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Constellations that matter: The role of telework characteristics in the relationship between work-family conflict and exhaustion

Micaela Santos Marques

Dissertation
Master in Social and Organizational Psychology

Supervisor:
Professor Doctor Sara Ramos, Auxiliar Professor
Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior (IBS)
Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

October, 2022



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
E HUMANAS

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Acknowledgments

This academic work results from many years of effort and a dream that is finally becoming a reality.

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The journey was long and chaotic, but at last... we thrive in chaos, right?

Resumo

A digitalização do mundo em que vivemos tem vindo a modificar muitas aspetos das nossas vidas, inclusive as formas e as ferramentas de trabalho. Esta digitalização crescente associada ao confinamento devido à pandemia de COVID-19 impulsionou o teletrabalho, fazendo com que este formato laboral fosse utilizado por grandes massas. No entanto, esta utilização, em muitos casos forçada e repentina poderá ter tido impactos negativos para os trabalhadores. O objetivo desta investigação é estudar a relação entre o conflito trabalho-família (CTF) e a exaustão e se esta relação é moderada pelo nível de autonomia no trabalho. Foram distribuídos questionários a teletrabalhadores ($N = 911$) e foram entrevistadas pessoas cuja situação laboral e do seu cônjuge fosse o teletrabalho (total ou parcial) e que tivessem filhos ($N = 7$). Os resultados obtidos permitem concluir que a relação entre CTF e a exaustão é positiva e significativa, no entanto esta não é moderada pelo nível de autonomia que o indivíduo possui no seu trabalho. Os resultados apontam ainda que as mulheres sentem mais CTF, mais exaustão e têm menos autonomia nos seus trabalhos. Ademais foi ainda possível verificar que indivíduos com filhos sentem mais CTF. Nos resultados qualitativos, os participantes exploram as estratégias desenvolvidas no seio familiar que permitiram combater os efeitos negativos e as desvantagens do teletrabalho. Através dos resultados obtidos quantitativa e qualitativamente, são sugeridas estratégias às organizações para que se melhore o teletrabalho e se facilite a sua prática, uma vez que este provavelmente continuará a ser uma tendência.

Palavras-chave: Teletrabalho, conflito trabalho-família, exaustão, autonomia.

Abstract

Digitalization in our world has been changing many aspects of our lives, including work formats and tools. This growing digitalization associated with lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated teleworking, and large masses started using this working format. However, telework was forced and abrupt in many cases, which might have negatively impacted the workers. This investigation aims to understand if there is a relationship between work-family conflict (WFC) and exhaustion and if autonomy at work moderates this relationship. Questionnaires were distributed to teleworkers ($N = 911$), and interviews were done with individuals with whom they and their partners were teleworking (totally or partially) and that had children ($N = 7$). The results made us conclude that the relationship between WFC and exhaustion is significantly positive, yet the autonomy level did not moderate it. Results also indicated that women feel more WFC, more exhaustion, and less autonomy at their jobs. Furthermore, it was also possible to verify that individuals with children feel higher levels of WFC. In the qualitative results, participants explore the strategies developed within the family that helped fight the adverse effects and disadvantages of telework. Through the quantitative and qualitative results obtained, some strategies were suggested to organizations so they can improve telework and facilitate its practices, as it is likely it will continue to be a trend.

Key words: Telework, work-family conflict, exhaustion, autonomy.

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Acronym glossary

ICT – Information and communication technology

ILO – International Labor Organization

WFC – Work-family conflict

IT – Information technology

HR – Human resources

Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term telework has been broadly used, but it is not a new concept. Telework is the junction between the Greek word *telou* which means distance, and *tripalliare*, which comes from Latin and means work (Padilla-Meléndez & Del Aguila-Obra, 2007). Telework is a working format that started in the seventies. The industrial revolution built its foundations with the development and introduction of telegraphs, photographs, and telephones (Türkeş & Vuță, 2022). In 1973, Jack Nilles (cited in Padilla-Meléndez & Del Aguila-Obra, 2007) described telework as the action of taking the work to the worker, instead of the other way around, by using telecommunications. The digital revolution arrived a few decades later and then allowed the transition from mechanical and analog electronic technology to digital electronics, significantly impacting telework. In addition, the introduction of the internet at home, mobile phones, and online social networks allowed everyday people to have the possibility to be connected to work at their own houses (Türkeş & Vuță, 2022), which made telework more accessible.

International Labour Organization more recently described telework as the work achievement with information and communications technologies (ICTs), and that is performed outside the employer's space (ILO, 2020). The growing field of telework has accentuated the need for legislation for this working format, and ILO (2020) stated that telework should be voluntary and should be an agreement between the worker and the employer. This agreement should include where the work will take place, the working hours, the communication tools used, the supervision mechanisms, and the goals to accomplish. In addition, telework regulations and laws about its practices protect the worker formally, being an advantage.

However, not all negative consequences could be prevented when telework was mandatory for many employees unexpectedly. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly forced many people to work from home when many organizations were unprepared for this abrupt transition. As a result, many people suffered with the shift to telework since neither they nor their families were ready and could not balance their professional and personal lives equally. The main negative impacts of telework mentioned in the literature are social isolation (Beno, 2021), higher workload (Barata, 2021), higher stress levels (Beno, 2021), and higher levels of work-family conflict (WFC) (Medina et al., 2021).

Furthermore, some factors might influence telework experiences, such as gender and the number of children. For example, the literature points out that women might have a worse experience while teleworking because they have a central role in house chores and feel more overwhelmed (Çoban, 2021). The number of children is also a factor that might have a significant influence on the well-being of the teleworker since it might lead to feeling more pressured (Thulin et al., 2019), but it might also be a reason to prefer to telework (Çoban, 2021) since individuals might feel like they can respond to their child's needs more efficiently.

All these factors and the difficulty in healthfully balancing the professional and personal life might lead to higher levels of exhaustion, a burnout dimension, and therefore affect the worker's performance and negatively impact the organization. The present investigation will focus on the WFC felt by individuals who telework and its relation to their emotional exhaustion. Besides trying to understand if there is a positive and significant relationship between these two variables, this investigation will also study the potential factors that might impact this relationship. Since exhaustion is affected by the autonomy level (Queirós et al., 2014, as cited in Areosa & Queirós, 2020), this research will attempt to understand if the autonomy level moderates the relationship between WFC and exhaustion.

This academic work will start with a chapter focusing on the literature review about telework and the COVID-19 context, the possible gender inequalities in society, the presence or absence of children, the work-family conflict, exhaustion, and lastly, autonomy levels. This part of the dissertation will also present the study's goal and hypothesis. In the second chapter, the method will be described. To better understand the relationship between the variables previously mentioned, a mixed method will be used, including online questionnaires and interviews. The following chapter will describe the results obtained with both methods. The fourth chapter, the discussion, will relate the questionnaires and interview results to have a broader picture of the subject. Finally, a conclusion will summarize the investigation's findings.

Literature Review

1.1 Telework and COVID-19

Telework is not a new concept, and many authors have defined and updated it. For example, Niles (1984, as cited in Bailey & Kurland, 2002) stated that telework occurs when the workers perform tasks related to the job outside the infrastructures of the organization and communicate with their colleagues through available technologies.

Telework became popular in 1980 in organizations such as Yahoo in California (Nilles, 1988, as cited in Messenger & Gschwind, 2016), and it has evolved since there, adapting to the companies' and market's needs and resources. Initially, the information technologies and communication tools utilized radically differed from what we use today. According to Makimoto and Manners (1997, as cited in Messenger & Gschwind, 2016), telework, as we know it today, began with the devices available such as computers, telephones, and fax machines. Nowadays, with technology evolution, there are tools such as clouds shared by the whole organization that allows all the users to access and edit the same document simultaneously through different computers, smartphones, or tablets with internet access (Miller, 2008), which facilitates group work. Furthermore, the digitalization of our world allows everyday people to access the necessary tools to telework.

Even though telework was becoming more popular and accessible, many considered it impossible to apply for some jobs. Most workers spent their days at the offices provided by the company until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the number of new cases of COVID-19 increased exponentially, the governments decreed a state of emergency, and the organizations had to close their doors, forcing people to telework. The percentage of teleworkers has never been so high.

The numbers presented by the Eurofound exemplify the great augmentation of the teleworking population. According to this agency, in Europe, in 2017, just about 3% of the working population regularly worked from home (Eurofound, 2018). In Portugal, during the same year, about 8.3% of employees sometimes worked from home (Higgins, 2020). However, during the pandemic, these numbers grew exponentially. In Europe, about 48% of workers exerted their functions from home, and in Portugal, these values rose to 39% (Higgins, 2020; Llave, 2021). These numbers

demonstrate the exponential increase of workers who had to work from their homes, some of them having to share the same space with their spouses or even with their children, which was a challenge.

Looking closely at the teleworking community before the pandemic's beginning, we can infer that most people who practice telework are analytical workers with high qualifications and higher autonomy in their work (Pouri & Bhat, 2003; Thulin et al., 2019). However, the pandemic forced workers with fewer qualifications, the case workers, to work in this regime as well (Thulin et al., 2019). As a result, many occupations performed solely in the workspace of the organizations had to find new ways to adapt to telework on an organizational and individual level. The worker's forced and abrupt adaptation all over the globe resulted in positive and negative consequences for both organizations and individuals.

As previously mentioned, telework has advantages and disadvantages to the organization that needs to be integrated into the business and its services. Telework can enhance workers' flexibility and mobility, reducing general costs for the organization (Ferreira et al., 2021). An example of these cost reductions is related to the offices. Since there is no need for a mandatory office that must accommodate all its employees simultaneously, there is a significant reduction in per capita office space, which saves the company a significant amount of money (Ferreira et al., 2021). Another monetary benefit has to do with the energetical needs of the organization. Since it is not necessary to regulate the temperature during long periods, especially on days when employees are not working (e.g., during the weekends and holidays), the organization reduces its expenses and ecological footprint (Hook et al., 2020). With telework, the organization can also hire people from different sites within or outside the country that are open to lower salaries (Ferreira et al., 2021), which translates into a cost reduction.

Nonetheless, there are also disadvantages to organizations, like the absence of control related to technical problems since the employees are responsible for their installations which might not be adjusted to their work needs which can also lead to communication problems (Ferreira et al., 2021) that may impact the functioning of the team and its cohesion and consequently the organization (Ferreira et al., 2021). Managers might also have difficulties handling their teams since it is harder to recognize existing problems, and it might be harder to control their performances (Ferreira et al., 2021). Beyond the struggles presented above, it is also important to note that team cohesion might also be affected due to reduced contact between team members

(Ferreira et al., 2021). Usually, while teleworking, the contacts are frequently reduced to what is strictly necessary and related to work tasks, so informal conversations are not so common. This reduced social contact might lead to a more disconnected team which can affect the team's performance.

There is still an open debate about the advantages and disadvantages of telework for employees. The main advantages mentioned in the literature are higher productivity (Beno, 2021; Gajendran et al., 2015; Martin & MacDonnel, 2012; Tavares, 2017), flexibility and autonomy (Beno, 2021; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Beno, 2021; McNall et al., 2009) and increased balance between work-life (Beno, 2021, Tavares, 2017). Some authors even defend that telework decreases fatigue which might be related to less commuting to work (Song & Gao, 2020), which is also seen as an advantage by itself since it reduces the monetary costs (Barata, 2021).

However, there are also disadvantages regarding telework. As mentioned above, since it is performed at the employee's home, the contact between employees is reduced, which can result in a higher feeling of isolation and loneliness (Beno, 2021; Golden et al., 2008; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). The social isolation felt by the workers is negatively related to job performance. This relation intensifies when the employee is teleworking for an extended period (Golden et al., 2008), and therefore it affects the organization to a greater degree.

