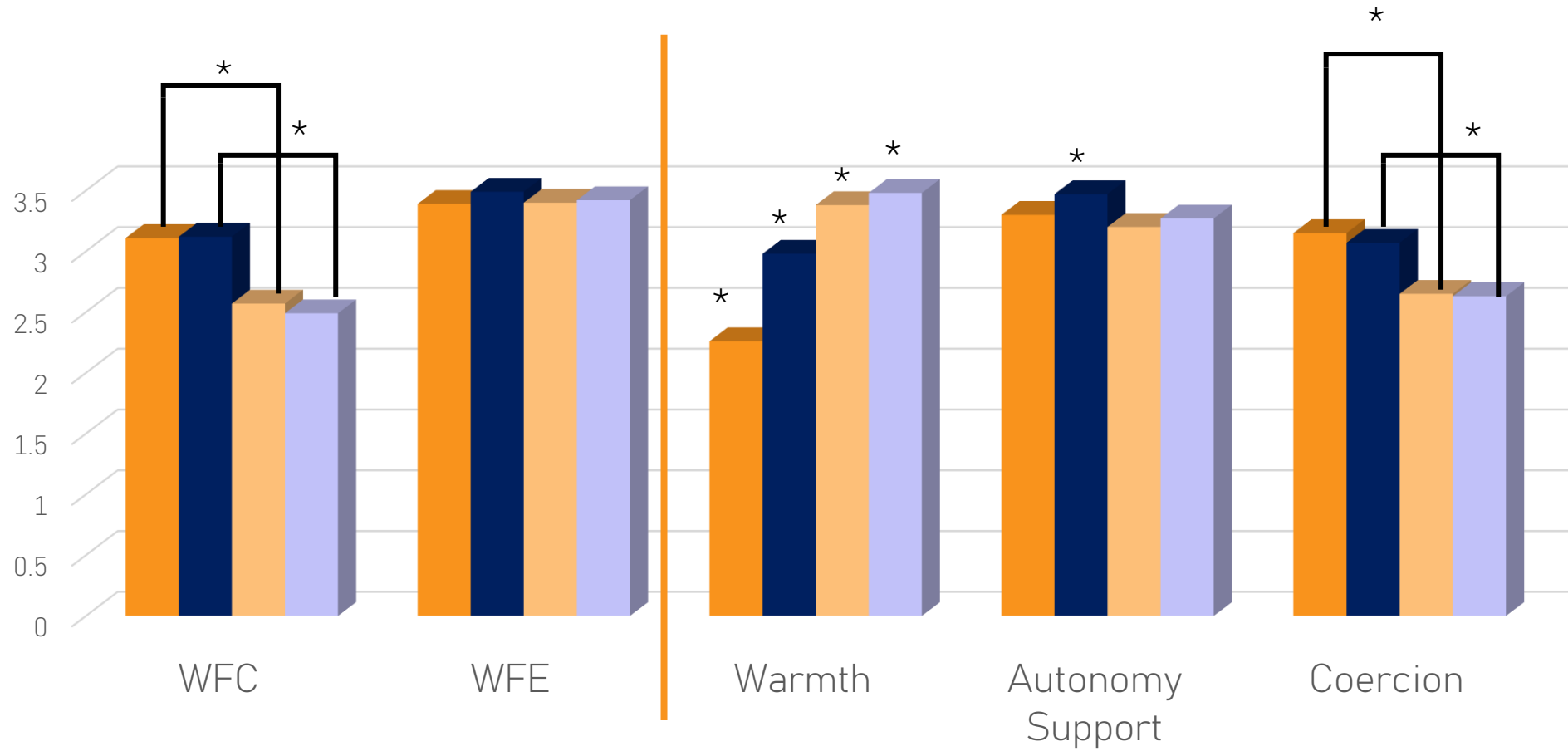
Key takeaway

- WFE associates more with autonomy support, while WFC associates with coercion
 - Deplete resources (cognitive and emotional)
 - Increase emotional resources



