

## Family emotional support in the transformation of women entrepreneurs

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### **Abstract:**

Women-owned family businesses have proliferated since the fall of communism in formerly Central and Eastern European countries. Unfortunately, we have a limited understanding regarding how women entrepreneurs in this part of the world navigate the challenges they face. Research suggests that a significant challenge that family business owners face is the conflict that can emerge from the overlap of family and business roles. This paper explores how perceived family support can reduce the amount of conflict felt by women business owners in Slovakia. Results suggest that being part of a family business increases the perceptions of role conflict for women business owners. However, perceptions of family support diminish this feeling. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** women entrepreneurs | family business | work-family interface | role conflict | Slovakia

### **Article:**

#### **1. Introduction**

Interdependencies between work and family domains is a topic garnering increased attention in the family business field (i.e., Michael-Tsabari, Houshmand, Strike, & Efrat, 2020). Given that work and family contexts are closely interconnected in family firms, researchers have tried to understand the overlaps between these roles for owners and their family firms (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). Compared to men, women in family businesses manage more family responsibilities (Smith, 2000) and are more likely to reallocate family resources to help the business (Lee, Fitzgerald, & Bartkus, 2017). This responsibility creates tensions between family and business roles that can have a negative impact on women and their businesses (Danes & Olson, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to understand what conditions could help women owners diminish the tensions between family and business domains.

Research in entrepreneurship and management provides some insights on how individuals lower these perceived role conflicts. For example, women entrepreneurs create synergies between family and work while men enhance their family support at home to achieve satisfaction (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). In this sense it seems as though the support of others is an essential

condition to diminish these role conflict. Previous research in the management field has highlighted the vital role of social support (i.e., the support of family, coworkers, supervisor and organization) in helping diminish work and family conflict (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011). Unfortunately, we know very little regarding how women entrepreneurs in formerly communist countries navigate these role challenges as they develop their businesses. This is important to understand given the relevant role that women entrepreneurs have in the economic development of developing countries (Woetzel et al., 2015), and the challenges women face due to the more traditional role expectations for women in these cultural contexts (Michael-Tsabari et al., 2020, Pieper et al., 2016).

To address this gap, this project explores the conditions under which family support translates into lower perceptions of role conflict for women owners in family enterprises. Our research is built on role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), the family embeddedness perspective (Aldrich & Cliff 2003), and research on social support. Like other researchers (see Michel et al., 2011), we argue that perceiving higher support from the family will result in a lower perception of role conflict, particularly for those who are part of family firms. We test our ideas using data collected from women business owners in the Slovak Republic during 2015. The Slovak Republic is an interesting context because of the more traditional role expectations for women (Bussard, Uhlíková, & Dobová, 2007). Thus, it provides a stringent test for our ideas. In the following sections, we review entrepreneurship, family business, and management literatures to develop our rationale, describe the methodology used, and discuss our results. We finalize our paper by outlining the implications of our study for current and future research about the work-family interface, women entrepreneurship, and family businesses in a former communist country.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Slovakian women entrepreneurs

Since the fall of communism, entrepreneurship has become a career option for women (Ferge, 1997). Women start businesses for employment purposes (48.7%), followed by parallel and part-time employment (17.4%), and for maternity or paternity leave (10.4%) (Pilková et al., 2017a). However, between 2007 and 2019, there have been very little changes in the percentage of women entrepreneurs in Slovakia (see Table 1). One of the reasons for this lack of growth may be the challenges of managing work and life spheres in patriarchal countries.

**Table 1.** Number and percentage of Slovak women entrepreneurs.

Year	Number of women entrepreneurs	Percentage of women of total entrepreneurs
2007	112,212	28.1%
2008	115,393	27.6%
2009	115,068	27.7%
2010	112,598	27.5%
2011	111,224	27.7%
2012	108,795	28.2%
2013	109,345	28.7%
2014	107,393	29.1%
2015	96,191	28.4%
2016	99,865	28.8%

Year	Number of women entrepreneurs	Percentage of women of total entrepreneurs
2017	101,046	29.0%
2018	96,459	29.2%
2019	98,479	28.2%

Note: (Slovak Statistical Bureau, 2014).