Furthermore, people who telework for prolonged periods tend to extend their working hours, overcoming the limit of working hours of their contract (Barata, 2021; Song & Gao, 2020). Overwork and extended working hours are standard practices among teleworkers because they feel they need to be online and always available to respond immediately to their colleagues and the organization's needs, making it difficult to close the working day and rest completely (Wang et al., 2021).

The extension of the working hours might be associated with a higher work-family conflict (WFC) (Barata, 2021; Beno, 2021; Song & Gao, 2020; Wang et al., 2021), which can be mainly represented by role and time conflicts. People usually feel that it is challenging to delineate limits for themselves, and it is hard to separate the time and space to work and spend time with the family. The conjugation of these factors might end up negatively affecting the mental and physical health of the worker (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003).

The stress felt by the employees is something that is still an ongoing discussion between different authors when it comes to telework. Some defend that during telework, stress levels arise

(Beno, 2021; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Song & Gao, 2020) due to WFC. The difficulty in separating the work and family contexts and space might cause WFC intensification (Tavares, 2017). On the other hand, some studies state that telework reduces stress levels since it promotes better time management (Barata, 2021), which might reduce WFC. This disagreement demonstrates the need for clarification about the factors that might work as buffers to stress experienced by employees.

There might exist some factors that will influence negatively or positively the telework experience, that is, they might work as buffers or not. A factor that is broadly explored in the literature related to telework is gender. There is still an ongoing debate about whether gender affects the telework experience. Some authors defend that telework is experienced differently by men and women and state that women are more prone to develop anxiety and mental disorders, and telework might aggravate this fragility (Bertino et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the other part of the literature states there are no differences between men and women, and they experience telework the same. However, this group of researchers is divided. One states that telework increases stress levels equally for both men and women (Beno, 2021; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Song & Gao, 2020), and the other defends that telework reduces stress levels (Barata, 2021). Once again, the disagreement in the literature is evident.

Another factor that can influence telework is the existence or absence of children, precisely the number of children and their age. Bertino and colleagues (2021) indicate that parents who telework and have one kid only see telework as more harmful than adults who do not have children or have more than two children. The presence of children can also be associated with the gender factor previously mentioned, as women who are mothers tend to feel more stress when they have to telework since they feel like they have more responsibilities (i.e., responsibilities towards their job and their children) (Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021).

Still about the household and housing conditions, individuals who need to share the space with someone from their family feel more interrupted, leading to lower productivity levels during telework (Solís, 2016). Nevertheless, sharing the house and the space with a partner or colleague is a protective factor against social isolation and depression (Bertino et al., 2021).

1.2 Gender and inequalities

After the pandemic's beginning, many couples were forced to stay in their houses and had to adapt to those conditions during an undetermined period. Before the pandemic, they spent most days at the organization's workspace, and after the emergence of COVID-19, every working day was spent inside their own houses, which was a significant difference. As a result, the families needed to adjust their lives and impose boundaries to separate the space to work and rest, greatly impacting each worker's life. Since every family member was working from home, the house chores distribution was one of the main adjustments (e.g., cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children, and going shopping). The house chores division is an essential piece of the telework experience since different types of division might present different consequences for the individual, as presented in the literature.

It should be considered that the division of the house chores might be related to the gender roles attributed to men and women by society. These roles are associated with society's expectations and beliefs toward both genders (Blackstone, 2003). For example, according to gender roles held by occidental society, women tend to be more affectionate and warmer than men (Blackstone, 2003), which is believed to be adequate for caring for the family, especially children. Therefore, women are expected to dedicate more time to house chores (Blackstone, 2003). Additionally, men are expected to be the "head of the couple", they are expected to make the decisions and to offer financial support to the family (Blackstone, 2003), they are not expected to be part of the house chores as much as women. Even in the work sphere, there are preconceived ideas about what kind of work should be done by men and women. Men are expected to be more task-oriented, and women are tendentially oriented to do tasks that value interpersonal relationships (Blackstone, 2003), which also reinforces the gender roles mentioned. Therefore, the transition to telework by the two members of the couple might intensify the gender roles previously imposed by society, especially in traditionally non-egalitarian countries (Kurowska, 2020).

Previous studies point out that women tend to feel overwhelmed with the number of house chores they need to perform. This feeling was intensified after the beginning of the global pandemic, which demonstrates that there is a centralization of this type of work on the feminine part of the couple, reinforcing the traditional gender roles (Çoban, 2021). Even in situations where the house chores are shared, in heterosexual couples, the woman still has a central role, and the

man has a secondary role, working as an assistant to the woman (Cerqueira & Motte-Baumvol, 2022; Çoban, 2021; Santos et al., 2021).

The biggest responsibility for this sort of task induces higher stress levels in women who feel overwhelmed more frequently (Zauchner et al., 2000, as cited in Pérez et al., 2002). The literature that points out the negative impacts of telework advocates that women feel more overwhelmed and stressed than their partners, which might lead to telework avoidance (Beno, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). With telework, home can become a place where there are mixed feelings, particularly to the feminine element of the couple, because it becomes a place where there are abundant demands, and it is no longer a space of restoration of the dispensed energies (Hartig et al., 2007). Furthermore, Feng and Savani (2020) state that right after the pandemic began, when many women were forced to telework, their productivity and satisfaction with their work decreased significantly, reinforcing the adverse effects of telework for women.

However, there are other points of view in the literature defending that women feel better when teleworking (Giovanis, 2018). According to Giovanis (2018), when both parts of the couple work from home, it is likely that men increase their contribution to the house chores, which is positively related to the well-being of the feminine part of the couple. These findings demonstrate that proper support can attenuate the negative impact of telework on the feminine part of the couple.

1.3 Presence of children

The presence of children is a topic that generates high disagreement in the literature about telework. Some studies point out that having children is one of the reasons to prefer working at the office (Beno, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) since teleworking with children is considered more demanding because it requires more resources than working in the organization's workspace. Teleworking with children, particularly younger children, is related to higher levels of pressure in everyday life and lower levels of time use control (Thulin et al., 2019). Especially among women, the high demands and pressure from work and children lead to a more prominent feeling of overwhelmingness. Therefore, parents might avoid telework since it might be more exhausting.

On the other hand, the presence of children might be a factor in choosing to telework (Çoban, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). Many women consider telework an advantage in balancing their roles as workers and as mothers because this option allows them to efficiently respond to the needs of their children while performing their job (Cerqueira & Motte-Baumvol, 2022; Giovanis, 2018;

Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Pérez et al., 2002). Additionally, those who telework and have children at home report less stress than people who telework and do not have children (Mokhtarian et al., 1998). López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño (2020) state that the will to telework in the presence of children under 15 years old increases solely after the second child is born, which is a relevant factor since having only one child does not seem to be a booster factor to desire telework.

Beyond affecting the actual work produced by parents, the presence of children might also be associated with WFC, but this topic is not consensual yet. Some authors defend that the presence of children augments the WFC (Graham et al., 2021; Madsen, 2003), while others state that this factor does not influence the WFC (Fein & Skinner, 2015).

Considering this information, it is possible to infer that the presence of children is a very uncertain topic. Therefore, further research is suggested to analyze the impact on children. More specifically, the age and number of children and the family to determine if these variances influence the WFC and if the

1.4 Work-family conflict (WFC)

The attempt to balance all the roles in their life increases the risk of WFC. Kahn (1964, as cited in Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) defined role conflict as a conflict where the pressure and the demands of these two roles, the work, and the family role, are mutually incompatible. According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), the WFC might have different shapes, such as time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict.

The first mentioned, time-based conflict, occurs when the individual has many roles in their life, and these roles compete for the limited time available. Generally, the time attributed to a task of a particular role cannot be shared with another task from a different role Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). The number of hours worked might negatively affect this conflict felt by the individuals (Fein & Skinner, 2015; Medina, 2021) because more hours dedicated to work mean there are fewer hours dedicated to the family. Thus, it is possible to understand that more schedule flexibility and reduced working hours might diminish the conflict felt by the employees (Madsen, 2003) once it allows a better adjustment to the needs of both roles.

Another conflict that might arise is strain-based conflict, which happens when there is tension between the roles performed by the same individual. This sort of conflict happens when the demands of one role compromise the performance of other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). One

factor that might attenuate these tensions and the conflict felt by the individual is autonomy and a sense of freedom (Jones & Butler, 1980).

Lastly, the behavior-based conflict mentioned by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) is related to behaviors and attitudes that exist in one role and are incompatible with other roles. An example of this type of conflict is when the job values characteristics such as aggressiveness, objectivity, and self-confidence (Schein, 1973, as cited in Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which can be incompatible with the desired behaviors of the family context. At home, warmth and vulnerability are the desired behaviors. If, for any reason, the individual feels difficulties accommodating and adjusting both behaviors, there might be a behavior-based conflict.

It is important to note that whatever shape the WFC has, it might have negative consequences for the individual, such as less satisfaction with work and life and higher levels of tiredness and exhaustion (Golden, 2012; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Medina et al., 2021; Meliala et al., 2020). However, as mentioned in the paragraphs above, autonomy, flexibility, and freedom can positively impact this WFC. Therefore, if telework can ensure these factors, it might contribute to a lower level of WFC (Madsen, 2003).

Nevertheless, specific characteristics of telework, such as the utilization of the same space for work and leisure, converge the two spheres of work and family (Medina et al., 2021), which can potentially lead to higher levels of WFC (Golden, 2012; Medina et al., 2021). An example that can easily represent this conflict is that mothers who telework are forced to take more breaks during working hours to answer their children's needs (Pabilonia & Vernon, 2022), reinforcing the possible impact of gender and children's presence aforementioned.

Once again, telework is still a working format that generates disagreement in the literature. Moreover, even though it might contribute to more autonomy and flexibility at work, it forces an overlap of familial and professional life, which impacts the WFC.

1.5 Exhaustion

Burnout is a pathology caused by the elevated workload present in one's job, and it is connected to and caused by organizations (Maslach et al., 2001; Queirós et al., 2014, as cited in Areosa & Queirós, 2020). Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors. Individuals who suffer from it usually feel high stress and anxiety levels, lower autonomy levels, lack of acknowledgment of their achievements, high demands related to their work, elevated

workload, and toxic relationships with their co-workers (Queirós et al., 2014, as cited in Areosa & Queirós, 2020). According to Maslach and colleagues (2001), burnout has three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy.

The first dimension, exhaustion, is the central aspect of burnout, and it is often mistaken for burnout itself, even though it is just a symptom (Maslach et al., 2001). It manifests the stress dimension of burnout, revealed by over-tiredness, lack of energy, and fatigue (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Furthermore, it is an experience that shapes the individuals' actions, which might result in emotional and cognitive detachment in the work context (Maslach et al., 2001).

The exhausted feeling results in depersonalization through detachment from work. Depersonalization helps workers feel indifferent toward their jobs (Maslach et al., 2001) and to disengage in their work, which results in a cynical attitude (Maslach et al., 2001).

Even though many studies corroborate the relationship between exhaustion and depersonalization, there is not such a clear connection to the inefficacy dimension. The inefficacy felt by the workers is a more complex dimension as it can be a product of exhaustion, depersonalization, or both (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). The lack of efficiency felt by the workers can be related to the high demands and pressure felt on the job, and therefore, when an individual feels exhausted and indifferent to the job they are performing, it is difficult to feel the importance of the work results.

According to Copranzano and colleagues (2003), exhaustion is related to organizational commitment, turnover intentions, performance, and organizational citizenship, which are all connected to the organization's prosperity. Therefore, exhaustion negatively affects the employee's performance (Moon & Hur, 2011) which negatively affects the organization's performance. Therefore, since workers' exhaustion negatively impacts the organization, addressing it and attempting to diminish it is relevant.