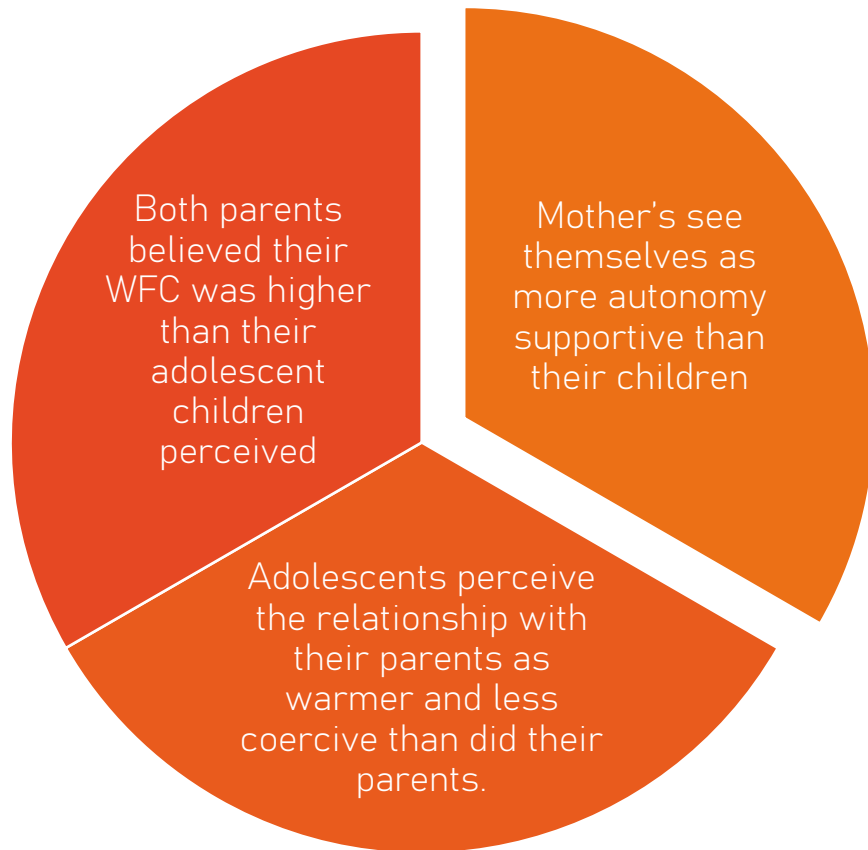
- Children are concerned with parents' wellbeing – decentralize from the negative

Results



■ Father report ■ Mother Report ■ Adolescent Report on Fathers ■ Adolescent Report on Mothers

Crossing parents and adolescents perspectives



- Our findings align with the ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986) and the family systems theory (Alarcão, 2000; Cox & Paley, 1997).

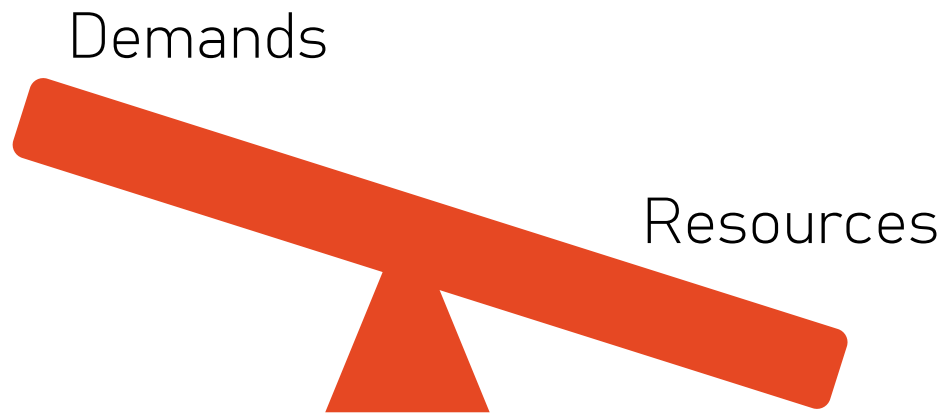
Family systems perspective – experience of one member reverberates in the family

Spillover and crossover matter!

When imbalance becomes chronic

- These studies show a consistent pattern: work-family dynamics are reorganizing family relationships across development
- What happens when these demands are not occasional... but chronic?

