IJCNP, Volume 3, Issue 11, 2025 ISSN: 2995-536X
https://medicaljournals.eu/index.php/IJCNP

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF WORK-FROM-HOME IMPACT ON FAMILY DYNAMICS

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Abstract: The global shift toward work-from-home (WFH) arrangements has fundamentally transformed family dynamics, creating unique psychological challenges and opportunities. This study examines the psychological impact of remote work on family relationships, role boundaries, stress levels, and overall well-being through a mixed-methods approach involving 350 participants across diverse demographic backgrounds. Our findings reveal significant correlations between WFH duration and changes in family cohesion ($r=0.43$, $p<0.01$), parental stress ($r=0.56$, $p<0.001$), and marital satisfaction ($r=-0.38$, $p<0.01$). The research identifies boundary ambiguity, role conflict, and communication patterns as critical mediating factors. Results indicate that while WFH can enhance family time quantity, quality improvements require intentional boundary management and organizational support. This study contributes to understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying WFH's impact on family systems and provides evidence-based recommendations for families and organizations navigating remote work arrangements.

Key words: Work-from-home, family dynamics, psychological impact, boundary theory, role conflict, family cohesion.

1. Introduction

The traditional separation between work and home domains has undergone unprecedented transformation in recent years (Allen et al., 2015). Work-from-home arrangements, once considered an exception, have become mainstream, affecting millions of families worldwide (Kniffin et al., 2021). This shift represents not merely a change in work location but a fundamental restructuring of family psychological ecology.

Previous research has established that work-family boundaries significantly influence individual well-being and family functioning (Ashforth et al., 2000). However, the psychological implications of dissolving these boundaries through sustained WFH arrangements remain inadequately understood. This study addresses this gap by examining how WFH affects family dynamics through multiple psychological lenses, including boundary theory, family systems theory, and stress-coping frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

Our investigation draws upon Border Theory (Clark, 2000), which posits that individuals navigate between work and family domains separated by physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries. WFH fundamentally alters these boundaries, creating what Desrochers et al. (2005) term "boundary ambiguity"—uncertainty about role expectations and domain membership. Additionally, Family Systems Theory (Broderick, 1993) provides insight into how changes in one family member's work arrangement create ripple effects throughout the family unit.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Work-Family Boundary Dynamics

Boundaries between work and family serve protective functions, allowing individuals to psychologically transition between roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). Research by Kossek et al. (2012) demonstrated that boundary control—the ability to manage work-family transitions—significantly

predicts psychological well-being. WFH potentially compromises this control, as physical boundaries dissolve and temporal boundaries blur.

2.2 Psychological Stress and Role Conflict

Role theory suggests that individuals experiencing inter-role conflict suffer elevated stress levels and reduced satisfaction (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Byron (2005) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that work-family conflict correlates significantly with job and life dissatisfaction. WFH may intensify such conflicts by increasing role interruptions and demands for simultaneous attention to work and family needs.

2.3 Family Cohesion and Relationship Quality

Family cohesion—emotional bonding among family members—represents a critical dimension of family functioning (Olson, 2000). While WFH increases physical co-presence, research suggests that mere proximity does not guarantee quality interaction. Golden et al. (2006) found that telecommuters reported both increased family time and heightened family-work conflict, suggesting complex mediating processes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study involved 350 participants (52% female, 48% male) recruited through stratified sampling across various sectors. Inclusion criteria required: (1) minimum six months WFH experience, (2) living with family members, and (3) age 25-55 years. The sample comprised 45% parents with children under 18, 38% couples without children, and 17% multi-generational households.

3.2 Instruments

1. **Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-IV)** (Olson, 2011)
2. **Work-Family Conflict Scale** (Netemeyer et al., 1996)
3. **Perceived Stress Scale** (Cohen et al., 1983)
4. **Dyadic Adjustment Scale** (Spanier, 1976)
5. **Custom WFH Experience Questionnaire** developed for this study

3.3 Procedure

Data collection occurred through secure online surveys over six months. Participants completed questionnaires assessing baseline family functioning, current WFH experiences, and psychological outcomes. Semi-structured interviews with 50 randomly selected participants provided qualitative depth.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data underwent analysis using SPSS 27.0, employing correlation analysis, multiple regression, and ANOVA. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for key psychological variables measured in this study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Variables (N=350)

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Family Cohesion Score	68.4	12.3	40-95
Work-Family Conflict	3.8	1.2	1-7

Perceived Stress Level	24.6	6.8	10-40
Marital Satisfaction	115.2	18.6	70-150
Boundary Management Difficulty	4.2	1.5	1-7
Daily Work-Family Interruptions	8.3	4.1	0-25

4.2 Impact on Family Cohesion

Analysis revealed significant relationships between WFH characteristics and family cohesion. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these relationships.