There is also a connection to WFC. The WFC felt by the individuals, especially time and role conflict, are the ones that demonstrate a more substantial relationship with exhaustion. This relationship is intensified when telework is practiced for more extended periods (Golden, 2012).

Even though some factors might be considered risks since it amplifies the negative impacts of telework, the organization also plays a vital role in attenuating these negative impacts. The organization's human resources team can influence and adjust some aspects of the organization that will have a repercussion on the worker's experience (Buller & McEvoy, 2012) and prevent some

of the negative impacts of telework. The organization's practices, policies, benefits offered to workers, and even management forms are examples of actions that facilitate telework practice (Gigauri, 2020). For example, the organization can offer more support for their employees, leading to a higher balance between work and family life (Bentley et al., 2016), reducing employees' exhaustion levels.

1.6 Autonomy

Another factor influencing exhaustion is the workers' autonomy over their tasks. As previously mentioned, people who suffer from burnout often feel they have less autonomy, and they are overly controlled by their managers (Queirós et al., 2014, as cited in Areosa & Queirós, 2020). This relation demonstrates that workers are more likely to experience burnout symptoms, including exhaustion, when they feel like the company controls them more.

The Job-Demands Resources Theory presupposes that a job has both demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2019). The job demands relate to the job characteristics that require effort and skills and have some costs to the individual (physiological or psychological). Extended working hours, complicated relationships within the team, and an uncomfortable environment are some examples of individual costs. In addition, job demands are associated with the exhaustion component of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). In turn, the job resources refer to the functional job characteristics and facilitate work goal achievement, reducing the physiological and psychological costs. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), autonomy is an example of a job resource.

Karasek (1979) also stated that a high decision latitude could positively affect mental processes. The same author points out that people with low decision latitude have more passive jobs and feel more dissatisfied. Therefore, higher decision latitude and autonomy can positively impact people and make them more satisfied with their jobs (Karasek, 1979).

According to Windeler and colleagues (2017), interdependence at work also impacts exhaustion. When workers depend on each other to complete a task, autonomy levels decrease, and exhaustion levels increase. The higher exhaustion levels might be related to the extra effort into integrating and managing the contribution of each team member involved in the task.

Furthermore, a study by Spagnoli and Molinaro (2020) indicates that autonomy can affect different types of jobs (i.e., managers working for an organization and freelancers). By comparing

the two, the authors verified that higher autonomy diminishes the intensity of the relationship between negative feelings associated with workaholism and exhaustion for managers. Freelancers, though, consider that autonomy might enhance the relation mentioned above. A possible explanation is that the risk inherent in a freelancer's activity is higher than the risk associated with a manager position. In this job, the profit only comes if anything is produced, so any type of failure that stops the production might put the individual's income at risk since he is not protected by a contract, generating more tension for the worker.

The job's flexibility, inherent to autonomy, is also essential in the couple's dynamic to respond to the family's needs, for example, in couples with children, both mothers, and fathers who have less flexibility report higher exhaustion levels (Leineweber et al., 2018). However, more women than men report that their partner has more flexibility, so more women report higher exhaustion levels. Furthermore, men have more flexibility than women, but they feel their lack of flexibility affects their mental health more than women. This finding is possibly explained by the fact that men with less flexibility in their work are associated with lower status, which can have different repercussions on their mental health.

It is important to note that high levels of flexibility and autonomy might quickly turn into the extension of the working hours, which is harmful to the employees and elevates stress levels (Beckel & Fisher, 2022; Leineweber et al., 2018). However, overall, more autonomy and control in the workplace are associated with better worker outcomes and reduced WFC (Beckel & Fisher, 2022), higher telework satisfaction, and organizational trust (Sousa-Uva et al., 2021).

The literature presents some threats and risk factors that might transform telework into a worse experience, such as sharing the working space with someone else, having children within the house during working hours, and not splitting the house chores equally, among others. Therefore, the organization must help the workers to have the best possible experience during telework by implementing policies that enhance their autonomy since it can attenuate the relationship between WFC and exhaustion. Furthermore, it is in the organization's interest to have their workers satisfied with the telework regime since it is positively associated with organizational commitment (Caillier, 2012), and nowadays, it is a regime that is exponentially growing all over the world.

1.7 Objectives

The current literature still has some disagreements about the factors that might benefit and attenuate the difficulties for someone who teleworks, especially concerning how the workers experience it. It is, therefore, essential to answer these questions through this thesis dissertation. Notably, the present investigation intends to study the relationships between the demands of telework and its consequences for the employees regarding the WFC and exhaustion, as well as the role of specific characteristics of the job that might affect this relationship (e.g., autonomy). Moreover, the current dissertation also intends to understand these relationships better qualitatively, to voice the opinions and the strategies developed by teleworkers.

The WFC felt by the individuals might be related to the level of emotional exhaustion felt. It presupposes a positive relationship between WFC and exhaustion, which means that the higher the WFC felt, the higher the exhaustion levels. Autonomy might work as a buffer for this relationship, moderating it. Higher autonomy in the job tasks will be associated with less exhaustion.

CHAPTER 2

Method

The present study used a mixed methodology based on the previous literature review to understand the relationship between work-life conflict and exhaustion and the role of autonomy over the work tasks in this relationship. Mixed methods research can be described as a combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach; the strengths are united by merging the two methods (Dörnyei, 2007). The mixed methods permit a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied since it is possible to access a considerable amount of data that allows a better identification and quantification of the relations between the target variables and a better understanding and explaining these relations (Lopes & Pinto, 2016). The two methods might also corroborate each other's findings, improving the study's validity (Dörnyei, 2007).

To test our hypothesis, the data collection was conducted simultaneously through questionnaires (i.e., quantitative methodology) and interviews (i.e., qualitative methodology). Both methods were applied to the Portuguese population. Therefore, the instruments were constructed in European Portuguese so the general population would understand them easily.

This section will present the data collected from the questionnaires and the interviews, the construction of instruments, and the participant's description.

2.1 Procedure

2.1.1 The procedure of the data collection

To collect qualitative data, the present study performed semi-structured interviews (Appendix A). The interviews were conducted from the 5th of January until the 1st of March 2022, and they were all made on online platforms, such as Teams and Zoom, according to what was more convenient to the participants. The sampling method was initially convenience sampling combined with snowball sampling. Participants from the contact network were invited to participate in the study. At this stage, the people who answered the questionnaire were the ones who were easily accessible and were willing to participate in the survey (Dörnyei, 2007). At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they could indicate another person to participate in the study, leading to a snowball sample (Dörnyei, 2007). To analyze the data collected, a categories dictionary

(Appendix B) was elaborated, which helped classify the data collected and to categorize the relevant excerpts of the interview. The interviews were transcribed, and the corpus was divided into segments and coded using the table of categories, adopting an open coding strategy. This means that, if relevant information did not fit any category of the preexisting table, a new category was created, named a category emergent from the participant's answers. Information was considered worthy of including a new category if it was mentioned by more than one participant and was directly related to the teleworks' impact.

The first contact with the participants was made through email or WhatsApp text to schedule the interview and share the link for the online meeting. To participate in the study, the participants were required to be at least 18 years old, they and their partners had to be teleworking (partially or entirely), and all participants had at least one child. There was a particular focus on the population that had children. As stated in the literature review, there are still some disagreements about the impact of a child on telework, affecting the organization of the household, the perspective about telework, and even the preference or avoidance of this working format. Therefore, it was decided to interview only couples with children to understand better the impact of a child at home when teleworking and how couples could cope with it. Participants were asked to describe in detail their days, struggles, and strategies found to overcome to gather in-depth information about family lives who teleworked.

This investigation also distributed an online questionnaire through the Qualtrics online platform (Appendix C) from the 3rd of January until the 25th of February 2022. There was also a convenient snowball sampling. It started as a convenience sampling since the questionnaire was shared through a social network, such as friends, family, and colleagues, through different social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Moreover, afterward, some participants shared the questionnaire with their network. In addition, some students from different courses from Iscte-IUL helped to distribute the questionnaire in exchange for extra credit. To respond to the questionnaire, the participants had to fulfill the requirements, which included having at least 18 years old and partially or entirely teleworking from home when the questionnaire was applied.

When the participants accepted to participate in the study, either on the questionnaire or in the interviews, they were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Therefore, they could quit or end the questionnaire and the interview at any time.

Additionally, before starting the interview, it was also asked for permission to record the whole session to further analyze the data.

2.1.2 The procedure of the data analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed through a content analysis technique (Stemler, 2000). This technique allows a systematic analysis that separates the content into categories and for each category there are specific rules to code content (Stemler, 2000). Furthermore, this analysis method allows a word-frequency count, that is, each category has a final count of the amount of times a certain word or expression was made (Stemler, 2000).

The dictionary had eight dimensions; each dimension had various categories that aggregated the principal dimensions discussed in the literature and were seen as relevant to this investigation. It is important to note that the present study based the interview's analysis on an open codification, which means that new dimensions and categories can emerge according to the participants' answers.

Dimensions of the category dictionary:

- 1) Perspectives about telework: to initiate the interview, participants were asked to describe telework with three adjectives that they could think of immediately.
- 2) Telework advantages: the first questions of the interview intended to have a better description of what advantages the participants associate with telework compared to working in the office.
- 3) Telework disadvantages: the same questions that intended to explore the advantages also intended to obtain answers about the possible disadvantages the participants could identify in teleworking.
- 4) Work-life conflict: after understanding the job characteristics, the WFC questions aimed to explore how the work and family spheres coexisted.
- 5) Work-family facilitation: the interview also included questions about factors or strategies that could attenuate the conflict felt by the individuals.
- 6) Autonomy: the questions about the job characteristics and the tasks performed allowed them to understand better the perspective about their autonomy and control over their tasks (e.g., task interdependence).

- 7) Exhaustion: the participants were asked to describe the changes in their physical and psychological health since the beginning of telework.
- 8) Future of telework: to finish the interview, participants were asked if they considered any changes essential to improve their telework experience and which work model they prefer (i.e., telework, work at the office, partially telework).

The analyze of the quantitative data was made through the 28 version of the IBM SPSS Statistics software, and it was also used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) to study the moderation model.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Interview

The present study interviewed teleworkers to better understand the data collected through the questionnaires. The interview script was constructed based on the literature review previously made, resulting in a semi-structured interview with 29 questions (Appendix A). This instrument was constructed considering the multiple dimensions that could allow a better understanding of the advantages, disadvantages, and strategies that could help workers have a better telework experience.

Initially, it was presented a brief description of the study itself and the main topic of the dissertation, which was telework, mentioning that the main goal was to understand how telework could impact workers' lives and their families. After this brief introduction, the interviewees were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and they could stop the interview at any time. Before the interview started, it was also asked for permission to record the session to analyze further the data collected.

2.2.2 Questionnaire

Various pre-existing scales constituted the questionnaire from different authors that analyzed the relevant topics for this study, such as WFC, exhaustion, and autonomy at work. There was a brief initial text describing the main topic of the questionnaire, which was telework, the requirements to participate, and the medium duration of the questionnaire (i.e., seven minutes), and it presented the informed consent. A group of students doing the thesis dissertation with the common telework

theme elaborated on the questionnaire; therefore, some scales will not be discussed because they are irrelevant to the study.

2.2.2.1 Work-Family Conflict

A five-item scale based on an adaptation from Simões and colleagues (2019) of the Work-Family Conflict and Family-Work Conflict by Netemeywe and colleagues (1996) was used to assess the WFC. The original scale has ten items, but since the present study only aimed to explore the work-life conflict, the five items related to the family-work conflict were removed. The five items focused solely on the work-family conflict and were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale (1- Totally disagree to 7 - Totally agree). An example of an item is “As exigências do meu trabalho interferem na minha vida familiar.”. The scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0,89$).