Source: Slovak Statistical Bureau, Registrar of

Organizations. [http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/males\\_a\\_podnikanie\\_v\\_cislah\\_v\\_roku\\_2019.pdf](http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/males_a_podnikanie_v_cislah_v_roku_2019.pdf) and [http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/rodove\\_a\\_vekove\\_zlozenie-fo\\_2013.pdf](http://www.sbagency.sk/sites/default/files/rodove_a_vekove_zlozenie-fo_2013.pdf)

## 2.2. Managing work-family roles within family-owned businesses

Changes in the nature of gender roles (i.e., men = breadwinner, women = homemaker), the structure of families (i.e., dual-earning couples, single parents, unmarried partners), work (i.e., virtual work), and careers (i.e., lateral mobility, boundaryless careers) result in individuals today having to manage multiple roles as part of their professional lives (Powell, Greenhaus, Allen, & Johnson, 2019). According to role theory, individuals enact multiple roles as part of their everyday lives (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Given the finite resources available to individuals, when the expectations, responsibilities, norms, and behaviors of one role are at odds with acting another role, it is difficult to fulfill the requirements of one or multiple roles. Two sets of roles prevalent in an individual's life are family and work. Enacting these two roles can create competing demands for the person, create pressures to comply with expectations of one role, or be incompatible with other roles. This phenomenon is known as inter-role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). Higher levels of inter-role conflict are detrimental to individual and organizational health (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcombe, 2012).

Even though there are multiple types of inter-role conflict, we focus on work-family conflict. Work-family role conflict is one of the most common conflicts individuals face; and is intensified when the work and family roles are central to the person's self-concept (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Women are particularly affected by this type of role conflict due to their central responsibilities in the life domain; thus, they are more likely to feel the need to balance both roles (Jennings and McDougald, 2007, Powell et al., 2019). Our research focuses on women business owners in family firms. We suggest that the degree to which they perceive support from their family is likely to diminish the level of work conflict they experience in their day-to-day activities. We explore how being part of a family firm influences perceptions of work-family role conflict and how their perceptions of family support can diminish the levels of conflict felt by these women owners.

## 2.3. Role conflict of women owners in family firms

Family firms are organizations characterized by the overlap between the family and business systems (Chrisman, Chua, & Sharma, 2005). This overlap creates a unique context in which the family plays a central role in the strategic decision-making of the business (Chrisman et al., 2005), and where family issues, culture, and values permeate the organization affecting the goals, strategy, and behaviors of the firm (Astrachan, 2010). Managing the overlap between family and business is an essential consideration for the success of the firm and the wellbeing of the owners (Pieper et al., 2016). Even though strict adherence to gender roles has declined (Powell et al. (2011)), many societies remain rigid in part due to history and culture.

Women have practiced strategic disobedience to topple patriarchal practices within the family (Barragan, Erogul, & Essers, 2018). In general, women entrepreneurs face a uniquely complex set of challenges and need to manage the overlap between family and business (Knight, 2016). However, the expectation remains for women to emphasize family roles and play a central role in the family system (Powell et al., 2019). Therefore, in family firms, women owners are particularly affected by role conflict at the intersection of family and business (Danes & Olson, 2003).

Research exploring work-life conflict in family firms has been increasing in the last two decades (Michael-Tsabari et al., 2020). However, not much empirical work explores role conflict experienced by family members, particularly women owners in family firms (Memili, Chang, Kellermanns, & Welsh, 2015). Building on previous research in the family business field and on role theory, we argue that women owners who are part of a family business are particularly likely to perceive high levels of role conflict. Role theory indicates that individuals have a finite pool of resources. From this perspective, role conflicts come to light when the resources needed to fulfill the responsibilities of one role are in direct competition with the availability of resources required for the completion of the other role. Therefore, individual strain in resources is created, which enhances the possible perceptions of conflict. When women owners are part of a family firm, their family and business roles are more intertwined, which creates a greater burden for their family and business resources, leading to higher levels of conflict. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Being part of a family firm results in higher levels of perceived role conflict for women owners.*

#### 2.4. The moderating role of perceived emotional support

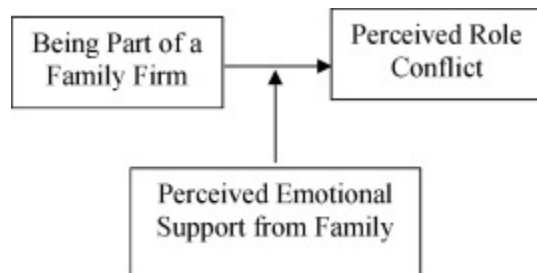
Entrepreneurship research provides evidence for the vital role that families play in the capacity of women entrepreneurs to succeed in their roles (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Brush (1992) suggests that family resources and relationships help successfully enact business responsibilities. Thus, family resources can help female entrepreneurs enhance their resources while performing a job, reducing the conflict between work and family domains. This idea is complemented by the work of Aldrich and Cliff (2003). They present the family embeddedness approach to show the importance of family characteristics in enhancing the value creation process for entrepreneurs.