The Emotional Cost: Parental Burnout



Emotional Exhaustion

Overwork and exhaustion

Saturation

Loss of pleasure and fulfillment in the role of parent.

Emocional Distancing

When a parent disconnects emotionally (not physically) from their children to distance themselves from the source of exhaustion.

Contrast

A feeling of opposition between current performance in the parental role and previous or idealized performance.

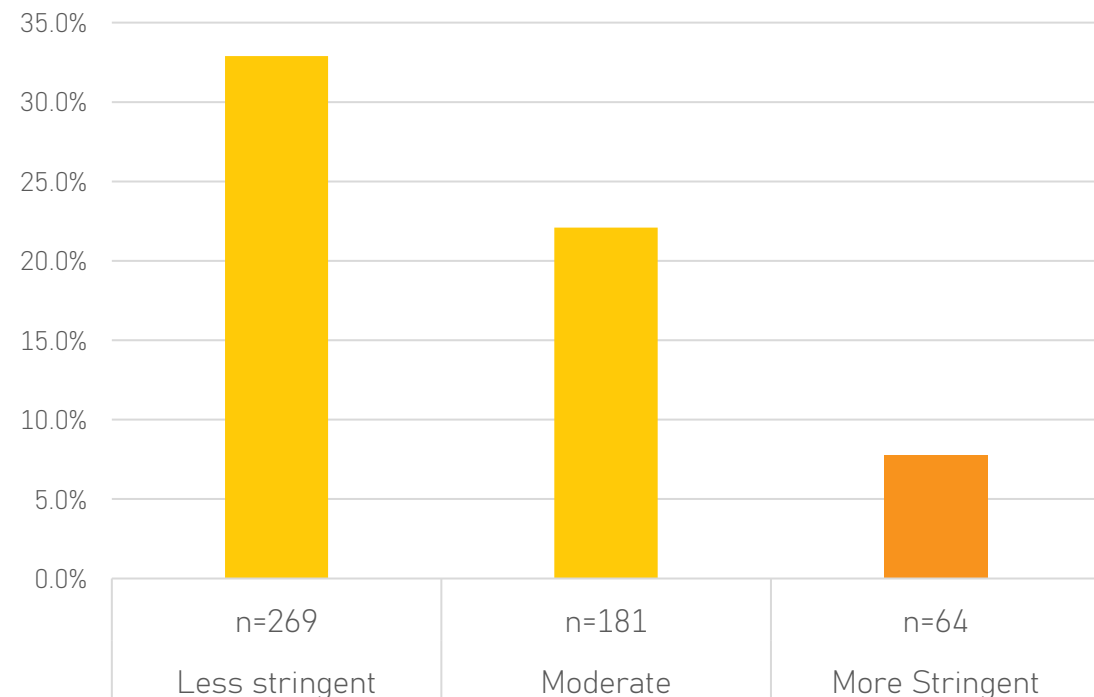
Mikolajczak and Roskam (2018)

The Emotional Cost: Parental Burnout

Study with a stratified sample of 818 parents

- 52% mothers; 48% fathers
- 78% married or civil union
- Age mean = 53,84 (SD=14,94)
- Education
 - Less than 9 years of education (24.9%)
 - 9 to 12 years of education (38,4%)
 - Higher education 36,5%
- 62% Working
- Nr of children = 1,76 (SD= 0,89)
 - 44% 1 Child | 42% 2 Children

% of Parents in Burnout detected according to different cut-offs (n=818)