2.2.2.2 Exhaustion

Author's Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and as the name suggests, it evaluates the three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. The present study only used the five items referent to exhaustion, for example, “Sinto-me esgotado pelo meu trabalho.”. The items were answered on a frequency scale from one (i.e., Never) to seven (i.e., Always). The Portuguese version of the scale was taken from França (2021). The scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0,83$).

2.2.2.3 Autonomy

Karasek and colleagues (1998) developed a questionnaire about subjects related to work, the Job Content Questionnaire, that was previously translated into European Portuguese by Carvalho and Chambel (2014). For this questionnaire, the items used were related to workload, pressure, autonomy, and support. All the questionnaire items were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale (1- Totally disagree to 5 - Totally agree). In the present investigation, the autonomy dimension will be the only one analyzed, and an example of an item is “Tenho a possibilidade de decidir como organizar o meu trabalho.”. The scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0,82$).

2.3 Participants

2.3.1 Interview participants

There were seven interviews; five participants were women, and only two were men (Table 2.1). The initial contact with the participants cleared that any member of the couple could participate in the study, and generally, most couples decided that the woman should be interviewed. The number of children ranged from one to two per couple. Most participants totally teleworked, and only two participants had a hybrid working format.

Most participants started teleworking because of the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, before 2020, never had an experience in this regime. Only one participant teleworked only during short periods due to the flexibility his job allowed him.

Table 2.1

Interview participant's biographic information

Participant	Gender	Area	Number of children	Telework type
P1	Female	Call center manager	2	Totally teleworking
P2	Female	IT manager	2	Totally teleworking
P3	Male	Marketing manager	2	Hybrid
P4	Female	HR specialist	2	Totally teleworking
P5	Male	IT specialist	2	Totally teleworking
P6	Female	Teacher	1	Hybrid
P7	Female	HR specialist	1	Totally teleworking

Note. IT = Information Technology; HR = Human Resources

2.3.2 Questionnaire participants

The questionnaire had 911 valid answers, 608 were women (66,7%), and 303 were men (33,3%). The participants were between 19 and 69 years old, and the medium age was 36 years old. Most participants had at least a bachelor's degree (82,1%), about 17,6% completed high school, and only 0,3% could finish middle school.

About the telework choice, most of the participants chose to work in this regime because of their organization's incentive (48,1%), followed by the participants that chose to telework as an agreement between them and the organization they were employed (40,5%). The less common situation was when the participants were teleworking against their own will because it was imposed by their organization (1,4%).

The percentage of teleworking time was also variable in the sample: about 47,7% mentioned that they telework more than four days per week, followed by 16,7% of the participants who telework three days per week. The most uncommon situation in this sample is the participants who only telework one day per week (9,8%).

CHAPTER 3

Results

This chapter will focus on the interview and the questionnaire results. First, the analysis started with the qualitative data, followed by the quantitative data.

To analyze the qualitative data collected through the interviews, we performed a content analysis technique (Stemler, 2000). For this purpose, a table of categories (Appendix B) was created, with eight dimensions subdivided into categories that tapered the dimension they were included. The analysis of the quantitative data was made through the 28 version of the IBM SPSS Statistics software, and also PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017).

3.1 Qualitative results

It is possible to observe in Table 3.1 that there were eight dimensions analyzed in this study: the perspectives about telework, telework advantages, telework disadvantages, work-family conflict, work-family facilitation, autonomy, exhaustion, and the future of telework.

Table 3.1

Number of occurrences of all dimensions

Dimension	Number of occurrences
Perspectives about telework	24
Telework advantages	47
Telework disadvantages	93
Work-Family conflict	29
Work-family facilitation	66
Autonomy	15
Exhaustion	21
Future of telework	19

The disadvantages dimension was the one that registered more occurrences, followed by the advantages dimension of telework. This high level of occurrences can be justified by the interview script that focused on these two dimensions to understand better what made the participants prefer

the presential or the telework format. It is also important to note that the dimension of work-family facilitation had more occurrences than the work-family conflict, which might demonstrate that there might be more facilitators than expected that undermine the existing conflict.

3.1.1 Perspectives about telework

The perspectives about telework dimension focused on the preconceived opinion that the participants had about telework. First, the participants were asked to describe telework with three adjectives that could be categorized as positive or negative according to their valence. Participants were also asked to describe the challenges they faced during telework.

Table 3.2

Number of occurrences of perspectives about telework dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Perspectives about telework	Positive feelings	18	7
	Negative feelings	3	2
	Challenges	4	3

The positive feelings category, part of this dimension, had 18 occurrences (Table 3.2), and all participants shared their thoughts about it. When comparing the positive and negative feelings categories, it is possible to observe that the positive feelings category had the highest number of occurrences, and a higher number of participants mentioned it, which might mean that overall, participants consider telework more positive. The positive adjective used more often was flexibility, and the negative was exhausting.

The challenges category registered four occurrences from three participants, mentioning situations that could be considered threats that can disturb the course and the realization of telework. Participant P3 stated that the personal organization was the biggest challenge of telework (*“Acho que é o desafio sobretudo da organização até pessoal, portanto acho que as pessoas que*

têm mais essas capacidades e que são mais organizadas e conseguem fazer toda aquela gestão da agenda.”) and participant P1 said that a big challenge was the coexistence with the same people at all times (*“(…) mas às vezes sabe bem não nos vemos durante umas horas.”*).

3.1.2 Telework advantages

The advantages dimension of telework has seven categories and is the second to have more occurrences (Table 3.1). The interview deeply explored this dimension to understand what could lead people to choose this working format, resulting in many occurrences.

Table 3.3

Number of occurrences of telework advantages dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Telework advantages	Time spent commuting	2	2
	Contact with the family	11	3
	Economic reasons	2	2
	Productivity	6	4
	Flexibility	17	7
	Contact with the team	4	1

By observing Table 3.3, it is possible to note that the flexibility category registered more occurrences and was mentioned by all participants, meaning that it is more notable to participants that telework offers great flexibility of working hours and breaks which contributes to a better response to the family and personal needs as stated by participant P3 (*“Vantagens é esta flexibilidade, não é? O poder gerir o dia em função dos ritmos da própria pessoa, da sua produtividade, dos seus ritmos familiares, fisiológicos.”*).

Contact with the family is the second category of this dimension which registered more occurrences, revealing how the proximity to the family and the availability to answer to its’ needs is valued by the participants. Both the contact with their spouse (*“Tanto eu como o meu marido começámos a criar uma dinâmica muito própria, eu acho que até em termos humanos, houve aqui*

um fortalecimento da nossa relação de casal.”) and with their children (*“Eu tinha essa possibilidade, de parar 15 minutinhos para trocar ela para estar com ela um pouquinho. É, para, para dar de mamar, enfim então isso me facilitou.”)* were mentioned as an advantage by participants P7 and P4 respectively. However, there were only three participants referring this factor as a relevant advantage.

The third category that had more occurrences was the productivity, enlightening that participants considered that telework could improve their performance and results, Participant P7 mentioned that at home it was easier for her to concentrate than in the office (*“Eu acho que o facto de estar em casa consigo estar muito mais concentrada do que estar aqui num ambiente de escritório, até porque no ambiente de escritório nós trabalhávamos em open-space.”*). But some participants like P1 stated they did not feel any differences in their productivity levels (*“Não noto que tenha afetado a minha produtividade ou o período em que me sinto mais produtiva.”*).

The contact with the team category emerged from the participants' answers, having four occurrences (Table 3.3). In this category, the participants mentioned that telework was a contributing factor to approximate the team members as declared by participant P4 (*“Aqui neste formato remoto conseguimos trabalhar mais como uma equipa em termos globais (...) Ou seja, conseguimos interagir mais umas com as outras.”*).

The time spent commuting category had only two occurrences and was mentioned by two people, the same as the economic reasons category, revealing that even though these factors were considered important, they were not seen as highly relevant to this sample. Regarding a reduction of time spent commuting, participant P3 mentioned that telework saved time during his day that he could use to do something else. He stated that currently, taking his kids to school only takes seven minutes, and before teleworking, taking kids to school and then going to the organization's workspace took at least 50 minutes (*“(…) ganha-se tempo, como eu disse, por exemplo, eu saio de casa para levar os meus filhos à escola e volto e faço isto em sete minutos. Antigamente (...) demorava 50 minutos a chegar lá, dependendo do trânsito, 50 [minutos] a 1 hora, para lá e para cá.”*). The same participant highlighted the importance of cost reduction in commuting, food, and extracurricular activities for his children after school due to the work from home (*“Enfim, embora se gaste mais em casa de energia e alimentação e isso tudo, ainda assim compensa outros gastos de deslocações, alimentação fora (...) portanto isso significa pagar prolongamento nos colégios e nas escolas, atividades extracurriculares Acho que há imensa poupança financeira.”*).

3.1.3 Telework disadvantages

Along with the advantages category, it also explored the telework disadvantages, which constituted another dimension with more registered occurrences (Table 3.1). This dimension had eight categories, of which five were new categories suggested by the participants (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Number of occurrences of telework disadvantages dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Telework disadvantages	Work boundaries	12	6
	Health problems	5	2
	Workload	21	7
	Interruptions	11	5
	Social isolation	14	5
	Working conditions	11	5
	House chores	4	3
	Concerns with the company	10	3

The workload category was the one that registered more occurrences, 21 in total (Table 3.4) and all the participants gave examples of their personal experience. In this category participants reported that telework increased the hours spent working, as explained by participant P6 (*“Parece que o que o Covid trouxe é uma continuação, não consigo parar o meu dia aqui naquele deadline, naquele horário.”*), and four participants stated that the work overall felt more intense, like participant P5 (*“O que eu sinto é, o impacto do horário que é diferente. Explicando, uma reunião presencial, o cansaço é diferente de uma reunião remota.”*). Participant P2 mentioned that the extension of the working hours might have to do with a certain feeling of repaying the organization

the flexibility that it allowed (“(...) *há estas interrupções porque nos vêm interromper, acabamos por quebrar o nosso ritmo de trabalho e depois no fim do dia sentimos que ainda não fizemos ou sentimos que devíamos ter feito mais e acabamos por prolongar.*”).

Following, the social isolation, a new category that emerged from the collected data, had 14 occurrences from five participants. In this category individuals underlined how they felt telework was not responding to their social needs, as participant P2 explained she missed talking to people that were not in her household (“(...) *sinto falta é de ver outras pessoas também, de falar com outras pessoas, embora agente aqui também fale, mas não é igual.*”). It was also highlighted by the participants the weakening of social bonds between team members, participant P3 said that communication and team decision was much harder while teleworking (“*Tem sobretudo a ver com o trabalho colaborativo, ou seja, é mais difícil uma equipa trabalhar em equipa em remote (...) agora para resolvermos às vezes um problema minúsculo, um problema ou desafio qualquer, um brainstorm, ter uma ideia, avançar com uma coisa qualquer, é preciso mandar 50 emails ou marcar uma reunião.*”).

In the work boundaries category, which registered 12 occurrences and was mentioned by six participants, there were given examples of the difficulties individuals felt when establishing a limit of time and space to work and rest. The participants mentioned that they felt like they always had something to do during the day, either job-related or family related, meaning it was difficult to interrupt the day to have actual breaks and resting time. Participant P1 stated that the fact there were no ambience changes it was hard to understand when to stop (“*Não mudamos de ambiente quando terminamos o nosso horário de trabalho, parece que estamos num contínuo loop de trabalho.*”).

