



Full circle support: unpacking the relationship between women entrepreneurs' family-to-work support and work interference with family

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Abstract

With an anchoring in conservation of resources theory, this study examines the mediating role of women entrepreneurs' work-related emotional exhaustion in the relationship between their family-to-business support and work interference with family, as well as the moderating role of the entrepreneurial character of their company's strategy in this process. Survey data collected from women entrepreneurs in Argentina indicate that a notable reason that business support received from the family diminishes work interference with that same family is that it abates the sense of being overburdened by work. This benefit of reduced exhaustion is especially prominent to the extent that women entrepreneurs pursue an energy-consuming, entrepreneurial strategy for their business. For entrepreneurship scholars and practitioners, this research accordingly reveals a critical channel through which supportive family relationships can decrease the probability that women entrepreneurs bring work challenges home (i.e., diminished depletion of work energy), and it shows how this explanatory factor varies with the strategic profile they adopt for their business.

Keywords Family-to-business support · Women entrepreneurs · Work-related emotional exhaustion · Work interference with family · Entrepreneurial strategy · Conservation of resources theory

Introduction

The likelihood that women entrepreneurs cannot meet their family responsibilities, due to pressing work commitments, remains a pertinent challenge; the experience of work interference with family can undermine the quality and performance of their

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business activities (Agarwal & Lenka 2015; Brush et al., 2019; Ufuk & Özgen, 2001). Men entrepreneurs also experience work-to-family conflict, but it appears particularly pronounced among women entrepreneurs, due to persistent societal expectations that it is up to them, rather than their male counterparts, to take on most household tasks and duties (Eib & Siegert, 2019; Gudeta & van Engen, 2018; Kaciak & Welsh, 2020). The reality of running one's own company thus is intricately linked to gender-related expectations about the nature of work, and conflicting demands between work and family life tend to be felt more deeply by women than by men (Ahl, 2006; Forson, 2013; Mirchandani 1999; Rey-Martí et al., 2015). Extant research into work-to-family conflicts affirms that women are more likely to suffer from work interference with family, seemingly because they experience greater time commitments to, are more involved with, and have to address more demands by their families (Jayawarna et al., 2021; Poggesi et al., 2019).

To provide a complementary approach to prevailing views on the challenges that women entrepreneurs experience at the work–family interface, we consider how their access to family-to-business support might *decrease* the experience of a negative interference of work with family. Such family-to-business support is a relational resource that reflects the extent to which women entrepreneurs can count on the help of family members to address business matters, such as when they provide valuable input or feedback about work-related challenges on a voluntary basis (Cardella et al., 2020; Eddleston & Power, 2012; Welsh et al., 2016). Previous research indicates a positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' reliance on family-to-business support and their firms' performance (Neneh, 2017; Shanine et al., 2019), but it has not explicitly examined how the advantages of such support may come full circle and render it less likely that women entrepreneurs' family lives become compromised by work. The primary objective of this study is to explicate *how* and *when* women entrepreneurs' access to family-to-business support may diminish the probability that they suffer from negative spillovers from work to family.

We first postulate that family-to-business support reduces work interference with family by causing women entrepreneurs to feel less emotionally drained by their work (Haar, 2013). For this research context, we define work-related emotional exhaustion as the extent to which women entrepreneurs' energy resources are drained in the course of running their business (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015; Elmuti et al., 1993). In line with the logic of conservation of resources (COR) theory, relational resources available to women entrepreneurs, such as those offered by supportive family members, should translate into a reduced probability of work-to-family conflict, because the resources help reduce the sense of being overwhelmed by work (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). In organizational behavior research, the ability to avoid this sense of being overwhelmed is an explanatory factor that connects employees' exposure to negative work conditions, such as job insecurity (Nauman et al., 2020) or job overload (Chen et al., 2017), with the experience of work-to-family conflict. However, we are not aware of any empirical research that investigates its potential mediating role, in terms of ensuring the beneficial effects of women entrepreneurs' access to family-to-business support on the quality of their professional and personal functioning. In our proposed theoretical framework, we formally predict that the impact of

family-to-business support on work interference with family moves through diminished emotional drainage at work.

Moreover, the logic of COR theory predicts that the value of supportive family relationships for curtailing women entrepreneurs' exhaustion at work should be especially potent when the implementation of their strategic choices is difficult and energy consuming (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). We focus on a specific strategy—an entrepreneurial posture that entrepreneurs adopt for their company—that is marked by high levels of risk taking, innovation, and proactivity (Alvarez-Torres et al., 2019; Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2015). Such an entrepreneurial posture might provoke internal resistance among employee bases (Pittino et al., 2017; van Doorn et al., 2017), because it forces employees to reconsider organizational practices, a process that may seem intrusive or threatening to their existing privileges (Kollmann et al., 2017). Consistent with COR theory, access to family-to-business support, as a pertinent relational resource (Eddleston & Power, 2012), should diminish women entrepreneurs' work-related emotional exhaustion particularly effectively when they also adopt a disruptive strategic posture (Chen et al., 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2018), with notable benefits for their capacity to prevent work-related strain from flowing into the family domain (Yi et al., 2017).