One way to reduce the role conflict that women owners in family firms feel is through family emotional support. Family emotional support (i.e., the provision of reassurance, acceptance, and encouragement in times of stress by family members) enhances an individual's self-esteem. It helps the individual believe that they can navigate the challenges of their competing roles. Family emotional support enables women owners to free some of their resources and energy to enact their family and business roles and manage the conflicts between these roles. We argue that women who are family business owners will perceive the highest levels of work-family conflict when they do not perceive that they have family support. Under these conditions, women owners feel the highest demands of dual roles, creating high stress levels. When women work in a

family-owned business context and perceive the support of their family, they will have the lowest levels of role conflict. Under these conditions, women entrepreneurs can better utilize their finite resources to enact the more demanding role and then complete the other. Building on this rationale, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2:** *Perceived family emotional support will moderate the relationship such that, when family support is low, women owners will perceive the highest role conflict; when family support is high, they will perceive the lowest levels of role conflict.*

Fig. 1 summarizes the model tested in this study.



**Fig. 1.** Model studied.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Sample and procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to a convenience sample of 188 women-owned companies in the Slovak Republic via e-mail in 2015. One hundred and eleven questionnaires were returned (59% response rate), which is consistent with other survey-based research in entrepreneurship (e.g., Eyana, Masurel, & Paas, 2018, N = 118; Werbel & Danes, 2010, N = 110). Regarding the demographics of the sample, 56% of respondents were 40 years of age or younger, 50% had at least a college degree, and 51% of the participants were married. Their businesses were relatively mature (37% are at least three years old, while 55% have been in business at least five years), and 34% described themselves as family-owned businesses. A comparison of pertinent sample characteristics (individual age, education and marital status, firm size and age) with estimates of the general population in Slovakia—a well-established approach to assess representativeness (Adkins et al., 2013, Khelil, 2016)—indicated that the characteristics generally match Slovakian realities overall (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparison of sample with population estimates.

Characteristics	Sample (%)	Slovakia (%)
<i>Individual entrepreneur</i>		
Age (years)		
20–29	35.1	19.0 <sup>a</sup>
30–39	20.7	25.0
40–49	34.2	25.9
50–59	9.0	20.3
60–69	1.0	9.8
Education		

Characteristics	Sample (%)	Slovakia (%)
Primary	0.0	21.2 <sup>b</sup>
Secondary	49.6	58.8
University	50.4	17.6
Marital Status		
Single	35.1	26.6 <sup>b</sup>
Married	50.5	47.7
Divorced/Separated	13.5	9.8
Widowed	0.9	13.9
<i>Firm</i>		
Size (employees; excluding the owner)		
0	40.0	
1–10	43.8	(0–9; micro) 97.3 <sup>c</sup>
11–20	6.7	
21–50	4.7	(10–49; small) 2.2
51–100	2.9	
101 or more	1.9	(50–249; medium) 0.5
Years in operation		
<1	13.5	
1–2	23.4	
3–5	18.0	(at least 3.5) 38.8 <sup>d</sup>
5 or more	45.1	

<sup>a</sup> Own calculations, based on <http://statdat.statistics.sk>

<sup>b</sup> Pilinska, 2018.

<sup>c</sup> 2019 SBA Fact Sheet – Slovakia (<https://ec.europa.eu>)

<sup>d</sup> Pilková, Holienka, Kovacicova, Rehak, & Mikus, 2017b.

We adopted a self-administered questionnaire developed by Hisrich and Brush (1985), with subsequent modifications (Hisrich, Bowser, & Smarsh, 2006). The survey used Earley's (1987) back-translation procedure. In addition, the questionnaire included a mixture of dichotomous, multiple-choice, open, and rank-order items in Slovak.