Tied with the same number of occurrences, is the working conditions and the interruptions category, both categories that emerged from the participants answers. In the first one mentioned, five participants gave 11 examples of the difficulties of not having an adequate space to telework. Participant P1 pointed out that individuals that did not have a particular place to work, such as an office or a desk, were the ones presenting more complains (“*Se não houver aqui a possibilidade das pessoas terem um espaço específico para trabalhar em que possam sair desse espaço para continuarem a sua vida pessoal, é muito difícil e traz muito desgaste emocional e psicológico.*”). Participants that spent a lot of time in videocalls also pointed out that not having a separate room from their partner was a difficulty, as participant P1 (“*As pessoas não têm um espaço preparado*

exclusivo para trabalhar em casa. Muitas das vezes não estão num espaço sozinhas a trabalhar e isso eu acho que é muito desgastante.”).

The interruptions category also had 11 occurrences by five participants, and individuals voiced how usually the interruptions happened. Participant P2 stated that with younger children there are more interruptions, and these are harder to control (*“Com crianças em casa acho que é muito difícil ser muito organizado nesse sentido [pausas e horários restritos] porque não depende só de nós.”*).

The concern with the company was a new category that emerged from the participant's answers and had ten occurrences from three participants. In this category, the participants specified their preoccupations about the impact of telework in the well-being of the company, participant P3 demonstrated his concern about the connection and commitment of the workers with the company (*“Mesmo para as organizações é mau nesse sentido, porque as pessoas têm menos vínculo emocional com as organizações e é preciso trabalhar isso doutras maneiras”*). Participant P7 also mentioned that it is more difficult to integrate someone in a company because all the interactions are formal and there are no coffee breaks with colleagues or time to talk about the personal life (*“Claramente a pandemia veio-nos dificultar a nós, aqui que estamos aqui com esta responsabilidade de acolher os novos trabalhadores do onboarding, é mais difícil.”*).

The health problems category related to the physical impact of telework registered five occurrences from two participants. Individuals mentioned sleep alterations, back pain, and a deep feeling of physical inertia. Participant P1 mentioned she realized that there was less movement and more laziness (*“Além de que ficamos muito mais preguiçosos, em casa não nos mexemos. Não há muito exercício.”*) The fact that not all participants mentioned the physical impact of telework might be associated with the fact that currently, the more significant part of this sample had appropriate conditions to work, which could attenuate the physical impact of working from home.

Lastly, the house chores category registered only four occurrences by three participants. This category reveals disagreement since two participants, like participant P1, stand by the opinion that telework increases the amount of house chores done, (*“Sim, porque estamos em casa acabamos sempre por desarrumar e sujar mais.”*) and the third participant, participant P3, disagrees, stating that being at home does not allow more flexibility to do those chores so they remain the same (*“Eu acho que é um mito essa história de «Ah em casa tenho mais flexibilidade porque assim consigo ir pôr uma máquina de roupa a lavar e estender».”*).

3.1.4 Work-family conflict

As a clear focus of this study, the conflict the participants felt between their work and family spheres was also analyzed in the interviews. As mentioned in the literature review, two types of conflict were considered: role-based and time-based conflict.

Table 3.5

Number of occurrences of work-family conflict dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Work-family conflict	Strain-based conflict	21	5
	Time-based conflict	7	3

The role conflict category registered 21 occurrences by five participants. In comparison, time conflict registered only seven occurrences by three participants (Table 3.5), demonstrating that individuals felt more pressure to conciliate their responsibilities as a worker and family members rather than separating the time to perform tasks for both spheres.

In the strain-based conflict category, participants often mentioned they had to work and care for their children simultaneously, as P1 refers “*Se já trabalhei com ela (a bebê) ao colo? Inúmeras vezes. Seja a dormir, seja entretida com algum brinquedo, mas é inevitável.*”, including one participant was interviewed while holding her child. Participants also mentioned they felt the pressure from both roles to fulfill their responsibilities. Participant P2 highlighted the pressure she felt to both respond to her children’s needs and keep the same outcomes at work (“*(...) foi sentir a pressão toda de ajudá-los a eles, não deixando o nosso trabalho para trás, não deixando as nossas responsabilidades e conseguir isto tudo.*”).

Related to time-based conflict, participant P2 mention that the absorption in their own work made her overlook their family needs (“*Outras vezes eu nem tinha tempo de lhe perguntar porque estava sempre ali em reuniões ocupada, só o ouvia depois dizer que não tinha feito a ficha ou o trabalho que tinha mandado fazer.*”). Furthermore, Participant P7 even mentioned that she was so engaged in her work that she often reduced her breaks and ended up having lunch during meetings (“*(...) se calhar já só vou almoçar à uma e um quarto, uma e meia, como a correr porque às duas*

horas já tenho uma reunião. Às vezes, por exemplo, se estamos aqui no teams temos as câmaras desligadas, ainda vou comendo alguma coisa e estou aqui na reunião às duas horas.”).

3.1.5 Work-family facilitation

The interview focused too on the work-family facilitation that could decrease the conflict's impact (Table 3.6). The category that revealed more occurrences was the house chores division, with 28 occurrences mentioned by all the participants. Most participants reported that they equally divided the house chores with their counterparts, as said by participant P5 (*“Sim, sim, é um casal moderno, então já ‘tamos 50/50.”*). Nevertheless, two participants reported there were still differences between the two parts. For example, participant P6 mentioned that if the house chores included the chores inside the house (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry), they equally divided the tasks, but if it included the children’s education, then she handled a higher percentage. Also, participant P4 stated she was much more overloaded with house chores than her husband, revealing a clear inequality (*“Eu vou ser um pouquinho legal com ele eu acho que pode ser 70% para mim e 30% para ele, sendo legal. A mim eu diria 90%, 10%.”*).

Table 3.6

Number of occurrences of work-family facilitation dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Work-family facilitation	House chores support	17	7
	Division of chores in the couple	28	7
	Strategies	21	6

The participants were also asked about possible fonts of support in the house chores, such as cleaning and taking care of the children, resulting in the house chores support category, which had 17 occurrences mentioned by all participants. The main font of support reported by the participants is a cleaning lady and the extracurricular activities after school to maintain the children occupied and they see this aid as very valuable, as exemplified by participant P1 (*“[ter ajuda] aligeira*

sempre aqui a realização das tarefas a tomar conta das meninas e também acabamos por conseguir fazer as coisas com maior descanso. Não há aquele stress que temos aquele tempo limitado para fazer alguma coisa porque temos de àquela hora temos de ficar com elas”).

It was also asked to the participants the strategies used to better coordinate the work and the family tasks and time, resulting in 21 occurrences mentioned by six participants. Two of the participants, like participant P3, mentioned that they try to organize their agendas and meetings with their partner so one of them is available to respond to the family needs (*“Mas tínhamos o horário deles [dos filhos] das ligações, das horas a que tinham que se ligar (...) o que eu fazia era, punha isso na minha agenda e tentava coordenar com a minha mulher.”*). Another strategy mentioned by two participants is blocking the professional agenda with family time, such as meals and drop offs at school, to guarantee available time to answer to the family and children needs, as explained by participant P5 (*“Aquele transporte escolar é uma reunião igual a qualquer outra, (...) qualquer agendamento que eu tenha na reunião, todos eles têm o mesmo grau de importância, se está lá é porque é importante.”*). Participant P2 said, the use of a smartphone was also mentioned as a strategy to be part of the meetings while doing tasks to respond to the family needs, such as picking up from school (*“(...) portanto acabava por dar hipótese de estarmos a ouvir e a participar na reunião pelo telemóvel e irmos acompanhando.”*).

3.1.6 Autonomy

The autonomy dimension has two categories, task interdependence with eight occurrences and the freedom to define the breaks with seven occurrences (Table 3.7). The participants stated that most of their tasks were completely independent but on tasks they depended on someone else they tend to get frustrated, as exemplified by participant P7 (*“Quando há aquelas situações em que estou dependente, às vezes gostava de ter as respostas mais rápidas.”*). Participant P3 represented an example of independence at his job, he stated that he had the freedom to define his breaks during the day (*“Aí tenho autonomia total [para definir as pausas], não nenhum report. E a minha equipa também comigo não o tem que fazer. Dentro da equipa comunicamos só por uma questão de conhecimento das pessoas saberem.”*).

Table 3.7

Number of occurrences of autonomy dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Autonomy	Task interdependence	8	6
	Freedom to define the breaks	7	4

3.1.7 Exhaustion

The exhaustion dimension was split into two categories: tiredness and stress (Table 3.8). The category which registered more occurrences was Tiredness, with 12 occurrences in total by five participants. Participants mentioned that telework often induced a higher level of tiredness due to the higher demands and the constant need of focus, as explained by participant P1 (*“Muito exigente e muito desgastante para todos porque estamos sempre no limite do nosso esforço, da nossa concentração, da nossa paciência.”*). Even though the participants mentioned physical tiredness, the biggest focus was psychological fatigue. Participant P7 (*“(…) chegamos ao final de um ano e sentimo-nos muito mais cansados ou um cansaço psicológico muito maior do que se calhar se eu estivesse presencial.”*).

Table 3.8

Number of occurrences of exhaustion dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Exhaustion	Tiredness	12	5
	Stress	9	5

The stress category, which registered nine occurrences and was mentioned by five participants, also demonstrated that telework negatively affected the stress levels of most individuals. Participant P6 clarified she felt more stress while working on this format (*“(…) porque eu ficava num stress tão grande, uma angústia tão grande que eu não tinha espaço para mais nada (…)”*).

However, two participants, such as participant P7, mentioned that even though the beginning of telework was stressful, nowadays, they do not consider telework more stressful than working at the office (*“É menos stressante, porque em termos de horários, não é aquela rigidez que tenho de sair a esta hora de casa porque depois tenho de ir pôr o miúdo à escola.”*).

3.1.8 Future of telework

The last dimension refers to the future of telework, the perspectives, preferences, and suggestions that participants might have to improve the quality of telework. The seven participants reported that this dimension had 19 occurrences in total (Table 3.9). Six of the participants said they would prefer the hybrid working format that could allow them to work from home at least two or three days per week, participant P4 said (*“Eu acho que o misto é bom, acho que o misto faz bem. (...) Acho que faz um bocadinho falta essa parte mais social dentro do próprio trabalho.”*) and participant P7 even said the full remote would be the best option for her (*“Se eu tivesse que dizer, aqui à escolha, remoto, híbrido ou on site, eu claramente não teria dúvidas no remoto.”*). Therefore, we can deduce a clear tendency to prefer to telework over the presential working format.

Table 3.9

Number of occurrences of future of telework dimension

Dimension	Category	Number of occurrences	Number of participants who mentioned it
Future of telework	Future of telework	19	7

3.2 Quantitative results

3.2.1 Descriptive analysis and correlation between variables

Preceding the model analysis, the variables and the covariates were descriptively analyzed, as demonstrated in Table 3.10. It is possible to note that for the covariate group, the higher mean score was for the teleworking hours ($M = 38,5$; $SD = 8,6$), followed by the age of the participants ($M = 36,3$; $SD = 11,9$). In the variable group, the autonomy was the one with the higher mean scores (M

= 3,7; $SD = 0,7$), followed by exhaustion ($M = 3,6$; $SD = 1,0$) and the work-family conflict was the one with lower ($M = 3,3$; $SD = 1,4$).

The correlations between the variables were also analyzed to understand better how the variables interacted with each other. Firstly, we can infer that the work-family conflict is moderate positively and significantly correlated with exhaustion ($r = 0,50$; $p < 0,01$) but it has a negative weak but significant correlation with autonomy ($r = -0,19$; $p < 0,01$). Lastly, the exhaustion and the autonomy have a negatively weak but significant correlation ($r = -0,32$; $p < 0,01$).