Our conceptual focus on women entrepreneurs, instead of entrepreneurs in general, is not meant to suggest that women and men entrepreneurs have different abilities to exploit positive family relationships in the work domain. As previous research pertaining to paid employment indicates, both genders can successfully leverage family support to enhance the quality of their job functioning (Kacmar et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2022). We maintain that access to such support should offer work advantages to entrepreneurs too, women and men alike (Edelman et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2017). But the *relative* value of family-to-business support may be more prominent for women, to the extent that this support helps them overcome their generally restricted access to other relevant resources, such as social network contacts or financial investors (Audretsch et al., 2022; De Clercq & Brieger, 2022; Elam et al., 2020). These restrictions remain a frustrating reality in many country settings, including Latin America (Alecchi, 2020; Bardasi et al., 2011). As Powell and Eddleston (2013, p. 261) explain, women entrepreneurs tend to benefit more from supportive family relationships, compared with their male counterparts, “because of their relative lack of access to other resources such as human, social, and financial capital.”

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we discuss the conceptual background of the study, including its theoretical anchoring and the relevance of gender and context, and then detail the hypotheses. We subsequently describe the research methodology and report the results that arise from the statistical analyses. We end the paper with a discussion of theoretical implications, limitations and avenues for continued research, practical implications, and a general conclusion.

Conceptual background and hypotheses

Conservation of resources theory

Our theoretical arguments about the negative indirect relationship between women entrepreneurs' family-to-business support and work interference with family, through diminished work-related emotional exhaustion, and the intensifying effect of an entrepreneurial strategy on this indirect relationship, are grounded in COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018). It asserts that the quality of people's work experiences is critically informed by the extent to which they can draw from valuable resources that help them address work-related challenges (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In addition, COR theory conceptualizes the notion of resources rather broadly, to include any "objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources" (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 339). But two especially critical resources, according to Hobfoll's (2001) influential work, are "help with tasks at work" and "people one can learn from," which may come from either coworkers or personal connections. For the current study, we focus on the extent to which women entrepreneurs have access to supportive family relationships that help them with business issues (Neneh, 2017).

We also apply two main premises of COR theory. First, people's access to the valuable resources held by others diminishes the probability that they experience a depletion of energy in the course of doing their work, which frees up other energy resources they then can apply to areas outside the work realm (De Clercq et al., 2020; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Consistent with this logic, we propose that relational resources offered by supportive family interactions should reduce the chances that women entrepreneurs suffer work interference with family, because the resources leave the entrepreneurs feeling less burdened by the responsibilities that arise with running their business (Constantinidis et al., 2019; Shanine et al., 2019). Second, the incremental benefits derived from external resource access, which helps people safeguard their reservoirs of positive work energy, are relatively greater when those people undertake activities that generate resistance from others, because such activities drain these reservoirs (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The usefulness of family-to-business support for avoiding a sense of being emotionally overwhelmed by work thus should be particularly high when women entrepreneurs adopt a strategic posture that is disruptive and challenging to implement (Hon et al., 2014; Pittino et al., 2017). When they pursue such an entrepreneurial strategy, the business support that women entrepreneurs receive from family members likely is especially valuable for containing their work-related emotional exhaustion, with the ultimate outcome that they can better prevent work strain from spilling over into the family sphere (Chen et al., 2017).

Relevance of gender and the country context

As emphasized in the Introduction, our specific attention to how *women* entrepreneurs may suffer less work-related emotional exhaustion and work interference with family, due to their access to family-to-business support, does not imply that men

entrepreneurs are unable to leverage or benefit from supportive family relationships (Edelman et al., 2016). The proposed conceptual arguments, anchored in COR theory, apply to both women and men entrepreneurs. But we explicitly recognize that the nature and quality of women entrepreneurs' business functioning is strongly influenced by broader, macro-level forces, which often put these entrepreneurs in disadvantageous positions when it comes to access to non-family business support, such as from financial investors or industry networks (Bullough et al., 2022; Fleck et al., 2011; Sequeira et al., 2016). The benefits that entrepreneurs can derive from family members who assist them with business issues then may be more pronounced for women than for men (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). As explicated by Constantinidis et al. (2019, p. 1791), "support from the close family tends to be more critical for female entrepreneurs than for their male counterparts."

Moreover, and as we detail in the [Method](#) section, we conduct this study in Argentina. The proposed theoretical relationships are fundamentally country-neutral, so they should apply to a wide range of country contexts, but the Argentinean context is especially relevant, for several reasons. First, previous studies indicate that the probability that work negatively interferes with family (i.e., the dependent variable for this study) is particularly high for women who operate in country settings characterized by traditional gender expectations (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022; Jennings & Brush, 2013), such as in Latin America (Aboal & Veneri, 2016; Terjesen & Amorós, 2010). The traditional family values that mark Latin American countries, including Argentina—with expectations that women hold primary responsibilities for family matters, even if their business activities render it challenging for them to honor these responsibilities—suggest that work-to-family conflict is a critical concern for Argentinean women entrepreneurs (Alecchi et al., 2020; Elam et al., 2020). Second, Argentina features a collectivistic, family-oriented culture, so women entrepreneurs may be especially open to and appreciative of any business help extended by family members, which should have positive consequences for the quality of their work and home functioning (Bullough et al., 2017; Hofstede et al., 2010). Third, the country scores high on uncertainty avoidance, so the challenges associated with employee resistance to a disruptive entrepreneurial strategy may appear particularly threatening to entrepreneurs, meaning access to family-to-business support may be particularly useful for containing emotional hardships and work-to-family conflict (Aboal & Veneri, 2016; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Proposed theoretical framework