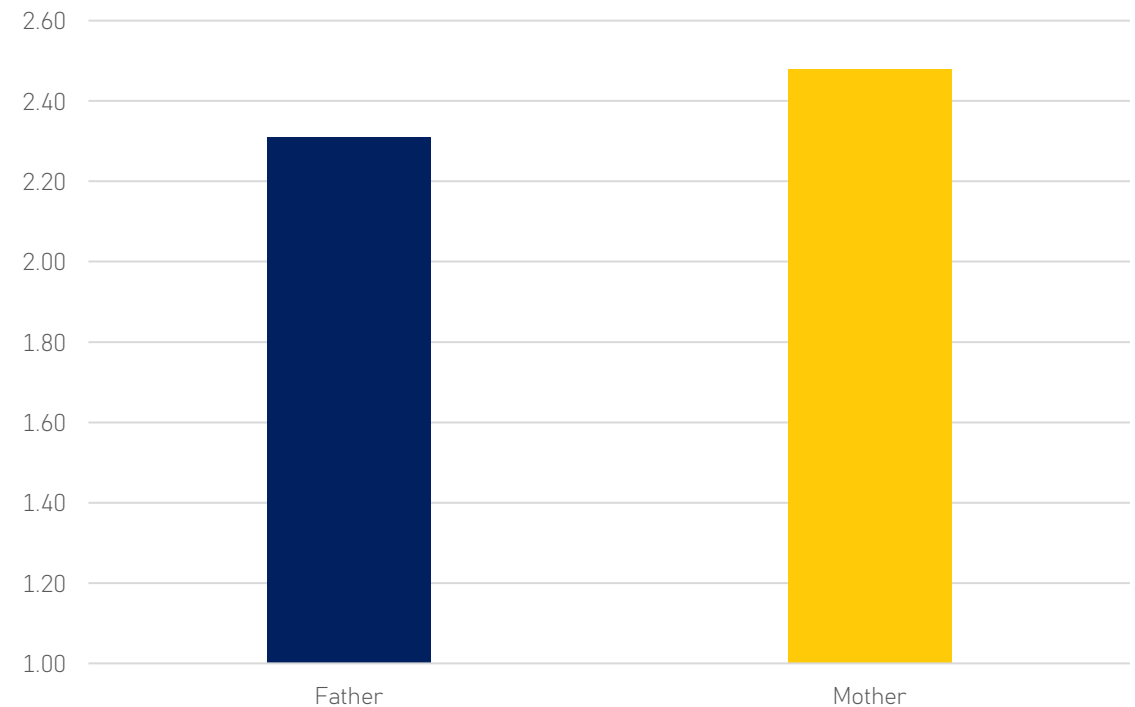


The Emotional Cost: Parental Burnout

Study with a stratified sample of 1209 parents

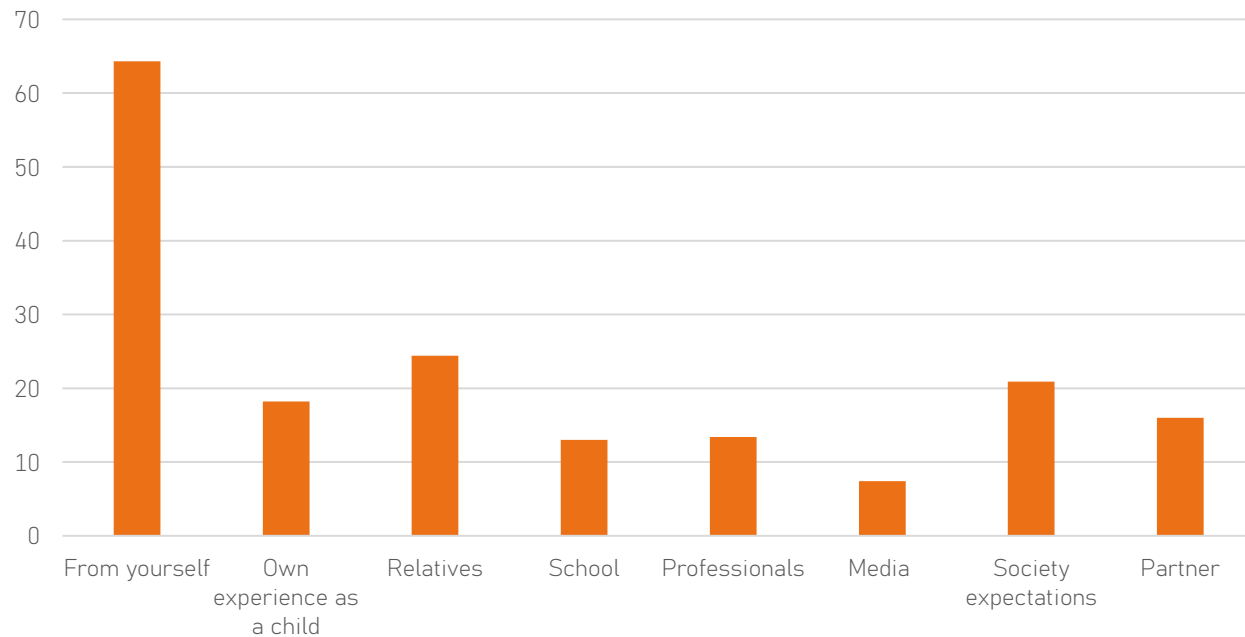
- 49,5% mothers; 50,5% fathers
- Sexual orientation: 3,8% non heterosexual
- Age mean = 40,95 (SD=9,04)
- Education
 - Less than 9 years of education (24.3%)
 - 9 to 12 years of education (42,7%)
 - Higher education 33%
- 89% Working
- Nr of children:
 - % 1 Child | 41% 2 Children | 9% 3 or more
- Children's age group:
 - 0-5Y - 29,4% | 6-12Y - 35,5% | 13-18Y - 35,1%

