



Characteristics of *pandemic work–life balance* in Slovenian military families during the lockdown: Who has paid the highest price?

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Abstract

In April 2020, a survey was conducted among Slovenian military families, being one of the first surveys to be carried out in the country after the outbreak of the pandemic. The military was labeled a crucial institution in the efforts to combat the SARS-CoV-2 virus and was appointed to various activities, leading to a considerable increase in its workload. The burden of care and unpaid work at that time also intensified, becoming shifted onto the military family, particularly civilian female spouses. The survey's purpose was to measure how military families evaluated their success in balancing between working from home, household work, childcare, and home schooling during the pandemic lockdown. The risk factors were observed on the micro (i.e., lack of extended family support, institutional childcare, and school lockdown) and macro (i.e., military support, national support measures) social levels. The analysis reveals that when it comes to military families the greatest price has been paid by female civilian spouses. The number of children and their age influence parents' self-evaluation of their success with work–life balance. The results show that big families and families with primary

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school children have been struggling the most during the lockdown. Surprisingly, dual-serving families felt the most successful.

Keywords

Lockdown, military family, pandemic, resilience, SARS-CoV-2, work-life balance

Introduction

At the start of 2020 the world became paralyzed by a virus that is today continuing to spread around the globe. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has forced humankind to cease its hectic everyday life, stay within social bubbles, and practice physical distancing. This situation shows the great importance of family, institutional, community, and social network support in both day-to-day life and in a crisis (Brannen et al., 2004; Dremelj, 2004).

Right in the midst of the first pandemic lockdown, in April 2020 a survey was carried out among military families¹ in Slovenia. Its purpose was to measure how they evaluated their success in balancing between their regular work,² childcare, and home schooling during the lockdown. The impact factors on the micro (e.g., the lack of extended family support, childcare, and school closures) and macro social levels (i.e., military support, national support measures) were also studied.

On 16 March 2020, preschool care and schools closed down and remained closed until the middle of May, some even early June 2020. Families were suddenly left on their own to arrange the balance between the new obligations (i.e., simultaneously working from home, home schooling, and caring for children).³ Parents who stayed at home due to childcare were entitled to compensation of their salary (50–80%). Where both parents (or in the case of single-parent families, one parent) were employed in critical occupations, including service members, the state offered organized childcare at home for preschool children and children up to the 5th grade of elementary school. Some parents were simultaneously working from home, home schooling children, caring for young children, while others kept working in the field the whole time.⁴

The country was shut down for two months.⁵ In the course of events, the workload in some occupations increased greatly (e.g., health workers, police, military, and others in critical infrastructure), even though many vital institutions had closed down overnight (e.g., school, childcare). The Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) were declared by the Slovenian government as a critical institution during the pandemic. The SAF consists of 6321 service members,⁶ of whom 83.5% are men and 16.5% women. During the lockdown, the military maintained air transport for protection and other medical equipment; the veterinary unit carried out the disinfection of several health institutions. The SAF set up a medical hospital at the military base in the Slovenian capital and their specialists assisted the national laboratories with performing tests. In addition, the SAF has been assisting the police with protection of the southern border due to illegal migration. Approximately 5% of SAF service members were deployed to various crisis response operations. Between April and June 2020, the SAF organized a national exercise which included 2500 service members. Based on this overview, it is hypothesized that the

burden of the unpaid household work, childcare, including home schooling, was shifted onto service members' civilian spouses.

Theoretical outline of the work–family balance concept

The expression 'dual-career family', based on the division of labor on an 'equal status basis' between the partners in family life, was introduced by the sociologists R and RN Rapoport (1969). It presented the new family model of two adults sharing the household work and care for the children. The dual-career family model was distinct from the breadwinner model, which was based on economic power relations and women's dependence on men.

The dual-career family model raises important questions to do with the organization, division of labor, and gender roles within families, already problematized in the works of feminist authors in the late 1970s. They identified unpaid household and care work in the private sphere mainly performed by women as the crucial lever of gender inequality in society and drew attention to the significance of an equal division of work between partners in the private sphere for the achievement of gender equality (Hochschild, 1995; Oakley, 1980).