The theoretical framework in Fig. 1 depicts our prediction that family-to-business support contains work-related emotional exhaustion, which reduces work interference with family. The pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy triggers this process, so family-to-business support becomes even more important for reducing work-to-family conflict, through emotional exhaustion containment, when women entrepreneurs push their company in entrepreneurial directions. To reiterate, the signs of these links should apply to women and men entrepreneurs alike, but the advantages that the first group can gain from supportive family relationships likely are more salient, as informed by the difficulties that they often encounter in obtaining access to valuable

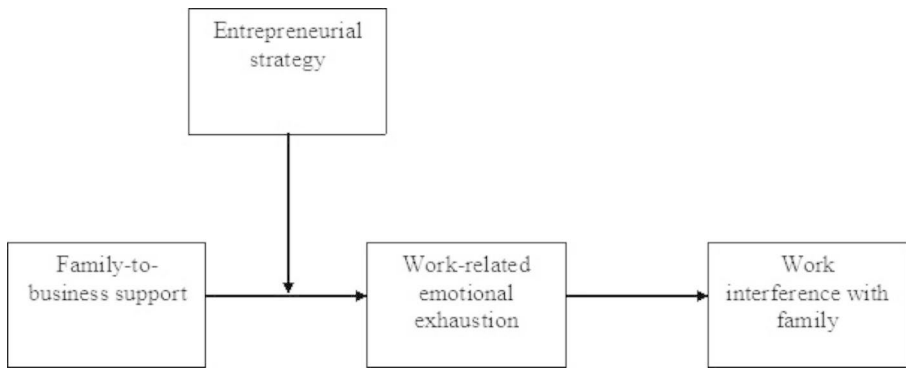


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

market resources (Audretsch et al., 2022; Powell & Eddleston, 2013). The hypotheses, as detailed hereafter, thus refer to women entrepreneurs specifically.

Mediating role of work-related emotional exhaustion

We predict a negative relationship between women entrepreneurs' access to family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion. The tenets of COR theory suggest that the gains that women entrepreneurs can achieve in the presence of valuable relational resources—such as when their family members help them with their business endeavors (Neneh, 2017)—elevate their ability to address challenging work situations (Hobfoll et al., 2018). When they can count on family members for business advice for example, it may be less likely that women entrepreneurs worry about whether their dedicated work efforts are worthwhile (Cardella et al., 2020; Shanine et al., 2019). Instead, they should feel more vitalized and in control of their work to the extent that they experience active support from family members (Neneh, 2017; Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020). In contrast, when women entrepreneurs have a sense that their loved ones are indifferent to their professional well-being or unresponsive to their business-related needs, the corresponding disappointment may make them feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of running their company (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015; Welsh et al., 2014). This disappointment may be reinforced to the extent that unfavorable macro-level institutions or limited access to *non-family* resources prevent women entrepreneurs from finding innovative solutions to work challenges that they encounter (Audretsch et al., 2022; Elam et al., 2020). That is, they feel isolated in their struggle to resolve work-related problems, which drains their energy resources in the course of running their business (Omrane et al., 2018). We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1 There is a negative relationship between women entrepreneurs' access to family-to-business support and their work-related emotional exhaustion.

According to COR theory, the resource-depleting hardships that women entrepreneurs experience in one domain, such as work, may spill over and negatively influence

their functioning in another domain, such as family (Yu et al., 2020). Organizational behavior literature has established that the exhaustion that employees suffer in the workplace can undermine the quality of their family lives, because they are not able to keep work-related worries out of their minds (Greenbaum et al., 2014; Nauman et al., 2020). We similarly expect a positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' work-related emotional exhaustion and work interference with family, because the work-related strain they experience may usurp so much of their energy that they cannot spend sufficient time with family (Chen et al., 2017; Quinn et al., 2012). A sense of being emotionally drained by work also might push women entrepreneurs' energy in negative directions, such that they become absorbed by excessive worries and feel unable to explore novel ways to balance work and family demands (Yi et al., 2017). The energy-depleting effect of their work-related emotional exhaustion deprives women entrepreneurs of the stamina needed to meet their family responsibilities (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000; Mäkineniemi et al., 2020). But if women entrepreneurs feel less emotionally overwhelmed by work, they are better positioned to retain discretionary energy that they can dedicate to their family lives (Quinn et al., 2012). If they can avoid a sense of being emotionally overburdened by work responsibilities, the probability that they suffer from work-to-family conflict should decrease. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2 There is a positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' work-related emotional exhaustion and work interference with family.

Integrating the aforementioned arguments leads us to expect a critical mediating role of work-related emotional exhaustion, such that women entrepreneurs' access to valuable relational resources (family-to-business support) reduces negative interferences of work with family, due to the diminished depletion of their work-related resources (Haar, 2013). If they can rely on their family to provide assistance with business challenges, they are less likely to forgo family obligations, because they feel energized instead of drained by their daily work (Neneh, 2017). Conversely, women without family support may struggle to combine work with family demands successfully, because their sense of being overextended by work obligations prevents them from having sufficient energy to take up family responsibilities (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). In organizational behavior research, we find evidence of a mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the connection between family ostracism and negative performance outcomes (Ye et al., 2019), and we seek to complement this evidence by postulating and testing a mediating role of women entrepreneurs' exhaustion containment in the translation of their supportive family relationships into diminished work interference with family. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3 Women entrepreneurs' work-related emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between their access to family-to-business support and work interference with family.