In the past 12 months, how often have you felt under pressure regarding the way you care for your children? *

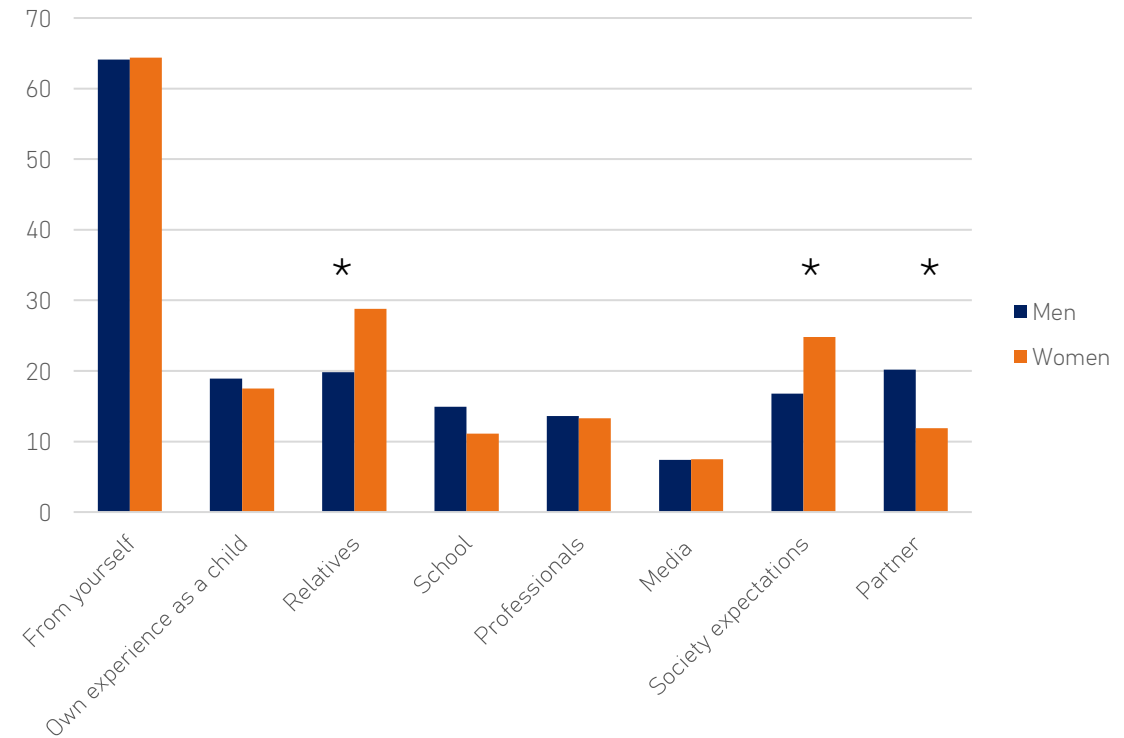