### 3.2. Measures

*Perceived Role Conflict (PRC)*. We obtained the initial data on perceived role conflict as rankings of four of nine (i.e., pick and rank k of n; ties allowed) predetermined categories of women's personal problems (i.e., conflict between business and family relationships, a conflict between business and personal relationships, emotional stress, family stress, loneliness, inadequate or lack of support, time management, dealing with men, and dealing with car transport drivers). We determined the total number of picks (rankings in the range 1 to 4) by a woman entrepreneur from the original list of nine to produce a metric variable depicting the number of problems a respondent experienced. To better reflect role conflict specifically between the family and the business, we eventually focused on the following five measures only: a conflict between business and family relationships, a conflict between business and personal relationships, emotional stress, family stress, and time management. Thus, the resulting metric variable assumes values from 0 (no conflict role problems at all) to 5 (each of the selected five measures received a ranking from 1 to 4 when ranked out of the nine original issues).

*Family Business Ownership (FBO)*. This variable distinguished family businesses (1) from non-family businesses (0). Consensus on the definition of a family firm lacks in previous literature (e.g., Howorth, Rose, Hamilton, & Westhead, 2010), as a family business is a complex issue (Ramadani & Hoy, 2015). Therefore, this study asked respondents to judge whether their business was a “family business” when responding to the survey items (Westhead, 1997).

*Perceived Family Emotional Support (PFES)*. Perceived Family Emotional Support (PFES) is a categorical variable. The initial data on all moral supporters represents a ranking of the top four of ten (i.e., pick and rank  $k$  of  $n$ ; ties allowed) predetermined moral supporters in a business venture. These choices included spouse, child, parent, sibling, relative, friend, mentor, government agency, private agency, or other. Then, we obtained a ratio of (a) the total number of picks by a woman entrepreneur from the first five family-related supporters to (b) the total number of selections across all ten types of supporters. Thus, the more a woman entrepreneur picks from the first five supporters (a), the stronger her perceived family emotional support is (for a similar approach to determining the strength of family ties, see Alesina & Giuliano, 2010). The ratios (a)/(b) represent the intensity of family-related sources of emotional support to the total number of supporters (family and non-family-related). Given its significant negative skew, and based on the frequency distribution, we decided to recode the variable comprising the ratios into a multi categorical construct with the following values: ‘0’ (low family emotional support;  $n_1 = 28$ ) for ratios between 0 and 0.67, ‘1’ (medium support;  $n_2 = 20$ ) for ratios between 0.68 and 0.99, and ‘2’ (high support;  $n_3 = 63$ ) for ratios equaling one. As a robustness check, we reviewed several other coding possibilities the results were qualitatively similar.

*Control variables*. We account for four control variables: personal factors (the entrepreneur’s education level and marital status) and organizational factors (years of business in operation and business size). Education can increase a woman’s access to knowledge that will help run the business (Pathak, Goltz, & Buche, 2013). ‘Educational level’ was labeled as ‘1’ if the woman entrepreneur had a college diploma or above and ‘0’ otherwise. Other studies have also employed categorical coding of education level (Lofstrom, Bates, & Parker, 2014), while Cruz et al. (2012) & Mas-Tur et al. (2015) use binary coding. ‘Marital status’ indicates whether the respondent is either (1) married or (0) not married (i.e., single, widowed, separated, or divorced). Marital status was commonly used as a control variable (e.g., Cetindamar, Gupta, Karadeniz, & Egrican, 2012).

We also controlled for the stage of business (‘years in operation’) (Miskin & Rose, 2015). We assigned a code of 1 when the business had been in operation for longer than three years, and a code of 0 otherwise. ‘Business size’ was coded as (1) for a firm with at least one employee and (0) otherwise. We wanted to juxtapose women entrepreneurs who operate solo (no employees) and those who employ at least one person. These women have to deal with various labor-related issues (i.e., payroll, taxes), contributing to stress.

#### **4. Results**

We tested for multicollinearity and calculated variance inflation factors for the explanatory variables. The factors were all below 10, suggesting no apparent problems with collinearity among the explanatory variables (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Due to the small sample size, we employed the Hinkley estimation for the standard errors (Hinkley, 1977) to

assess heteroskedasticity rather than Huber-White adjustment. To address common method bias that may result from collecting data from self-reported questionnaires at one point in time, we used Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

The exploratory factor analysis produced the unrotated factor solution with four factors, accounting for 73.9% of the total variance explained with no dominant factor solution. Thus, no common method variance is prevalent. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics and correlations.