Moderating role of entrepreneurial strategy

We predict an invigorating effect of the extent to which women entrepreneurs pursue an entrepreneurial strategy on the negative relationship between their access to family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion. Consistent with COR theory, the relative benefit of relational resources for containing emotional exhaustion while running a company may increase to the extent that women entrepreneurs encounter resource-draining challenges in their strategy implementation (Hobfoll, 2001). Even if an entrepreneurial strategy can yield positive performance outcomes at the firm level (Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2015), it remains energy-consuming and complex, especially when it comes to convincing employees of its merits (Monsen & Boss, 2009; Pittino et al., 2017; van Doorn et al., 2017). The prospect of changing the organizational status quo may lead to internal resistance among employees, who prefer that things stay the way they are (Gupta et al., 2016; Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009). Notably, women entrepreneurs in less developed countries often cannot maintain satisfactory growth rates across the firm lifecycle (Belitski & Desai, 2021); if a disruptive entrepreneurial strategy gets blamed for disappointing growth outcomes, women entrepreneurs likely encounter even more significant internal resistance to their strategic choices. This resistance increases the value of family-induced business support even further, such as if family members suggest techniques to *overcome* the resistance (Eddleston & Power, 2012). Conversely, access to such support offers less incremental benefit if women entrepreneurs already embrace a more conservative strategic approach, such that employees experience the company's strategic choices as less intrusive. The negative relationship between family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion is weaker in this scenario, so we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4 The negative relationship between women entrepreneurs' access to family-to-business support and their work-related emotional exhaustion is moderated by the entrepreneurial character of their business, such that this negative relationship is stronger when they pursue a more entrepreneurial strategy.

This logic indicates the presence of a moderated mediation effect (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). The pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy can serve as a critical contingency factor of the *indirect* relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family, through abated work-related emotional exhaustion. For women entrepreneurs who push their companies in an entrepreneurial direction (Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2015), exhaustion containment as an explanatory factor for the value of family-to-business support in diminishing work-to-family conflict should be more prominent. Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000), the resource-draining effect of a strategic posture that requires substantial implementation efforts enhances the beneficial roles of supportive family relationships in containing work-related hardships. The effect comes full circle, by making it less likely that women entrepreneurs struggle to complete family duties (Greenbaum et al., 2014). In contrast, exhaustion containment offers a weaker mechanism for reducing the chances of negative interferences of work with family in the presence of family-to-business support to the extent that women entrepreneurs pursue a strategy that is

less radical and disruptive for their employee bases. With a less change-oriented strategic posture for their firms, their ability to avoid energy drainage at work becomes less important in terms of how their reliance on family-induced business support contributes to the absence of negative spillovers from work to family. In this regard, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5 The indirect relationship between women entrepreneurs' experience of family-to-business support and work interference with family through their diminished work-related emotional exhaustion is moderated by the entrepreneurial character of their business, such that this negative relationship is stronger when they pursue a more entrepreneurial strategy.

Method

Sample and data collection

We adopted a theory-driven, quantitative method to empirically test the research hypotheses, which are anchored in the robust COR framework (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2001). The empirical assessment of the hypotheses is based on responses to a questionnaire, administered in one round in summer 2019 among women entrepreneurs who operate in Argentina. This study was subjected to a rigorous review procedure and obtained ethics clearance from the research team's university. The data were collected by a well-recognized survey company (Institute for Field Services [IFF] International) that has a strong track record of undertaking and managing large-scale survey projects. The company employs 750 interviewers who are native speakers, maintains more than 200 stations for computer-assisted telephone interviews, and applies rigorous methods to ensure data quality. For example, 10% of all interviews are partially tracked for quality, 5% are tracked up to three-quarters through, and 5% are tracked completely. All employed interviewers participate in several mock interviews before they receive full interviewing responsibilities.¹ Collaborating with a reputed, professional survey company as a data collection intermediary is in line with approaches used in extant research (e.g., Arend, 2014; Biermeier-Hanson et al., 2021; De Clercq, 2022).

The sampling frame came from IFF International's database of firms that operate in Argentina. In addition to the conceptual value of the Argentinean setting, as outlined in the "Relevance of gender and the country context" subsection, our focus on one country diminished the risk of unobserved differences in macro-level factors that can determine the extent to which women entrepreneurs suffer work interference with family (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022). More generally, in studying this country setting, we respond to calls for more detailed investigations of the opportunities and

¹ Detailed information about the survey company can be found at www.iff-international.com. In 2021, its company name changed from IFF International to FFIND Beyond Data (www.ffind.com).

challenges that women entrepreneurs encounter in underexplored country contexts, such as in Latin America (Alecchi, 2020; Kuschel et al., 2017).

The firms had to meet three criteria to be considered for inclusion: (1) run by a woman who owned more than 50% of the shares, (2) launched in 2010 or thereafter, and (3) employed fewer than 250 people. We sought to survey women entrepreneurs who held majority ownership to increase the chances that they had substantial impacts on their company's strategic choices, including the pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy (Mari et al., 2016). In addition, we focused on companies that were relatively young (Kang et al., 2016) because challenges at the nexus of work and family tend to be especially prominent in companies that are in earlier development stages (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015). By focusing on companies with fewer than 250 employees, we address small and medium-sized enterprises (Powell & Eddleston, 2013), which represent the vast majority of companies worldwide (OECD, 2022). Together, these sampling criteria increase the chances that we survey women entrepreneurs who struggle with resource constraints and who take primary responsibility for running their company, which represents a relevant sample for investigating the conflicting demands of work and family responsibilities. In addition, these informants likely can benefit substantially from research-based suggestions for how to deal with such conflicts (Rastogi et al., 2019), as we aim to provide with this study.