Table 3.10

Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for study variables

Variables	M (SD)	Minim Maxim		1	2	3	4	5	6
		um	um						
1. Sex	-	-	-	-					
2. Age	36,3 (11,9)	19	69	-,03					
3. Number of children	0,8 (1,0)	0	5	,02	,64**				
4. Teleworking hours	38,5 (8,6)	6	65	,06	,08*	,02			
5. WFC	3,3 (1,4)	1	7	-,07*	,18**	,17**	,13**		
6. Exhaustion	3,6 (1,0)	1	6,83	-,11**	-,01	-,04	,08*	,50**	
7. Autonomy	3,7 (0,7)	1	5	,09**	,15**	,08*	,08*	-,19**	-,32**

Note. $N = 911$; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$

3.2.2 Regression analysis

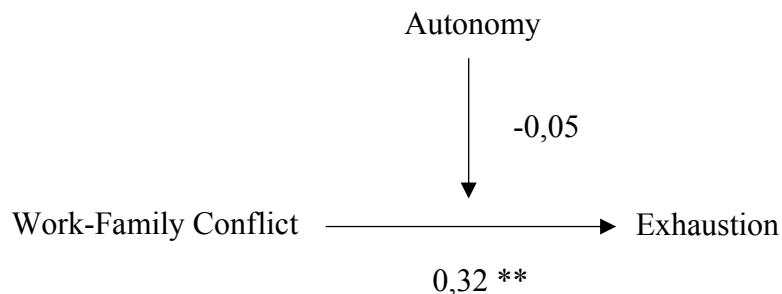
To test the model and the hypothesis that the work-family conflict generates more emotional exhaustion and that more autonomy at work can moderate this relationship, it was carried a regression analysis with the following co-variates: sex, age, number of children and number of teleworking hours. The results presented in Appendix D show that the linear model can explain about 33,0% ($R^2 = 0,33$) of the variation of emotional exhaustion that is significant ($F(7,903) = 62,30$, $p < 0,001$). These findings mean that the model weakly to moderately explains the changes in the exhaustion levels of the participants.

In addition, we can also note that the work-family conflict is positively related to exhaustion, and the effect is significant ($B = 0,32$, $t = 16,39$, $p < 0,001$), revealing that the higher the levels of work-family conflict, the higher the exhaustion felt by the individual. However, it is important to note that this relationship is weak to moderate.

Last, we can also infer that the interaction effect between the work-family conflict and autonomy does not affect exhaustion ($B = -0,05$, $t = -1,74$, $p = 0,083$), expressing that even though the relationship between work-family conflict and exhaustion is significant, the level of autonomy does not affect this relationship (Figure 1).

Figure 3.1

Autonomy as a moderator on the relationship between WFC and exhaustion



Note. ** $p < 0,01$

The gathered information demonstrates that the model suggested based on the literature review is not confirmed since the autonomy level does not affect the relationship between WFC and exhaustion. Nonetheless, the qualitative results might express a possible justification that will be further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Telework has been a working format rising in the past years, and since the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been even more used by organizations and workers all over the globe. Due to its ascension and globalization, it is crucial to understand which factors might protect individuals and which might contribute to a worse experience. The present investigation intended to verify if there was a positive relationship between the WFC and exhaustion and if this relationship was moderated by autonomy in a way that more autonomy would decrease the relationship between the first two mentioned.

A mixed method was used to better understand how the variables affected each other. Data were gathered through questionnaire distribution and interviews. Combining both types of results allowed a broader knowledge of the topic. As mentioned before, merging the two methods allows us to quantify the strength of the relationships between variables and understand their reasons.

The quantitative data revealed that an individual's autonomy level does not moderate the relationship between WFC and emotional exhaustion, disagreeing with the literature prediction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Karasek, 1979). Nevertheless, the relationship between WFC and exhaustion was confirmed to be consistent with the literature presented, yet this relationship had a weak to moderate relation.

Through the correlation analysis, it is possible to deduce that the gender of the participants influenced the WFC, exhaustion, and autonomy levels. The results reveal that women report higher levels of WFC and exhaustion and lower levels of autonomy at their jobs. These findings are congruent with the predictions from the present literature review and corroborate the findings from Ghislieri and colleagues (2022), who found that women report higher levels of WFC and exhaustion. The same investigation also pointed out that according to the Job-Demands Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), women have lower levels of recovery, meaning that besides feeling more exhaustion and conflict in managing the spheres of work and family, women tend to have trouble recovering the resources spent at work.

A greater conflict and exhaustion felt by women might be explained by the fact that even though men are increasing their participation in household chores, there is no equal division between the couple's feminine and masculine parts (Pinto et al., 2018). Portuguese families still

hold a traditional organization of work division, with the woman spending more time caring for the domestic chores, especially the children's care, than the male counterpart (Ribeiro et al., 2015). Since the female figure in the couple is more responsible for the house chores, her time off work is absorbed by the family needs, meaning it becomes hard to recover the resources spent during working hours.

The lower level of autonomy in their jobs reported by women corroborates the findings from Leineweber and colleagues (2018), who stated that women overall have less flexibility in their jobs than men. These autonomy and flexibility discrepancies might be related to differences in the positions of power occupied by each gender. In a study that analyzed the Portuguese public administration, the authors concluded that there was still vertical segregation, meaning that women are in fewer management positions despite being in a greater number (Rato et al., 2007, as cited in Monteiro et al., 2015). Thus, women feel they do not have as much autonomy as men, who occupy higher organizational positions.

The number of children also correlated with higher WFC and autonomy levels. In this study, the number of children was positively related to the WFC level, which is congruent with the findings from Zhao and colleagues (2020), who found that the number of children predicted WFC. Furthermore, the number of children was also positively related to autonomy at work, which might mean that individuals with greater autonomy at their jobs are more prone to having more children since their jobs guarantee them the flexibility to have a better work-family balance.

Even though the results do not support the hypothesis, it is important to analyze and combine the quantitative and the qualitative results to understand and explain the result better. First, it is important to consider that the questionnaire collected data for almost eight weeks, and only in the first two weeks the telework format was mandatory to what was decreed by the Portuguese government (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2022). Therefore, most of the time, the questionnaire participants were individuals who teleworked entirely or partially by choice. Therefore, the participants in this investigation were mainly analytical workers since the caseworkers could already work from the organization's workspace. This information is important because it might explain the weak relationship between WFC and exhaustion since these participants might not consider telework a source of conflict but rather a source of balance (Bolbol & Zalut, 2022).

The results obtained through the qualitative method reveal that the flexibility category was mentioned more often by all participants from the advantage dimension and the workload category from the disadvantage dimension. These results indicate that participants consider telework offers great flexibility to adjust their working hours and tasks to their personal and familial needs. However, there is a clear tendency to exacerbate the workload and to extend the working hours through this working format. These results might be connected since a high level of flexibility at work might also lead to a tendency to extend the working hours. For example, in an organization where it is normal for employees to make changes in their schedule, there is a tendency for employees to keep working or even just answer emails after the working hours agreed in their contract since it is a common practice in that workplace.

Through the qualitative data, it is possible to understand that the couples highlighted the strategies developed to detour the negative factors of telework. Through the interviews, the participants mentioned the problems that telework brought (e.g., working in the same space as their kids or spouse) and the strategies found to bypass it (e.g., everyone used earphones). The central focus on the developed strategies reveals that when the interviews were conducted, the individuals had already found ways to neutralize the negative impacts of telework. The sample appeared to have already managed the main telework disadvantages, which might be why they did not see telework as harmful as predicted in the literature. Another interesting finding from the qualitative part of the study is the two couples who moved into a new house after the beginning of telework. This information contributes to the evidence that the sample had some economic power that allowed significant adjustments to improve life quality during telework.

Through the analysis of the interviews, it was possible to understand that couples who had younger children had more difficulties when working from home. The unexpected interruptions were the most relevant consequence of having younger children at home. Parents with smaller children felt like the interruptions were very hard to manage because they had to mandatorily stop what they were doing to respond to their child's needs since the child was utterly dependent. These interruptions, which could happen during an important meeting or a highly demanding task, could impact their perspectives on telework, making them feel like teleworking was very demanding.

These interruptions were specifically hard to deal with for participant P4, who had a young daughter at one year old and an older daughter at seven years old, and whose husband did not regularly participate in the house chores. Associated with this low level of support from her spouse

was a high level of conflict, verified in 13 occurrences on the conflict dimension, the highest among all the participants. In comparison, participant P1, who had similar familiar conditions and had two daughters, one at eight months old and another at ten years old, registered fewer occurrences in the conflict dimension. This difference between the two cases might be related to the fact that the last couple reported an equal division of house chores, which might prevent conflict.

Another factor that seemed to greatly influence the telework perspectives was the type of career. Participant P6, a teacher, revealed that telework was one of her worst experiences, and she considers her job extremely hard in this format. She stated that telework required much more effort, and she recognized that she never had resting time. She felt like she was always working, and her job was continually delayed compared to the regular timings from presential teaching. This finding is supported by Lizana and Vega-Fernandez (2021), whose investigation showed that primary and secondary school teachers felt that they increased their working hours during the COVID-19 pandemic and negatively impacted their work-family balance, meaning the work-family conflict increased.

An interesting piece of information obtained through the interviews was that no participants stated they would want to return to work solely on the presential format. Instead, almost all the participants affirmed they would like to keep the hybrid working format, with a clear tendency to telework (e.g., two days at the office, three days teleworking). For example, participant P6 declared that even though she would like to keep the classes in the presential format, she would prefer to keep the meetings with her colleagues in the telework format since they felt more productive. Participant P7 even said that she would rather work from home solely. Participants also gave suggestions about what could improve the telework experience, such as proper support from employers and organizations that could help make the working space at home adequate. This support could include a plafond for each employee to purchase chairs, desks, and screens or a plafond to help support the electric and connection bills.

These preferences highlight that all the participants from this sample would enjoy doing at least one part of their jobs through telework. Therefore, we can assume that the telework perspective is not as harmful as predicted in the literature, at least for the inquired sample, and that the number of individuals working on this format will likely grow. In that sense, whenever possible, companies should keep investing in making telework more accessible to everyone by digitalizing their processes and offering adequate monetary support to their workers. Of course, the

organization cannot change some individual factors, such as the number of children per employee, but employers can have good management practices to support their workers.

4.1 Implications

The results and conclusions of the present investigation might contribute to changes that organizations can make to improve the telework quality and, consequently, the life quality of their employees. First, considering the participants' opinions, there is a clear tendency to choose telework or the hybrid format whenever possible. The presential work format is now seen by many as a requirement to deal with tasks too demanding to be done online, which usually include teamwork, and it is also seen as a tool to settle social needs.

The interview data also suggested that the participants thought the online meetings were exaggerated and sometimes unnecessary, which could disturb their productivity and work-family balance. Therefore, organizations should try to decrease the number of meetings, having only meetings considered essential to solve problems requiring a conversation. For instance, meetings with the sole purpose of allocating functions or inspecting the evolution of a task or project could be replaced with tools such as Trello, which allows managers and team members to create a shared task subdivided into smaller individual steps that can be described in detail and update on the task progress.

Participants also mentioned that telework could be improved if organizations could monetarily help their workers. For example, working from home might decrease the amount of money spent on telecommuting or for meals outside the house, but it also increases the amount spent on electric or internet bills. Therefore, to help the teleworkers, the organization could provide a plafond to mitigate the economic spending associated with working from home. In addition, the organization could also help their workers to have a better work environment at home with more ergonomic furniture. Most workers did not have a house prepared for telework or even a specific place or room to spend the whole day working. As a result, many people developed musculoskeletal complications and had to purchase furniture that would contribute to a more comfortable work environment (e.g., office chairs, proper lighting). Therefore, companies could offer a subvention that could either restore the money the employees had already spent or help them purchase new items to upgrade their workspace.