The Emotional Cost: Parental Burnout

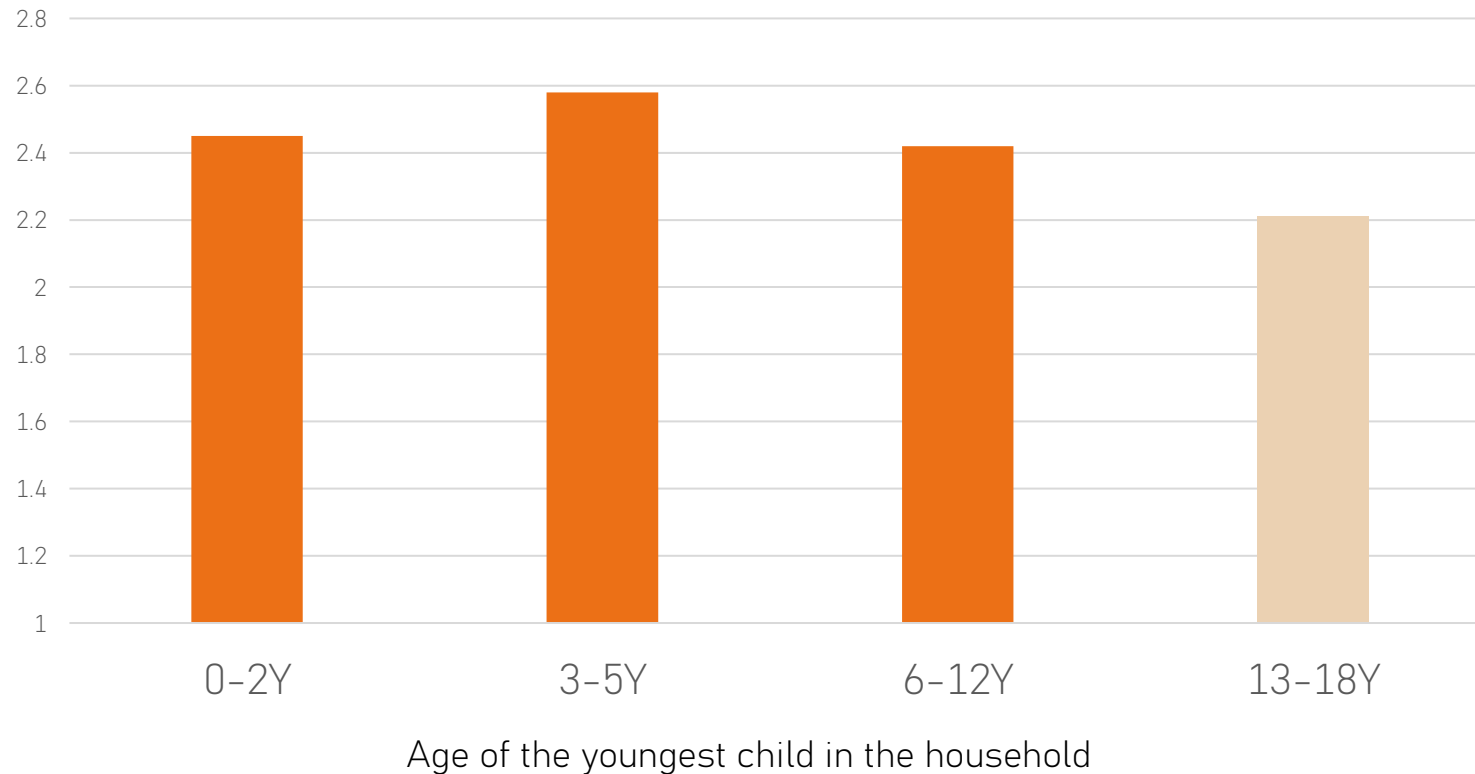
Where does the pressure that you feel comes from?