A pilot version of the survey instrument was administered to 10 women entrepreneurs who did not participate in the actual data collection. Using their feedback, we enhanced the clarity of the questions. The English-language survey questions also were translated into Spanish and back-translated to English, through the efforts of two bilingual translators (Brislin, 1986); we made a few minor changes to the final Spanish version of the survey. To safeguard the rights of the participants and diminish the risk of biases due to expectancy or social desirability, we took several measures. The interviewers first clarified the overall objective of the research, without going into detail about the specific research questions, and they underscored that complete privacy was guaranteed. In addition, they explained that participation would occur on an entirely voluntary basis and that any research reports generated from the study would contain only broadband patterns, not individual cases. The participants were also told that there were no good or bad responses and that it was critical for the validity of the findings that they provided their honest viewpoints. Finally, the interviewers explained that they could withdraw from the study at any point. These robust specifications do not entirely eradicate response biases, but they significantly reduce their probability (Jordan & Troth, 2020; Spector, 2006).

From the available sampling frame, the survey firm contacted 920 randomly selected companies, among which 573 refused to participate. Of the remaining 347 companies, 147 did not meet one or more of the inclusion criteria, as informed by screening questions at the start of the interview, and thus were excluded from the study. The final sample consists of 200 respondents who provided complete answers to the survey questions, for a response rate of 21.7%. The women entrepreneurs in this sample had an average age of 43.90 years ($SD=10.11$), 70% were married or living with a partner, 62% had a college degree or higher, and they had an average of 11.14 years of business experience ($SD=8.64$). Furthermore, 7.5% of them ran

a company that operated in manufacturing, 69.0% in services, and 23.5% in trade sectors.

Measures

Family-to-business support. To assess the extent to which women entrepreneurs have access to supportive family relationships that help them with business matters, we applied a five-item scale of instrumental family-to-business support (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). Sample items included, “My family members often go above and beyond what is normally expected to help my business succeed” and “I can count on my family members to fill in for me in times of need” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.83$).

Work-related emotional exhaustion. We measured the degree to which women entrepreneurs feel emotionally overextended in the course of running their business with a three-item measure (Haar, 2013). In light of our focus on women entrepreneurs, rather than employees, the original wording was revised; instead of referring to “work,” it cites “business,” such as whether “I feel emotionally drained from my business” and “I feel burned out from my business” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.78$).

Work interference with family. To measure whether women entrepreneurs’ family lives are compromised by their work, we applied a four-item scale (Guttek et al., 1991), including “After spending time running my business, I come home too tired to do some of the things I’d like to do” and “My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my business while I am at home” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.75$).

Entrepreneurial strategy. Regarding the extent to which women entrepreneurs pursue an entrepreneurial strategy, we relied on a seven-item scale of entrepreneurial orientation (Miller, 1983). Example items were “My firm takes bold, wide-ranging strategic actions rather than minor changes in tactics” and “My firm uses only tried-and-true procedures, systems, and methods” (reverse coded) (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.75$).

Control variables. The analyses included two control variables: women entrepreneurs’ age (in years) and whether the entrepreneurs were married/living with a partner (0=no, 1=yes). We included these two specific demographic characteristics because they likely have a meaningful impact on the extent to which women entrepreneurs encounter challenges at the interface between work and family.²

Common method bias

We found little evidence of common method bias, according to a confirmatory factor analysis marker procedure (Williams et al., 2010), in which we used a six-item masculinity scale, developed by Sharma (2010),³ as the conceptually unrelated marker variable. When we compare a baseline model against a Method-C model, in which the loadings of the method factor are constrained to have the same values, we find that

² According to a post hoc analysis, including additional control variables, such as education level, years of business experience, or industry sector, did not change the findings with respect to the hypothesized relationships.

³ A sample item is “Men are generally more ambitious than women.”

the latter does not attain a better fit ($\chi^2(279)=859.0$) than the former ($\chi^2(280)=862.7$; $\Delta\chi^2(1)=3.7$, *ns*), indicating a lack of method variance (Williams et al., 2010). The Method-U model, in which the loadings of the method variable are unconstrained, fits significantly better ($\chi^2(261)=819.2$) than the Method-C model ($\Delta\chi^2(18)=39.8$; $p<.001$), so we retained it to investigate possible bias by the marker variable on the factor correlation estimates. By including factor correlations fixed specifically to match the values from the baseline model, we developed and estimated a Method-R model ($\chi^2(267)=819.6$), then calculated the chi-square difference between it and the Method-U model ($\chi^2(6)=0.40$, *ns*). This difference was not significant, indicating that the effects of the marker variable did not significantly bias the factor correlation estimates.