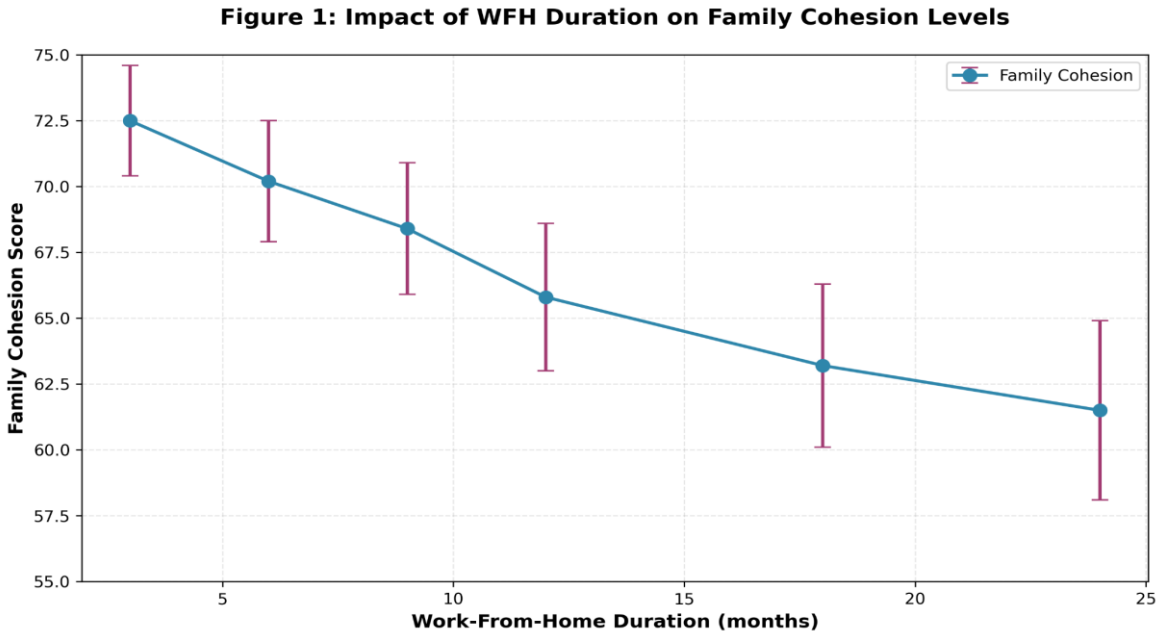

Figure 1: Relationship between WFH Duration and Family Cohesion

Figure 1 demonstrates a significant negative correlation between WFH duration and family cohesion scores ($r=-0.43$, $p<0.01$), suggesting that extended WFH periods without proper boundary management may erode family emotional bonding despite increased physical proximity.