**Table 3.** Variable descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variables	M	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Educational Level	0.50	0	1								
2. Marital Status	0.51	0	1	0.027							
3. Years in Operation	0.63	0	1	-0.124	0.287**						
4. Business Size	0.60	0	1	-0.034	0.046	0.255**					
5. Family Business Ownership	0.34	0	1	0.107	0.373**	0.237*	0.333**				
6. Perceived Family Emotional Support_Low	0.25	0	1	-0.047	-0.171	-0.114	0.049	-0.113			
7. Perceived Family Emotional Support_Med	0.18	0	1	0.043	-0.004	0.067	0.195*	0.057	-0.272**		
8. Perceived Family Emotional Support_Hgh	0.57	0	1	0.008	0.153	0.048	-0.194*	0.055	-0.665**	-0.537**	
9. Perceived Role Conflict	3.87	0	5	-0.063	0.091	0.011	-0.029	-0.030	0.082	0.176	-0.208*

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed); Listwise  $N = 111$ .

Hypotheses were tested using linear regression. As can be seen in Table 4, Model 1 tests control variables, while Model 2 adds the predictors and interaction terms following the standard moderation analysis. Results show that the addition of the predictors and interaction in Model 2 is significant ( $F(4,106) = 2.384, p < .05$ ) and explains 10% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.105$ ).

Consistent with H1, being part of a family-owned business was positively related to perceptions of role conflict (unstandardized  $\beta = 0.848, p < .05$ ). When exploring the interaction, results indicate that perceived family emotional support (PFES) moderates the relationship between being part of a family firm and perceptions of role conflict. However, this moderation is stronger PFES is high (unstandardized  $\beta = -1.256, p < .05$ ) than when PFES is medium (unstandardized  $\beta = -1.097, p < .10$ ; See Fig. 2). The interpretation of Fig. 2, indicates that when a woman entrepreneur experiences low family emotional support; her perceived role conflict is much higher when she operates in a family firm than in a non-family business environment. Conversely, when she perceives her family emotional support as high, the perceived role conflict is much lower for a family firm than a non-family. Regardless of family business ownership, there is not much difference in the role conflict perceived by women entrepreneurs when the perceived family emotional support is medium. These observations together support hypothesis two (H2). The findings show that perceived family emotional support moderates the relationship between being part of a family firm and perceived role conflict.

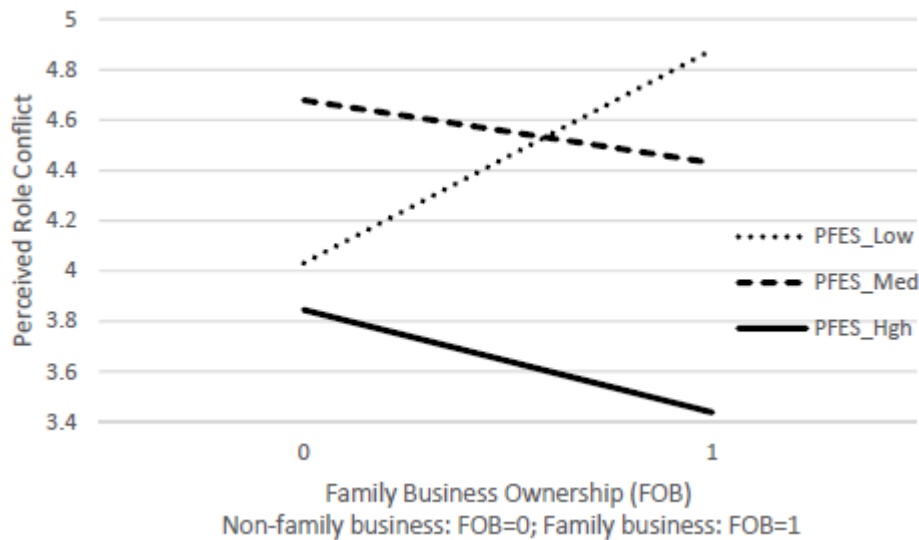
**Table 4.** Regression results for perceived role conflict.