Statistical procedure

We tested the research hypotheses with the Process macro (Hayes et al., 2017), which combines an estimation of individual paths with an encompassing evaluation of mediation and moderated mediation effects. Because it uses a bootstrapping technique, this procedure applies to scenarios in which indirect or conditional direct effects are skewed and do not necessarily follow a normal distribution (MacKinnon et al., 2004). To evaluate the presence of mediation, we calculated the indirect relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family through work-related emotional exhaustion, along with the associated confidence interval (CI). We relied on the Process macro's Model 4 for this estimation (Hayes, 2018). In this first stage, the macro also evaluates the signs and significance levels of the direct paths between family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion and between work-related emotional exhaustion and work interference with family. Next, to check for the presence of moderated mediation, we estimate the conditional indirect effects of family-to-business support (and corresponding CIs), at different levels of entrepreneurial strategy (one standard deviation [SD] below the mean, at the mean, one SD above the mean). Reflecting our theorized model, we relied on Process Model 7 (Hayes, 2018) to estimate the moderating role of entrepreneurial strategy in the link between family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion, though not between work-related emotional exhaustion and work interference with family.⁴

Results

The zero-order correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1, with the mediation findings obtained from the Process macro in Table 2. Family-to-business support diminishes work-related emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.201$, $p<.05$; Hypothesis 1), which then lowers work interference with family ($\beta=0.395$, $p<.001$; Hypothesis 2). The mediation test reveals an effect size of -0.079 for the

⁴ A post hoc analysis affirms that this second relationship is not significantly moderated by entrepreneurial strategy.

Table 1 Correlation table and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Family-to-business support						
2. Work-related emotional exhaustion	-0.120					
3. Work interference with family	0.000	0.436**				
4. Entrepreneurial strategy	0.290**	0.070	0.243**			
5. Age	-0.171*	-0.069	0.017	0.066		
6. Married/living with a partner	0.034	0.186**	0.201**	0.028	-0.101	
Mean	5.525	2.980	4.994	5.138	43.900	0.695
Standard deviation	1.289	1.469	1.452	1.013	10.112	0.462

Note: N=200. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2 Mediation results (Process macro)

	Work-related emotional exhaustion	Work interference with family		
Age	-0.013	0.006		
Married/living with a partner	0.572**	0.396*		
Family-to-business support	-0.201*	-0.012		
Entrepreneurial strategy	0.178 ⁺	0.303**		
Work-related emotional exhaustion		0.395***		
R ²	0.069	0.251		
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect	-0.079	0.036	-0.152	-0.011

Note: N=200; SE=standard error; LLCI=lower limit confidence interval; ULCI=upper limit confidence interval. ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

indirect relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family through work-related emotional exhaustion; the CI does not include 0 [-0.152; -0.011], which provides evidence for the presence of mediation (Hypothesis 3).

The Process results in Table 3 indicate a negative, significant effect of the family-to-business support \times entrepreneurial strategy interaction term ($\beta = -0.265$, $p < .01$; Hypothesis 4) in the prediction of work-related emotional exhaustion, implying an invigorating role of entrepreneurial strategy. According to further Process macro results, the relationship between family-to-business support and work-related emotional exhaustion is stronger at higher levels of entrepreneurial strategy (0.098 at one SD below, -0.306 at the mean, -0.508 at one SD above). The CI includes 0 at the lower level ([-0.151; 0.347]), so it is not significant. The intervals do not contain 0 at the higher two levels though ([-0.481; -0.131] and [-0.762; -0.255]). As a formal assessment of moderated mediation, we compare the vigor of the conditional indirect relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family, through work-related emotional exhaustion, at varying levels of an entrepreneurial strategy. The output of the Process macro indicates increasing effect sizes at higher levels of the moderator: from 0.039 at one SD below, to -0.121 at the mean, to -0.201 at one SD above. The CI includes 0 at the lower level ([-0.055; 0.122]; i.e., not significant) but not at the higher two levels ([-0.205; -0.047] and [-0.319; -0.093]). The index of moderated mediation equals -0.105, and its CI does not fea-

Table 3 Moderated mediation results (Process macro)

	Work-related emotional exhaustion	Work interference with family		
Age	-0.022	0.006		
Married/living with a partner	0.578	0.396*		
Family-to-business support	-0.242**	-0.012		
Entrepreneurial strategy	0.180 ⁺	0.303**		
Family-to-business support × Entrepreneurial strategy	-0.265**			
Work-related emotional exhaustion		0.395***		
R ²	0.114	0.251		
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of family-to-business support on work-related emotional exhaustion				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	0.098	0.127	-0.151	0.347
Mean	-0.306	0.089	-0.481	-0.131
+1SD	-0.508	0.128	-0.762	-0.255
Conditional <i>indirect</i> effect of family-to-business support on work interference with family				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	0.039	0.044	-0.055	0.122
Mean	-0.121	0.040	-0.205	-0.047
+1SD	-0.201	0.057	-0.319	-0.093
Index of moderated mediation	-0.105	0.032	-0.169	-0.042

Note: N=200; SD=standard deviation; SE=standard error; LLCI=lower limit confidence interval; ULCI=upper limit confidence interval. ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

ture 0 ([-0.169; -0.042]) (Hayes, 2015). Therefore, the adoption of an entrepreneurial strategy strengthens the indirect relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family, through work-related emotional exhaustion, in line with Hypothesis 5 and our study framework.