The ratio between paid work and family life is an important element of gender equality policies, family and employment policies. In particular, family policies with a parental leave scheme and childcare system support families – both women and men – to reconcile work and family life. On one hand, parental leave schemes, especially those focusing on paternal leave (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Moss and O'Brien, 2006), enable men to care for children at home, while on the other hand the public childcare system enables women to actively participate in the labor market.

During the period of Covid-19 between March and June 2020, entailing the lockdown of public life and transfer of certain public services such as childcare and education to the sphere of the family, the work–family balance was also placed in the spotlight in terms of healthcare. It shows that the amount of care and domestic work, done mainly by women, had increased in that time (e.g., Eurofound 2020; UN Policy Brief, 2020).

Between paid work and family life in Slovenia

According to Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar (2007), the successful reconciliation of these two spheres of life depends on the intertwining of three levels: societal (national legislation, institutional framework), organizational (employers' practices and policies), and individual (strategies of individuals). On the societal, systemic level, one finds *two key mechanisms* of family policy in Slovenia: (a) high quality and widely accessible systems of public childcare and education; and (b) the scheme of paid parental leave, including paid sick leave, that ensures employed parents are able to take care of their child(ren).

Slovenia is a post-socialist country with more than 60 years of women's full-time employment and good family policies concerning parental rights and the childcare system. The socialist legacy of extensive and affordable public networks of subsidized quality childcare and a 100% paid maternal and parental leave scheme were preserved, with the latter being extended with paternity leave in 2003 in the process of joining the EU.⁷

Similarly as for leave, the scheme for institutional childcare was established in Slovenia during the socialist period. The intensive development of *public preschool childcare* took place between 1971 and 1985 when 70% of the country's existing childcare institutions were built (Vojnovič, 1996). In the post-socialist period, public preschools have remained the dominant formal form of good quality, broadly accessible and subsidized early childhood care and education (Humer, 2018). At the same time, the regulated childcare system is the precondition for the full-time employment of women. Slovenia has one of the highest levels in the EU, including the high employment rate for women who have preschool children. In 2019/2020, up to 82.7% of children aged one to five were attending preschools (SURs, 2020).

While Slovenia has good systemic regulation in place for early childhood care and education and a system of paid leave for parents, the importance of the role played by employers in the work–family balance tends to be overlooked (Humer and Freljih, 2016). Apart from the systemic regulation of paid parental leave and early childhood care and education, employers may also introduce additional work–life balance measures for employees in the companies, which is a less common practice in Slovenia. Studies reveal that employees expect more support from their informal social network and the state than from employers (Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007).

Besides the organizational and systemic levels, *informal support* has an important role in Slovenia, including help with household work and the childcare grandparents offer (Kuhar, 2011; Rakar et al., 2010; Žakelj and Švab, 2009). In a 2010 study, Kuhar (2011) reported that 68.1% of families occasionally receive help from grandparents with afternoon childcare, and 59.6% of them can rely on their help when their child is sick. Grandparents' support with childcare is also linked to the proximity of households (Kuhar, 2011; Rakar et al., 2010). Almost a half of respondents reported the child's grandparents lived only a few kilometers from their own home (Kuhar, 2011). Compared to other EU countries, families in Slovenia use grandparents' help considerably more. Due to the proximity of households and the country's geographical characteristics (i.e., the size and population density), the majority of service members commute every day to their workplace. Hence, their primary support comes from the extended family and informal social networks and not from the military community.

While a family policy has a positive effect on the work–family balance and enables women's economic independence, it does not necessarily result in an equal gender division of care and household work. An asymmetric division of housework and care work in the private sphere between the genders has been reported ever since the first studies back in the 1960s (Boh, 1966; Ule, 1979). While in Slovenia men are increasingly taking part in childcare, gender differences remain substantial. In 2019, over one-third of men (37.5%) and about two-thirds of women (62.5%) were involved in childcare (Hafner Fink et al., 2021).⁸

The entrenched social patterns still largely place women within the private sphere, expecting them to take on the role of providing for dependent family members, while in contrast men are more often expected to provide the family with a higher income, which can deprive them of being actively included in family life (Crompton, 2006).