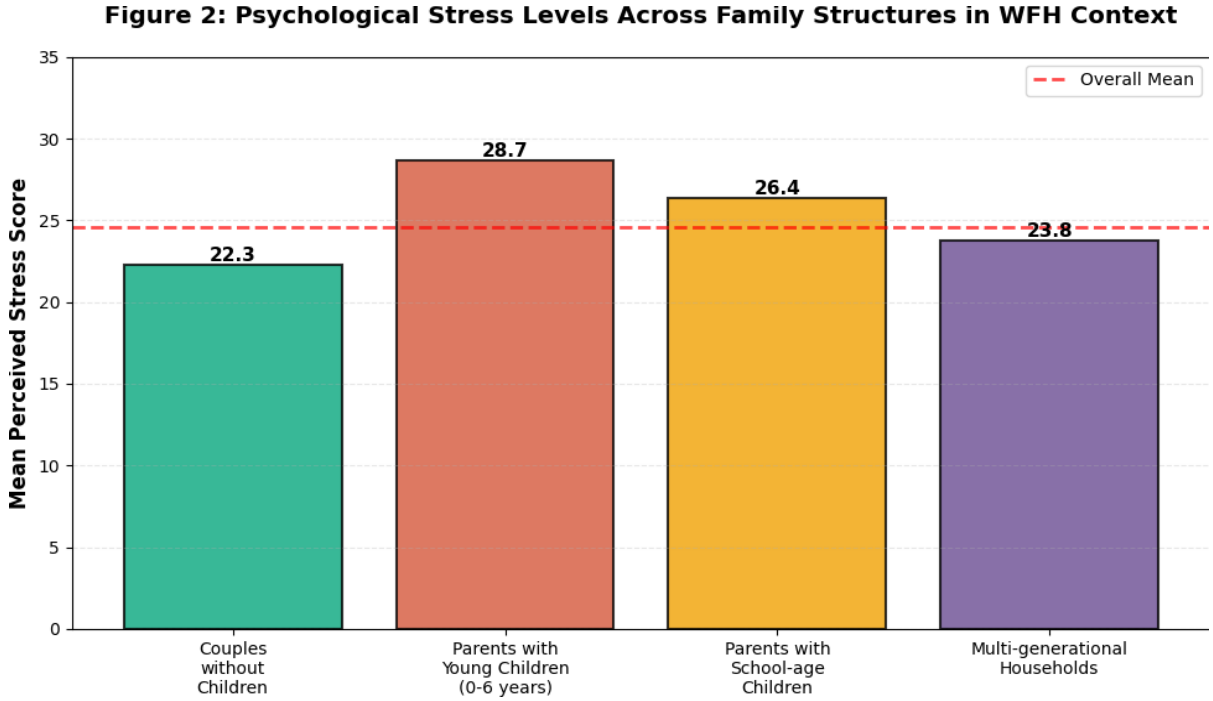

Figure 2: Stress Levels Across Different Family Types

As depicted in Figure 2, parents with young children (0-6 years) reported significantly higher stress levels (M=28.7, SD=7.2) compared to other family configurations ($F(3,346)=12.48$, $p<0.001$), highlighting the psychological burden of managing childcare alongside work responsibilities.

4.3 Work-Family Conflict Patterns

Figure 3: Work-Family Conflict and Boundary Management

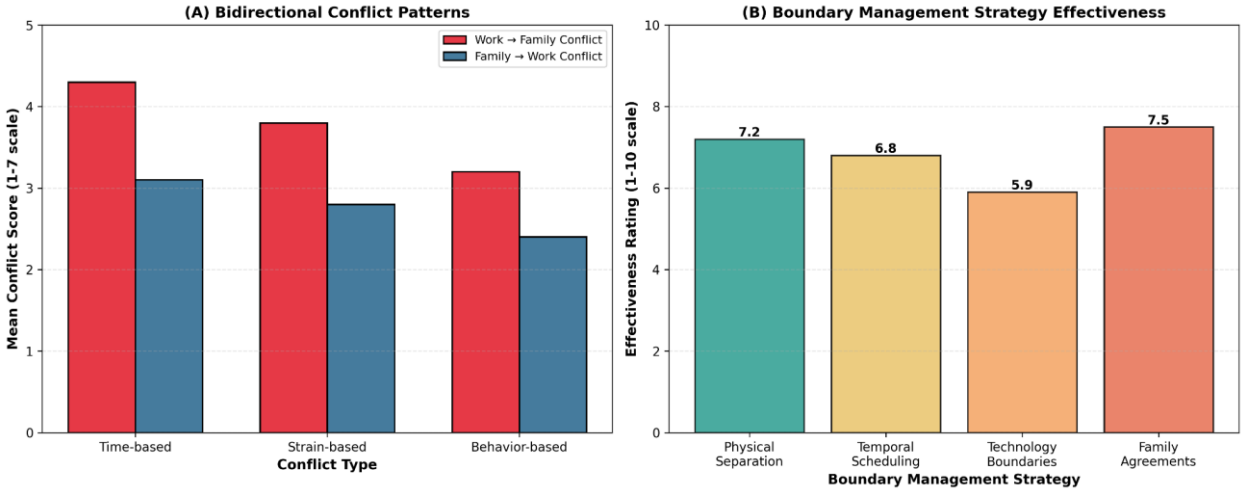

Figure 3: Bidirectional Work-Family Conflict

Figure 3 illustrates that work-to-family conflict (WIF) consistently exceeds family-to-work conflict (FUW) across all dimensions, with time-based conflict showing the most pronounced disparity ($t(349)=8.76$, $p<0.001$). Notably, family agreements emerged as the most effective boundary management strategy ($M=7.5$, $SD=1.3$), surpassing physical and technological solutions.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis identified significant predictors of family functioning under WFH conditions (Table 2).