The interference of work with family, as experienced by women entrepreneurs, also may increase work-related emotional exhaustion (Liu et al., 2015). To rule out such reverse causality and endogeneity concerns, we performed a post hoc analysis with two instrumental variables for work-related emotional exhaustion: time needed to get to the business (measured in minutes) and whether respondents belong to a religious group (1=yes, 0=no). With two-stage least squares estimations of these instrumental variables, using the STATA `ivreg2` command, we obtain results consistent with the Table 2 findings, so endogeneity is less a concern (Antonakis et al., 2010).⁵

⁵ The results of this post hoc analysis are available on request.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

Before we discuss the theoretical implications of the results, we again underscore that our central attention to women entrepreneurs, and how they derive benefits from supportive family relationships, is in no way meant to be deterministic. We explicitly do not anticipate that women entrepreneurs are more desperate or better able than their male counterparts to exploit family-to-business support to the advantage of their companies. But we also explicitly recognize that women entrepreneurs can derive more incremental value from such support because they tend to experience discriminatory societal-level forces that deprive them of access to non-family market resources (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022; Fleck et al., 2011). This argument echoes previous research that pinpoints how women entrepreneurs' reliance on family support is instrumental in spurring their business performance (Neneh, 2017; Shanine et al., 2019). We extend such research by revealing a complementary, beneficial role of family-to-business support that is not directly performance-related: This support diminishes the extent to which women entrepreneurs' work interferes with their family lives, because they suffer less work-related emotional exhaustion (Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020).

As a first novel theoretical insight, we accordingly show that valuable business advice provided by family members can diminish negative spillovers from work to family, as it helps women entrepreneurs feel less overwhelmed by their work responsibilities (Haar, 2013). Formal examinations of the process by which relational support from the family domain exerts positive influences on the quality of women entrepreneurs' family lives are rare, and we know of no considerations of how firm-level strategic decisions might serve as catalysts of this process. As our study reveals, a critical mechanism that enables women entrepreneurs to combine work with family duties is their sense that they are not overextended by work, due to the generosity of family members' help (Neneh, 2017). In line with COR theory, when women entrepreneurs can rely to a greater degree on pertinent support from their family circle, they can keep their work-related energy resource reservoirs filled instead of depleted (Hobfoll et al., 2018), which makes it easier to fulfill their responsibilities at home too (Nauman et al., 2020). A pertinent insight that emerges from this study—and that applies to all entrepreneurs, both women and men—therefore is that the value of family support for ensuring entrepreneurs' well-being and those close to them is multifaceted: Entrepreneurs' loved ones can enjoy a sense of personal accomplishment by making meaningful contributions to the entrepreneurs' business, *and* they also can reap direct benefits from their contributions, by enjoying a less preoccupied entrepreneur at home.

A second theoretical implication of this study is that the mediating role of work-related emotional exhaustion is *invigorated* by the entrepreneurial strategic approach that women entrepreneurs adopt for their companies. As we predicted, exhaustion containment connects family-to-business support more closely to diminished work-related emotional exhaustion when women entrepreneurs seek to steer their companies in entrepreneurial directions (Gutiérrez et al., 2014). Consistent with COR

theory, the resource-draining effect of an entrepreneurial strategy, which is potentially upsetting for employees and challenging to implement (Yoon & Solomon, 2017), increases the incremental value of supportive family relationships for mitigating work-related energy depletion (Hobfoll, 2001). This invigorating role of an entrepreneurial strategy is particularly insightful if we consider it in tandem with the mediating role of work-related emotional exhaustion. As the moderated mediation analysis reveals (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020), the strength of the indirect negative relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family through work-related emotional exhaustion depends on the possibly disruptive ways in which entrepreneurs run their companies. From a general perspective, the aforementioned multifaceted benefits are more likely to materialize when there is a stronger *need* for family-induced business support, to help entrepreneurs, women and men alike, cope with the challenge of persuading employees of the merit of disruptive strategic choices.

Taken together, we offer an expanded sense of why and when entrepreneurs can protect themselves against the danger that work-related hardships spill over into their family domain. First, their reliance on family support (Powell & Eddleston, 2017) stands out as a critical factor; it mitigates the danger by keeping them energized at work. Second, the invigorating role of an entrepreneurial strategy complements previous research into the *direct* beneficial effects of disruptive strategic approaches for enhanced company performance among women entrepreneurs (e.g., Adam et al., 2017; Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2015). We pinpoint an indirect influence on an outcome that is, literally, close to home: By leveraging supportive family relationships, the entrepreneurs can contain work-to-family conflict.

Limitations and future research

This study has some shortcomings that also provide opportunities for research. First, the focus on the intermediate role of work-related emotional exhaustion in the link between family-to-business support and work interference with family follows the close connection between this construct and COR-based arguments about energy resource drainage (Hobfoll, 2001; Hu & Yeo, 2020). Continued research could compare the power of this explanatory factor with other negative factors that also might be beneficially contained, such as women entrepreneurs' sense of isolation (Orhan et al., 2016) or relatedness need frustration (Longo et al., 2016). It also might be insightful to investigate how supportive family relationships diminish the negative interferences of work with family by prompting *positive* features or attitudes, such as women entrepreneurs' psychological capital (Digan et al., 2019) or goal commitment (De Clercq et al., 2009).

Second, we take entrepreneurial strategy as a critical factor that strengthens the indirect relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family, through work-related emotional exhaustion. But other strategic orientations might enhance the benefits of supportive family relationships for women entrepreneurs' enhanced professional or personal well-being too, such as the extent to which they embrace learning or market orientations for their business (Gutiérrez et al., 2014). In addition, certain *personal* factors may invigorate the mediated link between

family-to-business support and negative interferences of work with family, such as women entrepreneurs' social competencies (Baron & Tang, 2009), levels of agreeableness (Antonicic et al., 2015), or other personality traits (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010). It would be interesting to compare the relative value of these possible moderators and how their roles shape up in the presence of the focal moderator we study.