Pressure sources * Gender



In the past 12 months, how often have you felt under pressure regarding the way you care for your children? *



Key take aways

- More pressure from oneself
- Mothers feel more pressure overall and also from
 - Relatives and close net
 - *Media* and social expectations
- Mothers feel more pressure related to their parenting skills, to ensure the child's wellbeing, in autonomy encouragement and on behaviour management
- Parents of younger children feel more pressure

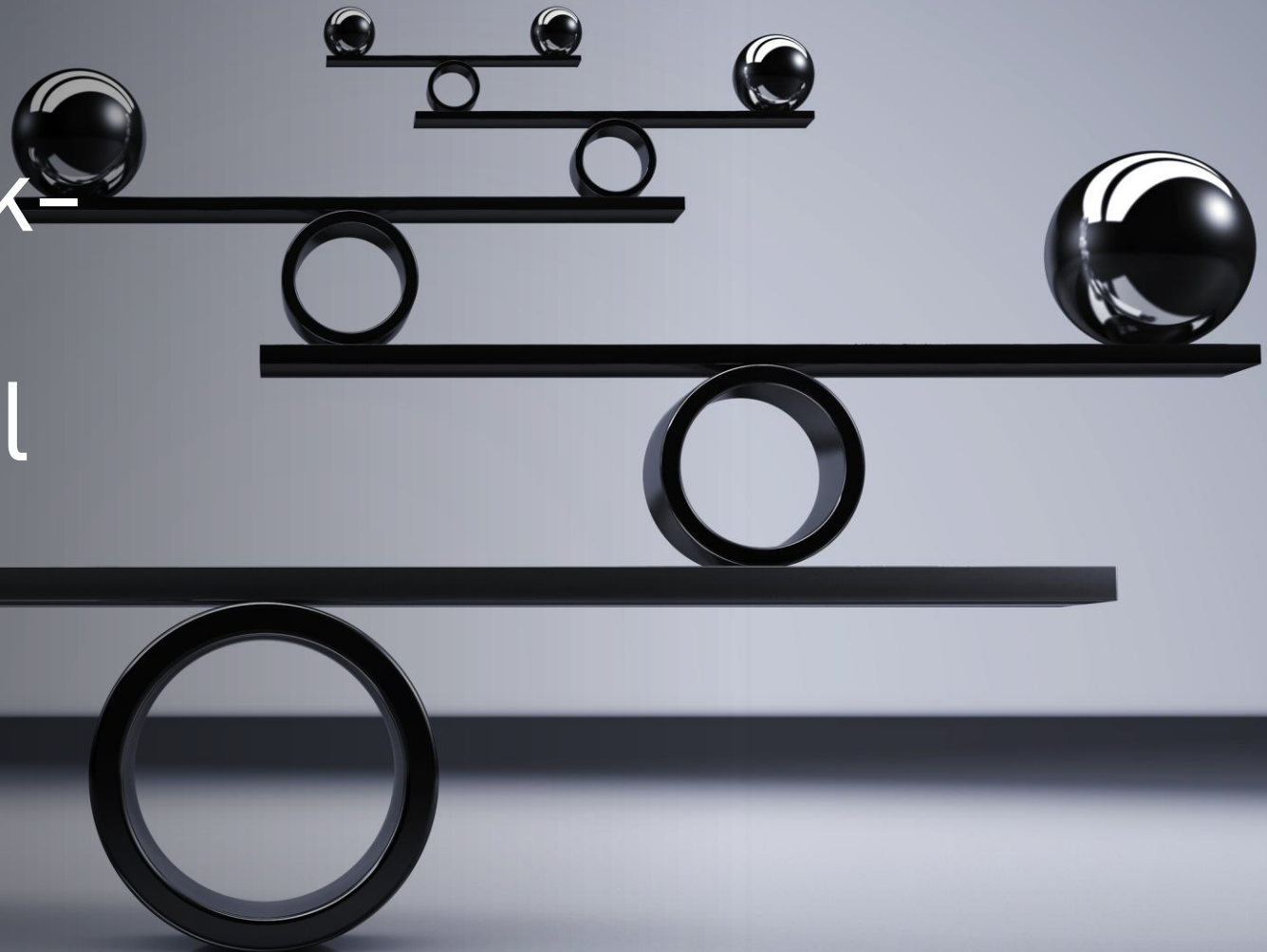
More Parental
Pressure

Links to more
vulnerability

Balancing is a dynamic, relational and contextual process

- It unfolds across time and across individuals
- Its effects accumulate and interact – emotional (un)availability is a silent and powerful mechanism
- Supporting families means also redesigning the systems around them.

Balancing the Unbalanced: Work-Family Dynamics and the Emotional Toll on Parents



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