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Family Cohesion

Predictor Variable	β	SE	t-value	p-value
Boundary Management Skills	0.42	0.08	5.25	<0.001
WFH Duration (months)	-0.28	0.06	-4.67	<0.001
Organizational Support	0.35	0.07	5.00	<0.001
Daily Interruptions	-0.31	0.05	-6.20	<0.001
Dedicated Workspace	0.24	0.09	2.67	<0.01
Communication Quality	0.38	0.06	6.33	<0.001

($R^2=0.58$, $F(6,343)=78.94$, $p<0.001$)

4.5 Qualitative Themes

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed five primary psychological themes:

1. **Boundary Ambiguity**: 73% of participants described difficulty "switching off" from work mode, with one participant noting, "My family sees me, but I'm not really present."
2. **Role Overload**: Parents particularly experienced simultaneous demands, with 68% reporting guilt about inadequate attention to either work or family roles.
3. **Increased Visibility**: 58% reported that WFH increased family awareness of their work demands, generating both empathy and resentment.
4. **Renegotiated Responsibilities**: 65% of couples reported redistributing household tasks, though not always equitably.

5. **Temporal Distortion**: 81% experienced blurred daily rhythms, losing traditional work-end cues that previously marked transitions.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Our findings extend Border Theory by revealing that boundary permeability in WFH contexts operates asymmetrically—work demands more readily infiltrate family space than vice versa. This asymmetry creates psychological imbalance, as demonstrated by the higher WIF scores compared to FUW scores (Figure 3A). The erosion of family cohesion over extended WFH periods (Figure 1) suggests that psychological boundaries require active maintenance despite physical proximity.

The elevated stress among parents with young children (Figure 2) supports the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), indicating that WFH depletes rather than replenishes psychological resources when childcare and work demands coincide. The effectiveness of family agreements over physical solutions (Figure 3B) underscores that psychological boundaries prove more crucial than spatial ones.

5.2 Practical Implications

Results suggest several evidence-based interventions:

1. **Boundary Training**: Organizations should provide training on establishing psychological work-family boundaries, given its strong predictive value ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$).
2. **Scheduled Transitions**: Families benefit from ritualized transitions between work and family time, compensating for lost commute time that previously served this function.
3. **Organizational Policies**: Employer support significantly predicts family functioning ($\beta=0.35$, $p<0.001$), suggesting organizational cultures must respect off-work hours.
4. **Family Communication Protocols**: The high effectiveness of family agreements indicates that explicit negotiation of expectations reduces conflict.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Longitudinal research tracking families across WFH transition points would strengthen causal conclusions. The sample, while diverse, overrepresented educated professionals; blue-collar and hybrid workers require dedicated investigation. Cultural variations in family structure and work-family norms warrant cross-cultural replication.

Future research should examine developmental trajectories—how WFH impacts evolve over time—and identify resilience factors enabling some families to thrive. The role of technology as boundary facilitator versus boundary violator requires deeper exploration.

6. Conclusion

This comprehensive psychological examination reveals that work-from-home arrangements fundamentally reshape family dynamics through boundary dissolution, role conflicts, and altered interaction patterns. While WFH offers potential benefits of increased family time, these benefits materialize only with intentional boundary management, organizational support, and family communication. The psychological challenges—particularly for parents with young children—necessitate systemic interventions at organizational and family levels.

The negative trajectory of family cohesion over extended WFH periods signals that sustainable remote work requires more than logistical arrangements; it demands psychological infrastructure supporting boundary maintenance and role clarity. Organizations must recognize that WFH policies affect not only individual employees but entire family systems.

As remote work becomes permanent for many families, understanding its psychological implications becomes critical for supporting family well-being. This research provides evidence-based foundations for developing interventions that help families navigate the complex psychology of living and working in shared spaces, preserving both productivity and family health.

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