The family and the military

The family has been traditionally understood as a female institution (Finch and Groves, 1983; Hanlon and Lynch, 2011; Hrženjak, 2007). On the contrary, the military has traditionally been understood as a typically gendered and masculine organization (Carreiras, 2010; Segal, 1995; Vuga Beršnak and Juvan, 2013a). The masculinity of the military influences the perception of and relationship between the genders within both the military and the family. Decades ago, Coser (1974) emphasized that the contemporary middle-class family is especially greedy towards women, who should invest more time, energy, emotions in the family, compared to men. Moreover, authors (e.g., Coser, 1974; Segal, 1986) see both the family and the military as greedy institutions.

Methodology

A cross-sectional study of service members and their female spouses was conducted; 5% of them constituted dual-serving families. Usually, the qualitative research approach is more appropriate to recognize and understand certain phenomena in the military (Vuga Beršnak and Juvan, 2013b), however our research aim was to carry out the survey during the first lockdown and collect structural data to discern patterns of similarity or differences as opposed to in-depth data. Further, the quantitative online survey enables greater anonymity, allowing service members to be more open in their answers. The online survey approach was also the only one possible due to military restrictions at times when the social distancing measures were in place. Therefore, the research instrument was formulated by the research team and administered in the quantitative online questionnaire in April 2020.⁹ The link with an invitation to complete the online survey was disseminated via social media (e.g., Slovenian Armed Forces' Facebook page), through personal contacts (e.g., email), on specific webpages (e.g., the MilFam project, the military's trade union, military veterans). The content of the questionnaire for the spouses remained the same, with the differences being minimal and restricted to language used.

No personal identifiers were collected and no unauthorized person had access to the collected data. There were no potential ethical issues as complete anonymity, privacy, confidentiality, and data security were assured throughout the research process.

Sample characteristics

Data were collected with a web-based survey between 4 and 21 April 2020. Altogether, 394 respondents filled in the questionnaire, of whom 295 were service members, 21 dual-serving families, while 23 respondents were civilians with a military spouse. Further, 55 non-member respondents were excluded from the analysis. Next, respondents without children were screened out.

The survey sample consists of 81% male and 19% female respondents,¹⁰ with an average age of 42 years. More than half of them (56%) live with their partners and children, 13% live in an extended family with grandparents. Fewer than 2% state they live alone with their children. Just under 15% of respondents live with a partner and every tenth one lives alone.

More than a half of respondents have two children (57%), approximately one-third has one child (30%), while 13% of respondents reported having three or more children, which corresponds to the ratio within the SAF. Further, 39% of the respondents have older children (high school, university or other), around one-quarter (24%) have primary school children, 18% preschool children while 19% reported having preschoolers and primary school children.¹¹

Research question and hypotheses

During the first lockdown in the country military families faced a specific situation because the military was one of the crucial occupations in the struggle against the virus. Therefore, respondents' self-evaluated success with achieving a balance between paid work, home schooling, and childcare was measured. Various factors (e.g., daily commuting, closure of educational and childcare institutions, number of children, age of the children, dual-military family) on the micro and macro societal levels were also measured that influenced the level of success with establishing a work–family balance.

Research question: Which factors have the strongest impact on the self-evaluation of *success in balancing paid work, childcare, and helping children with distance school work* during the first lockdown in Slovenia?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Support measures on the macro level have helped military families in balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.

As noted, the existing family policy on parental leave, the childcare system, and the public education system enable employed parents to reconcile their work and family obligations. These systems represent the major support for all dual-career families, however when the lockdown was declared public childcare and education facilities across the country were closed.