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant:	3.933*** (0.377)	4.032*** (0.492)
Control variables:		
Educational Level	-0.195 (0.276)	-0.241 (0.274)
Marital Status	0.278 (0.276)	0.366 (0.294)



	Model 1	Model 2
Years in Operation	-0.053 (0.285)	-0.014 (0.287)
Business Size	-0.096 (0.304)	-0.245 (0.342)
<i>Independent variable:</i>		
Family Business Ownership ( <i>FBO</i> )		0.848** (0.422)
<i>Moderator variable:</i>		
Perceived Family Emotional Support ( <i>PFES</i> ) <sub>med</sub>		0.647 (0.399)
Perceived Family Emotional Support ( <i>PFES</i> ) <sub>hgh</sub>		-0.186 (0.409)
<i>Interaction terms:</i>		
<i>FBO</i> × <i>PFES</i> <sub>med</sub>		-1.097* (0.584)
<i>FBO</i> × <i>PFES</i> <sub>hgh</sub>		-1.256** (0.564)
Model F	0.442	2.384**
Model R <sup>2</sup>	0.014	0.105

Note: N = 111; Unstandardized Regression Betas; \*\*\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10; two-tailed tests; Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in the parentheses (Hinkley); Perceived Family Emotional Support (*PFES*)<sub>low</sub> (the reference category).



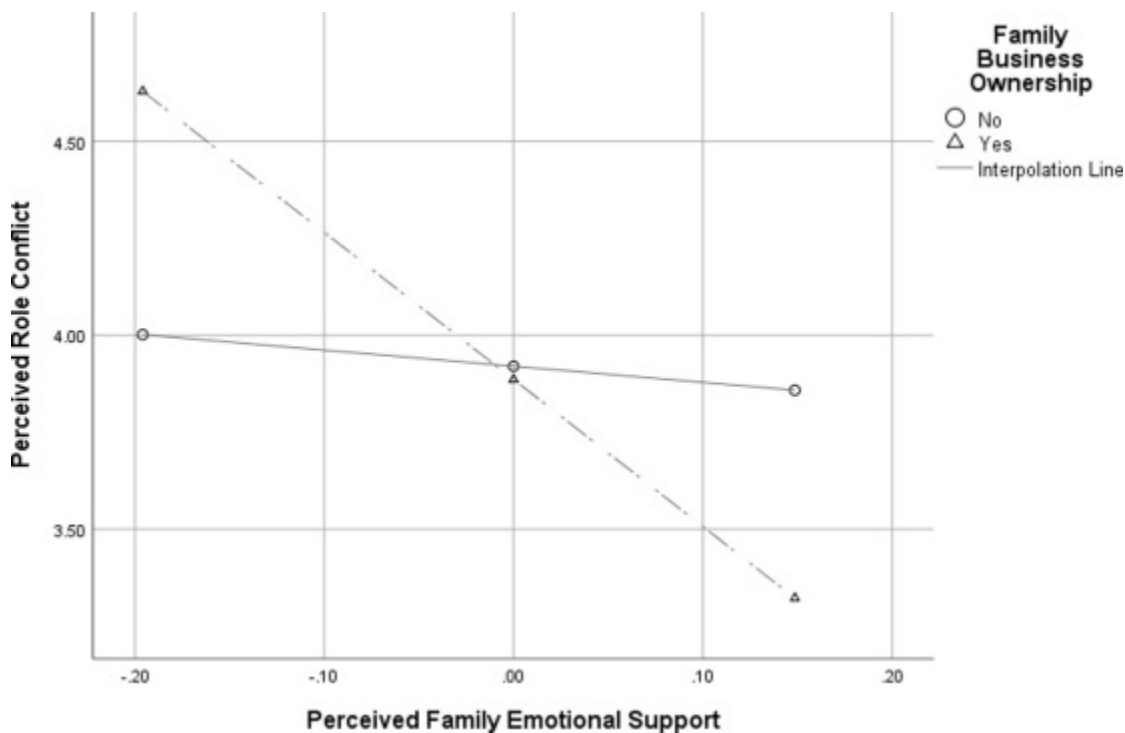
**Fig. 2.** Explanation of moderation.

#### 4.1. Robustness check

We conducted a supplemental analysis to examine our hypotheses. This time, we used the metric version of the variable *Perceived Family Emotional Support* (as mentioned earlier, this variable was initially recoded into a multi-categorical construct due to its significant negative skew). In order to accommodate this deviation from normality, we employed the Process macro (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017). The Process macro relies on bootstrapping, so it works well in situations in which focal variables do not follow a normal distribution (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). To check for the presence of moderation, we estimated the direct relationship between family business ownership and perceived role conflict using perceived family emotional support in its metric, original, form as the moderator (we employed Process macro Model 1; Hayes, 2018).