4.2 Limitations

The present study had, however, some limitations that should be considered when analyzing the data. First, the data was collected during a period when telework was mandatory (i.e., only two weeks) and when telework was an option (i.e., for nearly four weeks); hence, most participants chose to telework, and the perceptions obtained might be skewed. To choose to telework implies they had the means to maintain their work from home and they had managed or could manage the negative factors it might have. So, the sample used might be formed by teleworkers that already had good working conditions, which might be related to the lower levels of WFC and exhaustion and higher levels of autonomy.

Another limitation was finding participants for the interviews because of the requirements they had to fill in. The requirement that was harder to fulfill was the teleworking partner since many people had already returned to work in their organization's workspace. So even though the saturation level was not reached, it was not possible to do more interviews since participants could not be found.

Another important limitation of this study is that more sociographic information could have been collected about the interview participants to better understand the working and familial conditions. In addition, more information about the participants would also contribute to adequately generalizing these conclusions.

4.3 Future research

The fact that the hypothesis of the present study was not verified intensifies the need for future research that can help comprehend the factors that make telework a better working format.

Primarily, it would be relevant to replicate the study now since nowadays telework is no longer mandatory by the government; therefore, the individuals who practice it might have a better perspective of its benefits and advantages.

To further explore this future topic, research should interview both couples with children and couples without children to infer if there are differences between these two conditions. Since the number of children seems to interfere with the WFC, couples who do not have children might score lower for WFC and therefore have a better perspective on telework.

Since there are also differences between the female and the male part of the couple relating to the WFC, exhaustion, and autonomy, which are mostly related to the traditional gender roles in

families, it would be interesting to interview homosexual couples. Lesbian and gay couples do not attribute specific tasks according to gender as heterosexual couples do; consequently, the house chores division is much more balanced (Bauer, 2016). The comparison through qualitative data collection could extract some conclusions about how different households manage their chores, and it would clarify if the management is based on the gender of each individual.

Even though the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic is now over, telework is far from being gone. The energy crisis we now live in that aroused by various factors such as the extreme weather conditions in the past years, the post-covid recovery, and the conflict between European Union and Russia, among others, resulted in a significant increase in gas prices all over the world (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/europes-energy-crisis-conundrum>). The augmentation of energy prices might be a reason for organizations to encourage their workers to keep or shift to the teleworking format, as telework is a way to reduce energy costs for organizations (Hook et al., 2020). However, the workers will have higher electric bills, which will probably lead to conflict between the employees and the employers if the latter does not attribute a subsidy to their workers. Therefore, telework will still be an essential key for many organizations to function, and it is far from being completely understood. Therefore, it should keep being studied to create policies and laws that allow employees to have the best possible experience while teleworking since this working format is likely to keep growing and expanding.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many problems and restricted social contact, affecting the economy and all organizations worldwide. Suddenly, telework was mandatory for most people, forcing them to adapt quickly to a new form of living. The present investigation aimed to understand how the WFC related to exhaustion and whether autonomy at work influenced this relationship.

To study the topic mentioned above, there were questionnaires and interviews utilized. The purpose of combining both methods was to have a more profound quantitative and qualitative knowledge about how people felt while teleworking.

Through the mixed method, it was possible to know that the autonomy level had no significant influence on the relationship between WFC and exhaustion. A possible explanation is that the relationship between WFC and exhaustion was already weak to moderate, and the sample possibly comprised individuals who were already teleworking comfortably. Furthermore, since the data collection was done mainly during a period when telework was no longer mandatory, the participants who were teleworking, partially or totally, because they chose to. Therefore, most people who participated in the study probably had a good experience while teleworking and had already found strategies to deal with its negative consequences.

An important finding of the present investigation was that women were more affected by telework. Overall, women felt more WFC, more exhaustion, and felt like they had less autonomy at work. These findings corroborated the literature, which stated that women had a worse experience teleworking when in comparison to men. These findings might be related to the fact that women are usually more prone to participate in investigations, so more data is collected about this group. Another possible explanation is that this topic is more important to women since they are more affected by adverse conditions of teleworking. Moreover, these findings have greater importance since they represent the gender differences that still exist in Portuguese society, which still places the woman as the primary caregiver and responsible for chores.

Another factor that impacted the WFC is that people with children feel it is more challenging to balance their work and family spheres when teleworking. The qualitative information added that younger children are harder to deal with when teleworking and have a greater impact than independent children.

Finally, it is also possible to understand that most people see the hybrid working format, tendentially teleworking more days, as the future. Even though all the interview participants gave many examples about the disadvantages and the negative impacts of telework, not a single participant said he or she would like to go back to presential at full time, which represents a great desire from the workers to keep telework as a working format in their lives. Furthermore, it also appears that telework is a decision made as a couple. Most of the people that were teleworking did not have their partner also working from home, hence the difficulty in finding participants for the qualitative study. Therefore, we can infer that the choice of teleworking was probably made as a couple considering their difficulties and strategies in working both from home.

In conclusion, telework should be studied and invested in since many people want to keep this working format, and it also represents many advantages for organizations. Furthermore, organizations can intervene and create better conditions for their workers by offering them financial support and changing policies that will decrease the negative aspects of telework (e.g., more flexibility and autonomy, increased support for conditions in the home office, fewer meetings). Therefore, telework is likely to keep growing, and it is important to keep studying it.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview

A presente entrevista surge no âmbito do Mestrado de Psicologia Social e das Organizações no Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa e tem como objetivo analisar o impacto do teletrabalho nos trabalhadores.

A sua participação neste estudo é voluntária, anónima e confidencial, podendo escolher participar ou não participar.

Se escolher participar, pode interromper a entrevista em qualquer momento.

Peço-lhe que autorize a gravação da entrevista para que os dados sejam tratados posteriormente com vista a melhor entender este contexto de trabalho.

1. Quais são os 3 adjetivos que lhe ocorrem quando pensa no teletrabalho?
2. Quando esteve pela primeira vez em teletrabalho?
 - a. No último ano, quanto tempo esteve em teletrabalho?
 - b. E o seu/sua parceiro/a?
3. Como foi a decisão de estar em teletrabalho?
4. Descreva, por favor, um dia típico em regime de teletrabalho.
 - a. O horário que faz é semelhante ao que fazia quando trabalhava presencialmente
 - b. Sente que existem muitas interrupções?
 - c. Sente que existem partes do dia em que consegue ser mais produtivo?
5. Quais as principais diferenças entre o trabalho presencial e o online? (abordar possíveis vantagens e desvantagens)
6. Existem situações em que prolonga o seu horário de trabalho? (responder a emails, ajudar a resolver problemas de colegas que o contactam depois da hora)
 - a. Exemplos de situações
 - b. Porque o faz?
7. Tendo em conta as tarefas que tem de cumprir num dia normal de trabalho, tem a possibilidade de definir quando as realizar? (poder definir um horário mais conveniente

para as realizar – sesta dos filhos -, definir as próprias pausas de acordo com as necessidades – ir buscar os filhos à escola)

- a. Tem de informar a sua chefia quando o faz? Tem de justificar?
 - b. A realização das suas tarefas laborais é dependente de terceiros na organização?
Tal (in)dependência diria que facilita?
8. Sente que trabalha mais ou menos horas? Porquê?
 9. Quanto tempo acha que dedica às suas tarefas domésticas? (e.g., limpar, cozinhar, tomar conta dos filhos, compras)
 10. Tem filhos? Que idades têm?
 11. Como descreveria a divisão de tarefas domésticas em casa?
 - a. Percentagem para o próprio e para o cônjuge ou suporte
 12. Tem algum tipo de suporte na realização de tarefas domésticas? (e.g., empregada doméstica, ajuda de vizinhos/amigos, ajuda de avós, filhos mais velhos)
 - a. Com que frequência?
 - b. Sente que a sua ajuda é vantajosa?
 13. Que estratégias utiliza para conciliar a sua vida pessoal e o teletrabalho? (pedir exemplos do dia-a-dia) (e.g., levar as crianças à escola, horas das refeições – incluindo preparação -, interrupções por parte de filhos, espaço apenas para trabalho)
 14. Qual o maior desafio do teletrabalho?
 15. Sentiu alguma mudança na sua saúde devido ao teletrabalho?
 - a. No final do dia sente-se mais ou menos cansado do que se estivesse a trabalhar presencialmente?
 - b. Relativamente ao stress, diria que os níveis aumentaram ou diminuíram?
 - c. Sintomas físicos (dor de costas, dores de cabeça, olhos...)
 16. Prefere estar em teletrabalho ou trabalhar presencialmente?
 17. Para se manter em teletrabalho o que acha que poderia facilitar a realização do teletrabalho?
 - a. E da parte da organização?

Appendix B – Categories dictionary

Table of categories

Dimension	Categories	Definition	Source	Example
Telework perspectives	Positive feelings	Positive adjectives associated with telework and its impacts	Nguyen & Armoogum (2021)	<i>“Flexibilidade”</i>
	Negative feelings	Negative adjectives associated with telework and its impacts	Nguyen & Armoogum (2021)	<i>“Desgaste”</i>
	Challenges	Situations and factors that were considered hard to overcome	Saragih et al. (2021)	<i>“Estarmos todos dentro da mesma casa permanentemente, não que haja algum desentendimento ou o que seja mas às vezes sabe bem não nos vemos durante umas horas”</i>
Telework advantages	Time spent commuting	Less time spent traveling to the workplace	Silva & Melo (2018)	<i>“Já não temos a necessidade em perder tempo em deslocções”</i>
	Contact with the family	Higher chances of interacting and responding to the family's needs	Beauregard et al. (2019)	<i>“Aproveitamos vamos levar o miúdo à escola e ainda temos tempo para tomar um cafézinho e fazemos isto em conjunto, coisa</i>

			<i>que não acontecia antes do covid, porque cada um ia para o seu sítio”</i>
Economic reasons	Reduction of general costs of transport and meals	Bolbol & Zalat (2022)	<i>“Enfim, embora se gaste mais em casa de energia e alimentação e isso tudo, ainda assim compensa outros gastos de deslocações, alimentação fora”</i>
Productivity	Productivity levels increase or stay stabilized	Beauregard et al. (2019)	<i>“Eu acho que o meu rendimento é igual durante o dia, de uma forma geral, depende da demanda.”</i>
Flexibility	More flexibility to adjust tasks and working hours to the personal and family needs	Leineweber et al. (2018)	<i>“A gestão de tempo, o equilíbrio entre a nossa vida pessoal e profissional acaba por ser mais flexível.”</i>
Contact with the team	Increased contact with the team members	Emergent from participant’s answers	<i>“Aqui neste formato remoto conseguimos trabalhar mais como uma equipa em termos globais, não haver esta diferença dos três sites.”</i>

Telework disadvantages	Work boundaries	Trouble separating time and space to work and rest	Thulin et al. (2019)	<i>“Acaba por ser o lado menos bom talvez do teletrabalho porque temos tudo no mesmo sítio, sem sair do mesmo sítio, mas também é muita pressão vinda de todos os lados”</i> <i>“A parte física está totalmente afetada pela inércia que temos aqui. Sai de uma cadeira, vai para o sofá, acaba por ser um exercício muito mais reduzido do que faríamos fora de casa”</i> <i>“Estando em casa então principalmente, porque você está ali, você não tem hora. Da empresa, você tem que levantar e vir para casa, vai fechar, então a tendência é trabalhar mais em casa, eu acredito que sim.”</i> <i>“Aqui não há o pedido de com licença nem se faz favor, eles</i>
	Health problems	More diagnosed diseases and physical pain	Bolbol & Zalat (2022)	
	Workload	Augmentation of the work intensity and working hours	Abendroth & Reimann (2018)	
	Interruptions	More interruptions by the family members	Thulin et al. (2019)	