The greediness of both the military and the family was intensified during the lockdown. There was very little military support for families, an increased military workload, and increased needs of the family.

Certain crisis support mechanisms were introduced at the state level. Yet, previous research (Vuga Beršnak, 2021) reveals the lack of a systematic military approach and interventions for families during a deployment and thus a lack of support from the military may be expected during the lockdown.

Hypothesis 2: Dual-serving families evaluate their success in balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling lower than other military families do.

Zellman et al. (2009) established that those with the greatest difficulty balancing not only their work and the family, but mostly work and childcare, are female service members

who are also mothers and part of dual-serving families. Female service members must play a dual role, fulfilling professional expectations within the military and both parental and housekeeping expectations in the family. Women are still doing the biggest share of unpaid work in Slovenian society, while men usually step in with support for childcare (e.g., Renner et al., 2006). Being the primary caregiver puts women in a different situation vis-a-vis their husband and children while trying to cope with military demands. The stress arising from balancing work and the family inevitably impacts the mother's well-being in a military family (Andres and Moelker, 2011; White et al., 2011).

On the other hand, there are male service members whose role in the family is often less visible, which leaves them greater space to fulfill military demands and focus on their career. However, nowadays many fathers want to spend more time with their children and to more actively participate in family life (Kanjuro Mrčela et al., 2016).

The research findings indicate that during the Covid pandemic women generally took over more unpaid care work and home schooling than men (e.g., McLaren et al., 2020; Power, 2020). Since the military was mostly working in the field, it was expected that the civilian spouses had remained at home and were taking care of the family.¹²

Hypothesis 3: The influence of reduced daily commuting and distance working has had a positive impact on successful balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.

The daily commuting of employed parents can make the work–family balance more difficult (Emre and De Spiegeleare, 2019; Wheatley, 2012). Daily commuting permits flexibility, but can also be a potential source of conflict and increased stress (Wheatley, 2012).

In Slovenia, service members on active duty do not live in barracks, but spend several hours ‘on the road’ every day. This is possible due to the relatively small size of the country and the dispersion of its military units. This means that during the working week they are not involved in the family's daily routine (e.g., driving children to childcare, domestic chores). Preliminary data from the project MilFam indicate that the military population commutes significantly more than civilians. Half of the civilian and less than one-fifth of the military sample commute daily less than 20 km. On the other hand, more than two-thirds of the military sample commutes up to 100 km every day. Here is a practical example: in Slovenia, children are allowed to be in childcare for nine hours. This means that service members cannot take their children to childcare and pick them up. They must therefore rely on the flexibility of their spouses' jobs or on external help.

It is hypothesized that during the lockdown the intensity of daily commuting has decreased, which might have a positive impact on work–family balance.

Hypothesis 4: The number of children and their status influences the self-evaluation of success in the work–life balance.

The greediness of the military and the family vary in different life periods of the individual (Segal, 1986). Childcare needs and housework intensity depend on the number

and age of children. The younger the children, the greater the time needed for care, also resulting in increased housework in that time (Van der Lippe et al., 2006). The family's greediness increases when there are small children, children with special needs or in single-parent families. The greediness also increased during the lockdown when parents (women in the majority) were required to bear the additional burden of educating their children while also working from home.

Hypothesis 5: The lack of support on the micro level – childcare and extended family support – has had a negative influence on balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.

Since military families must regularly cope with long- or short-term absences, their external support (e.g., extended family, public educational and childcare institutions, hired help) assumes an important burden in the work–family balance. Research results show that an important support comes from the extended family, which represents a safety net for a child and the spouse while the other spouse is on deployment (Vuga Beršnak, 2021).

During the lockdown, military families faced the situation of the extended family (i.e., grandparents) not being available, thus leaving them unable to rely on their support. Further, the public education and childcare systems were closed. This means that parents were left on their own, perhaps like never before.