Third, it would be useful for further research to examine how the *strength* of the tested relationships might change for women versus men entrepreneurs. Our arguments are gender-neutral, and the signs of the theorized relationships should apply to both genders—as we have emphasized throughout this article—but gender-specific constraints in the broader institutional environment (Bullough et al., 2022) could affect the *vigor* with which family-to-business support translates into diminished work interference with family, as well as the extent to which an entrepreneurial strategy has a catalytic role in this process. Similarly, our research hypotheses are not country-specific, so the empirical findings should have external validity and apply to many countries. But the strength of the relationships could vary. As we indicated, the collectivism that marks Argentinean culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) makes it likely that women entrepreneurs respond favorably to supportive family relationships; its uncertainty avoidance also could reinforce the relative value of these relationships in the presence of uncertainty-inducing, disruptive strategic approaches. Formal tests of these arguments with cross-country comparisons could involve both cultural and institutional features (Kaciak & Welsh, 2020) and the potential effects of *individual* characteristics, such as women entrepreneurs' own collectivistic orientation (Yang, 2019) or risk aversion (Loi & Ngo, 2010).

Practical implications

This study offers various implications from which entrepreneurs and relevant stakeholders can learn. First, entrepreneurs who can count on family members to offer valuable advice to facilitate their business undertakings are better positioned to deal with the day-to-day stresses of running a company (Neneh, 2017), so the quality of their family lives improves. We accordingly recommend that entrepreneurs seek out and exploit this important resource, to retain their positive energy instead of becoming overwhelmed by their daily work responsibilities. To the extent that family members are *not* willing to provide pertinent business help, they should be aware that their reticence may backfire, because entrepreneurs become less likely to take on family responsibilities when they feel overwhelmed by work (Yi et al., 2017). To implement such insights, we recommend a full-circle initiative that offers customized training programs to teach entrepreneurs and their family members how they can benefit from each other's expertise and support and cultivate a sense of “familiness” (Carnes & Ireland, 2013). We intentionally offer this recommendation to entrepreneurs in general, both women and men, but as we have reiterated throughout this study, it may be especially important for women entrepreneurs, who often experience gender-discriminatory macro-level influences that render it more challenging for them to obtain relevant support from non-family sources (Audretsch et al., 2022).

Second, we note that this process is informed by the strategic posture that entrepreneurs adopt for their businesses. The reinforcing, full-circle link between the

value that entrepreneurs derive from family members who offer business support on the one hand and diminished work interference with family on the other is particularly prominent when entrepreneurs choose a strategic approach that prompts internal resistance. Of course, an entrepreneurial strategy is not *always* met with resistance; it can be welcome and effective in some cases, such as when dealing with hostile external markets (Hosseini et al., 2018). But what our research suggests is that when entrepreneurs run their companies in novel ways, deviating from preexisting paths, they likely have to address some internal employee concerns, so training initiatives that encourage high-quality interactions between entrepreneurs and their families can have particularly great value in such situations. Ultimately, entrepreneurs who can align the needs of their strategy with relevant competencies obtained through family relationships will be better positioned to enjoy high-quality family time, because they can prevent work-related concerns from occupying too much of their attention at home. Again, both women and men entrepreneurs who pursue an entrepreneurial strategy can benefit from supportive family relationships, but the former category may do so to a greater extent, if these relationships help alleviate women-unfriendly institutional conditions with respect to access to market resources (De Clercq & Brieger, 2022).

Conclusion

To advance scholars' and practitioners' understanding of why some entrepreneurs are better able than others to juggle conflicting work and family demands, we have investigated the relationship between family-to-business support and work interference with family, with a particular focus on two critical influences. In particular, we have proposed that (1) a diminished probability of work interference with family in the presence of family-to-business support can be explained by entrepreneurs' ability to remain vitalized at work, instead of being drained by it, and (2) their entrepreneurial strategy invigorates this process. The findings support both these theoretical predictions and offer pertinent contributions to entrepreneurship research.

First, we have empirically shown that women entrepreneurs' family-to-business support translates into lower work interference with family, because it limits their energy depletion at work (Greenbaum et al., 2014). To the extent that their family members go out of their way to provide business advice and serve as sounding boards (Neneh, 2017), a lack of energy drainage, or what we have referred to as exhaustion containment, makes it less likely that their work duties negatively interfere with family responsibilities. A beneficial loop then runs from the family sphere to work, then back to the family sphere. Family members can enjoy an entrepreneur who is more available at home, due their active support for her business, which grants her a sense of vitality at work.

Second, we have pinpointed how women entrepreneurs' pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy is a relevant enhancer of the value of family-to-business support, with regard to reducing work-related emotional exhaustion, which thus increases the chances that they can successfully combine work with family. Because an entrepreneurial posture threatens to disturb the organizational status quo, it provokes internal

implementation challenges (Yoon & Solomon, 2017), and supportive family relationships become particularly important for helping women entrepreneurs deal with these hardships. Extant research has focused on the direct beneficial effect of women entrepreneurs' pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy on their firms' success (Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2015); we have established a more indirect but no less important role. That is, adopting an entrepreneurial strategy can work like a catalyst for the beneficial influence of family-induced business advice on the quality of women entrepreneurs' functioning, both at work and at home. With these insights, we hope that this study can function as source material for further examinations of the circumstances in which entrepreneurs, women and men alike, can benefit the most from leveraging their family connections into outcomes that boost the quality of their professional and private lives.

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