For the moderation assessment, calculated the conditional direct effects of family business ownership at distinct values of family emotional support. In the Process macro, we used three scenarios for the moderator (1 standard deviation (SD) below its mean, at its mean, and one SD above its mean), which is typically used in such analysis.

The findings (details available on request) again revealed a negative, significant effect of the family business ownership  $\times$  family emotional support interaction term ( $\beta = -3.376, p < .05$ ) for predicting perceived role conflict. According to the Process macro results, the relationship between family business ownership and role conflict is changing from a positive to a negative one at increasing levels of family emotional support (0.63 at one SD below, -0.03 at the mean, and -0.54 at one SD above). This association is also revealed in Fig. 3, when the family business ownership is taken into account.



**Fig. 3.** Explanation of moderation (robustness check).

Specifically, when a woman entrepreneur perceives increasing family emotional support, her perceived role conflict decreases faster in the family ownership environment compared to firms without any ties to the family. Summarizing, we thus conclude again that family emotional support does mitigate the direct relationship between family business ownership and perceived role conflict in a way consistent with this study’s overall conceptual framework.

## 5. Discussion

Family firms are characterized by the family and the business system overlap (Chrisman et al., 2005). This overlap generates conflicts in the work and life domains, particularly for women owners (Michael-Tsabari et al., 2020). We have a limited empirical understanding of the level of conflict women owners feel when they are part of a family business, and how this conflict can be

mitigated. To address this gap, the current study explored how being part of a family firm affected women owner's perceptions of role conflict and how perceived family emotional support moderated this relationship. Reducing perceptions of role conflict is important because of its effect on job satisfaction and individual wellbeing (Shockley & Singla, 2011). Consistent with our expectations, being part of a family business resulted in higher levels of perceived role conflict for women owners. However, the perceived role conflict of women owners was lowest when emotional support from the family was high and was lowest when family emotional support was small.

### 5.1. Contributions and implications for theory and research

Our results have important contributions and implications for research and theory in the family business, work-life issues, and entrepreneurship. For the family business literature, our results provide initial evidence of how the family business context enhances the perceptions of role conflict for women owners. Our results provide initial support to claims from Memili and colleagues (2015) and Welsh, Llanos-Contreras, Alonso-Dos-Santos, & Kaciak, 2021, who indicate that the family business context can enhance perceptions of role conflict for family members. Our results suggest that feelings of role conflict are particularly true for women who do not perceive the emotional support of the family. However, when women owners perceive the support of the family, they feel lower levels of role conflict, which allows them to free resources to manage their family role to have additional resources for the completion of their work role. This study also answers the call by Michael-Tsabari et al. (2020) and Pieper et al. (2016) to conduct research that explores ownership in the work-family interface. Based on our results, ownership can add a higher degree of conflict between women's work and life domains. However, future research should explore whether male owners react in similar ways.

The support for the positive relationship between being part of a family firm and perceived role conflict has interesting implications for work-life research. Our results suggest that there may be conditions under which family support may not reduce perceived role conflict. Even though *meta*-analytic work finds strong support for this relationship (Michel et al., 2011), our results imply that there might be other factors at play that should be considered to understand the conditions under which family support will help reduce role conflict. It may be that in addition to dispositional characteristics (Allen, 2013), researchers need to consider the importance of organizational context and the role of the individual to better understand work-family conflict.

Given that most firms are family owned (IFERA, 2003), our study suggests that context consideration is essential. Being part of a family firm affects perceptions of role conflict. Therefore, the characteristics of the context can affect the way individuals evaluate the allocation of resources necessary to successfully perform roles and the demands that different roles place on the individual. Some contexts will be more likely to influence the type of roles that individuals need to navigate to succeed at what they do.

Concerning cultural context, findings show that collectivist cultures are more likely to report the family-to-work conflict (Allen, French, Dumani, & Shockley, 2015). Thus, it may be our results are driven by culture. In other words, there may be something about the Slovak cultural context that leads women owners in family firms to report higher levels of role conflict and the need for

family support. Given this, we would encourage future research to test these ideas in multiple cultures to compare results and ascertain whether cultural characteristics drive results.