			<i>interrompem e pronto. E se o colega sempre pede se faz favor e é possível, eles não, eles entram e pronto.”</i> <i>“Então acho que a grande, a grande diferença eu posso dizer que é uma desvantagem porque eu acho que nós, seres humanos, precisamos disso, a gente precisa desse contato social.”</i> <i>“Com as crianças em casa, fechava-me no quarto, basicamente. Portanto havia dias em que tudo aquilo é deprimente, eu estar a trabalhar aqui e a cama ao lado, onde durmo e depois levanto-me da cama para vir para o computador, tudo isso é deprimente.”</i>
Social Isolation	Increased social isolation boosted by reduced contact with colleagues	Emergent from participant’s answers	
Working conditions	Poor working conditions and lack of adequate equipment	Emergent from participant’s answers	

	House chores	Increased time spent on household tasks (e.g., cleaning, cooking)	Emergent from participant's answers	<i>“Nós tentamos sempre esticar um bocadinho, ver como é que fazemos, adiantar o almoço é no intervalo de uma reunião para outra”</i> <i>“Está no seu escritório que é o seu home-office, portanto é igual (...) mesmo para as organizações é mau nesse sentido, porque as pessoas têm menos vínculo emocional com as organizações e é preciso trabalhar isso doutras maneiras.”</i> <i>“Foi mesmo esse, deles estarem ali, um bocado à nossa responsabilidade também, durante o período das aulas e nós termos que garantir que estava a correr tudo bem para eles, mas também para nós no nosso trabalho”</i>
	Concerns with the company	General concerns with the well-being of the company	Emergent from participant's answers	
Work-family conflict	Strain-based conflict	Trouble in managing the responsibilities and roles from both work and the family area	Wang et al. (2021)	

Work-family facilitation	Time-based conflict	Difficulties in managing time attributed to each work task	Wang et al. (2021)	<i>“Depois que ela dorme, à noite ou depois do jantar dela eu venho e trabalho mais um pouco, eu faço de acordo com a necessidade.”</i> <i>“A mais velha neste momento até nem está aqui em casa, está em casa dos meus pais, porque também lá acaba por nos facilitar a nossa logística aqui porque com uma é muito mais fácil do que com duas”</i> <i>“Com uma bebé tem de estar sempre um com ela enquanto o outro faz alguma coisa, sinto que independentemente de ser eu a estar com ela ou nós estamos sempre os dois com alguma gestão doméstica em curso”</i> <i>“Então a primeira organização foi claramente assumir as refeições como uma reunião de</i>
	House chores support	External help in accomplishing the house chores (e.g., cleaning, taking care of children)	Wang et al. (2021)	
	Division of chores in the couple	Distribution of the house chores by the two elements of the couple	Leineweber et al. (2018)	
	Strategies	Strategies utilized to overcome the negative aspects of telework	Biron et al. (2022)	

Autonomy	Task interdependence	The tasks depend on other team members	Windeler et al. (2017)	<i>trabalho. Das 8h às 9h é o pequeno almoço, então já está bloqueado”</i> <i>“Talvez porque existem situações em que sou completamente autónoma, portanto, fazer os onboardings, não estou dependente de ninguém (...) Quando há aquelas situações em que estou dependente, às vezes gostava de ter as respostas mais rápidas”</i> <i>“Isso (ir buscar os filhos) quer dizer que eu tenho que sair as 15h30. Se não fosse esta flexibilidade poderia ser um problema, havendo esta flexibilidade acaba por alterar a minha rotina, mas não é um problema.”</i>
	Freedom to define breaks	Possibility of defining the own breaks during the working hours	Kim et al. (2020)	

Exhaustion	Tiredness	Increased reports of tiredness by the workers	Leineweber et al. (2018)	<i>“É muito exigente e muito desgastante para todos porque estamos sempre no limite do nosso esforço, da nossa concentração, da nossa paciência.”</i>
	Stress	Increased reports of stress by the workers	Spagnoli & Molinaro (2020)	<i>“O ensino à distância absorve de tal forma as minhas capacidades, a minha atenção, minha concentração...porque eu ficava num stress tão grande, uma angústia tão grande que eu não tinha espaço para mais nada.”</i>

Appendix C – Online Questionnaire

O presente estudo surge no âmbito do Mestrado de Psicologia Social e das Organizações no Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa e tem como objetivo analisar o impacto do teletrabalho nos trabalhadores. Deste modo, se está atualmente em regime de teletrabalho (total ou parcial), pedimos a sua colaboração, que será muito valorizada, através do preenchimento de um breve questionário com duração aproximada de 7 minutos.

A participação neste estudo é voluntária, anónima e confidencial, podendo escolher participar ou não participar.

Se escolher participar, pode interromper a participação em qualquer momento sem ter de prestar qualquer justificação, as suas respostas não serão gravadas.

Os dados destinam-se apenas a tratamento estatístico e nenhuma resposta será analisada ou reportada individualmente.

A sua participação é fundamental, pois vai permitir compreender o impacto do teletrabalho no bem-estar dos trabalhadores, possibilitando às organizações uma melhor adaptação a este contexto.

Obrigada pela sua participação, e pelo tempo dispensado.

Qualquer dúvida não hesite em contactar a equipa:

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Caracterização da situação profissional

Está a trabalhar atualmente?

- Sim
- Não

Realiza pelo menos uma parte do seu trabalho em teletrabalho? (total ou parcial)

- Sim
- Não

A decisão de estar em teletrabalho foi:

- Minha, totalmente voluntária
- Por iniciativa minha
- Por vontade de ambas as partes
- Por iniciativa da organização
- Imposta pela organização, contra a minha vontade

Em média, quantas horas trabalha por semana? _____

No último mês, qual a percentagem aproximada de tempo que esteve em teletrabalho?

- Até 20% (cerca de 1 dia por semana em teletrabalho)
- Entre 21% e 40% (cerca de 2 dias por semana em teletrabalho)
- Entre 41% e 60% (cerca de 3 dias por semana em teletrabalho)
- Entre 61% e 80% (cerca de 4 dias por semana em teletrabalho)
- Mais de 80% (mais do que 4 dias por semana em teletrabalho)

Indique, por favor, o seu grau de concordância com cada uma das seguintes afirmações, tendo em conta as suas experiências em casa e no trabalho durante o regime de teletrabalho.

1. As exigências do meu trabalho interferem na minha vida familiar.
2. O tempo que ocupo com o meu trabalho dificulta o cumprimento das minhas responsabilidades familiares.
3. Algumas tarefas que gostaria de realizar em casa não aparecem feitas devido às minhas exigências profissionais.
4. O meu trabalho não permite ausências por motivos familiares.
5. Para cumprir adequadamente os deveres profissionais, tenho de fazer alterações nas minhas atividades familiares.

Discordo Totalmente	Discordo	Discordo ligeiramente	Não concordo nem discordo	Concordo ligeiramente	Concordo	Concordo Totalmente
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Considerando os seus sentimentos em relação ao regime de teletrabalho, avalie a frequência de cada um dos seguintes sentimentos, utilizando a escala que se segue:

1. Sinto-me emocionalmente esgotado pelo meu trabalho.
2. Sinto-me desgastado no fim do dia de trabalho.
3. Sinto-me fatigado quando acordo de manhã e tenho de enfrentar mais um dia de trabalho.
4. Trabalhar durante o dia é realmente uma pressão para mim.
5. Sou capaz de resolver eficazmente os problemas que surgem no meu local de trabalho.
6. Sinto-me esgotado pelo meu trabalho.

Nunca	Quase Nunca	Algumas Vezez	Às vezes	Frequentemente	Muito Frequentemente	Sempre
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Considerando as suas tarefas profissionais durante o regime de teletrabalho, indique por favor o seu grau de concordância com as afirmações que se seguem.

1. O meu trabalho exige que eu trabalhe depressa.
2. O meu trabalho exige que eu trabalhe intensamente.
3. No meu trabalho, tenho uma grande quantidade de coisas para fazer.
4. Não tenho tempo para fazer todo o meu trabalho.
5. Tenho demasiado trabalho para fazer.

6. Sinto que não tenho tempo para terminar o meu trabalho.
7. Tenho de lidar com exigências contraditórias no meu trabalho.
8. Tenho a possibilidade de decidir como organizar o meu trabalho.
9. Tenho o controlo sobre o que acontece no meu trabalho.
10. O meu trabalho permite-me tomar decisões por mim próprio.
11. No meu trabalho é-me pedido que tome as minhas próprias decisões.
12. Se realmente precisar, sei que a minha chefia tomará a iniciativa de me ajudar.
13. A minha chefia compreende os meus problemas e necessidades.
14. A minha chefia reconhece o meu potencial.
15. A minha chefia tem confiança em mim para defender as minhas decisões, mesmo na minha ausência.
16. Tenho uma boa relação de trabalho com a minha chefia.

Discordo Totalmente	Discordo	Não Concordo nem discordo	Concordo	Concordo Totalmente
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D – Regression analysis

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 1

Y : Exhausti

X : WFC

W : Autonomy

Covariates:

Horas_Se Sexo Idade_Re Num_filh

Sample

Size: 911

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Exhausti

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,5707	,3257	,6342	62,2977	7,0000	903,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,6059	,1675	21,5341	,0000	3,2773	3,9346
WFC	,3179	,0194	16,3863	,0000	,2798	,3559
Autonomy	-,2933	,0381	-7,6920	,0000	-,3681	-,2184
Int_1	-,0462	,0266	-1,7360	,0829	-,0983	,0060
Horas_Se	,0049	,0031	1,5603	,1190	-,0013	,0110
Sexo	-,1148	,0565	-2,0328	,0424	-,2256	-,0040
Idade_Re	,0000	,0030	-,0091	,9927	-,0058	,0058
Num_filh	-,1026	,0345	-2,9740	,0030	-,1703	-,0349

Product terms key:

Int_1 : WFC x Autonomy

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p	
X*W	,0023	3,0135	1,0000	903,0000	,0829

Focal predict: WFC (X)
 Mod var: Autonomy (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

Autonomy	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-,7251	,3513	,0280	12,5512	,0000	,2964	,4063
,0000	,3179	,0194	16,3863	,0000	,2798	,3559
,7251	,2844	,0267	10,6564	,0000	,2320	,3368

Data for visualizing the conditional effect of the focal predictor:
 Paste text below into a SPSS syntax window and execute to produce plot.

```
DATA LIST FREE/
  WFC    Autonomy Exhausti .
BEGIN DATA.
-1,4403  -,7251  3,2692
,0000    -,7251  3,7752
1,4403   -,7251  4,2812
-1,4403  ,0000   3,1047
,0000    ,0000   3,5625
1,4403   ,0000   4,0203
-1,4403  ,7251   2,9403
,0000    ,7251   3,3499
1,4403   ,7251   3,7595
END DATA.
GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=
WFC    WITH Exhausti BY Autonomy .
```

```
***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS
*****
```

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
 95,0000

W values in conditional tables are the mean and +/- SD from the mean.

NOTE: The following variables were mean centered prior to analysis:
 Autonomy WFC

WARNING: Variables names longer than eight characters can produce incorrect output when some variables in the data file have the same first eight characters. Shorter variable names are recommended. By using this output, you are accepting all risk and consequences of interpreting or reporting results that may be incorrect.

----- END MATRIX -----