For entrepreneurship, our study continues to build an understanding of the work-life issues of women entrepreneurs and how to help diminish the levels of role conflict they experience as part of engaging in the entrepreneurial activity. Notably, our work complements previous work by Eddleston and Powell, 2012, Powell and Eddleston, 2013, who find that women and men experience work-life issues differently. Our results complement these findings by indicating that given the synergies that women entrepreneurs create, family support does not seem to influence perceptions of role conflict unless women engage in their entrepreneurial endeavors through family-owned businesses. It seems that being in a family-owned context makes women entrepreneurs more aware of their dual roles in the family and the business and creates more pressure for the management of those roles.

Our results also complement the work of Aldrich and Cliff (2003), who explain how family embeddedness influences entrepreneurial activities. In our case, being embedded in a family for the development of the entrepreneurial activity influences the capability that women have to mobilize resources and the responsibilities they feel for using the resources. In other words, when women entrepreneurs obtain financial and operational resources from the family through family ownership, they might also feel a greater responsibility towards the family, which puts a strain on both the work and family roles and results in higher perceptions of role conflict. This situation also occurs when the family cannot provide other forms of support to relieve the entrepreneur from responsibilities in the family role. It is essential to note that part of these results could be related to the cultural context of women entrepreneurs. Thus, it would be useful if future research could explore how family support and family ownership influence perceptions of role conflict in other cultural contexts.

## 5.2. Limitations and direction for future research

This study has several limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional, which limits the findings. Given that information was collected at one point in time, it is challenging to ascertain cause-effect relationships. Future research could benefit from collecting data at multiple points in time. Second, our sample is a convenience sample with a relatively small sample size. Thus, it may be that the characteristics of our sample do not reflect the general population of women entrepreneurs. To ensure broadness in the representation of women entrepreneurs, we tried to diversify the socio-demographic characteristics. Care should be taken when interpreting and generalizing our results to other contexts. However, it should be noted that the Slovakian entrepreneurial environment is considered close to “average” for European countries according to the 2016/2017 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Global Entrepreneurship Research Association, 2017). Therefore, while our results are based on only one country and generalizations should not be made without caution, our study might be helpful for future research projects. We recommend that future research consider different ways of selecting a sample to represent broader characteristics of the entrepreneurial population. A second aspect of the sample is the focus on one country. A focus on a single country can limit the generalizability of results to other cultures. Because of this, we would encourage researchers to collect data from multiple countries or collect similar data in other countries. Samples from formerly communist

countries that have had more traditional roles for women could be further explored and compared to male entrepreneurs. Additionally, a country's economic development should be considered in future research (Welsh et al., 2021; Welsh, Llanos-Contreras, Alonso-Dos-Santos, & Kaciak, 2021, De Clercq et al., 2021).

Using a self-report approach to collect data could also influence the way participants in this study answered questions. Self-report can lead to participants being untruthful in their answers. However, given that not many countries have detailed data about entrepreneurs, it is very difficult to obtain similar data using other approaches. Similarly, other researchers find that founder-reported measures may be highly correlated with objective data and can be equally reliable (Cruz et al., 2012). Therefore, we would encourage that future research considers ways to verify some of the collected information through third parties or collect similar information at multiple points in time.

A final limitation for our study comes from our assessment of perceived family support. Family support can come in multiple forms (Michel et al., 2011). For example, families can support women entrepreneurs with financial backing or offer free labor, expertise, and emotional support. We measured the perceived family emotional support (e.g., giving love, encouragement, and demonstrating approval). Thus, our results may not apply to other forms of family support. Given this, it would be useful for future research to explore multiple forms of family support to understand whether different types of support yield similar or different results.

## **6. Conclusion and policy implications**

This project explored how family ownership and perceived family support affect the perceptions of work-family role conflict for women owners. Our results indicate that family support reduces perceptions of work-family role conflict of women owners when they work as part of a family-owned business, and they perceive high family support. Perceptions of role conflict increase the lower the perceptions of family support. These findings are significant for countries trying to increase the level of women business owners, particularly those involved in family businesses and in countries that have more traditional role expectations for women. Actions to grow women-owned family businesses improve gender and social equity, improve unemployment, and contribute significantly to economic growth (Pilková et al., 2016).

### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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