Analysis

Respondents were requested to self-evaluate their *success in balancing paid work, childcare, and helping the children with distance school work* during the first lockdown between March and May 2020 in Slovenia. Their success was measured by evaluating the statement 'Please evaluate how successful you have been with balancing paid work, childcare, and helping the children with distance school work' on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means not successful at all and 5 very successful, while an additional answer 'no need for balancing' was offered. Figure 1 presents a graphic overview of the responses.

Further on, they were asked several other questions, as described in Table 1. The main question was statistically analyzed and explained with the support of the sub-questions presented in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1: Support measures on the macro level have helped military families in balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling

Whether the measures on the national level had exerted any positive or negative impact on military families and their ability to balance between work, childcare, and home schooling was assessed. The institutional support offered by the SAF was perceived to be useful by 30% of respondents, while one-quarter of the service members were unaware of any support. On the other hand, certain support offered by the state was evaluated a little higher: 62% of respondents evaluated the higher payment given to service members

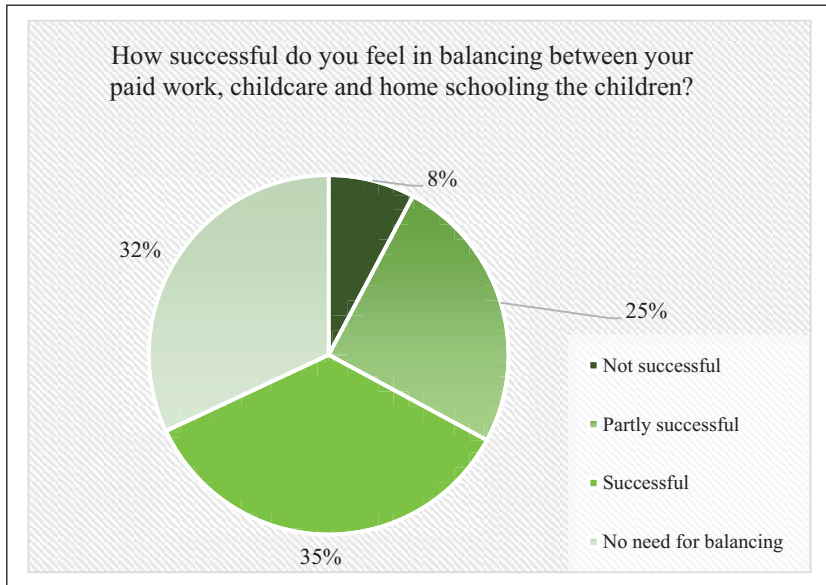


Figure 1. Self-evaluation of success in balancing among service members.
 N = 219.

during the lockdown as beneficial, 58% evaluated the reimbursement of the regular salary for the one parent who stayed at home to take care of the children and the household as beneficial.

Pearson's correlation coefficient shows (sig. = .001; $r = .324$) that those who perceive institutional military support as being more useful also feel more successful in balancing between their family and work during the lockdown. In contrast, the support offered by state appeared not to be correlated with the self-evaluation of success in balancing one's family and work.

Hypothesis 2: Dual-serving families evaluate their success in balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling lower than other military families do

Dual-serving families evaluated their success higher (mean value 4.00) than families where only one parent is a service member (3.39). A t -test shows a significant difference between these two groups. However, these results can only be treated as illustrative and with caution since only 21 respondents stated they were from dual-serving families. Further, the sampling procedure was not probabilistic and hence the significance can also only be regarded as an indication.

The data also reveal that women (mean value 3.9) felt more successful with balancing between work, childcare, and the home schooling of their children than men (mean value 3.34). One-third of service members and more than one-half of spouses believed they had

Table 1. The factors predicted to influence the self-evaluation of success in balancing between work, family, and home schooling.

Hypothesis	Item	Scale	n	Mean
Hypothesis 1	Please evaluate how useful or not useful for you was the support offered by the Slovenian Armed Forces for their employees and their families. Please evaluate how useful or not useful for you was the reimbursement of the regular salary for the one parent who stayed at home to take care of the children. Please evaluate how useful or not useful for you was the higher payment given to service members during the lockdown. Please evaluate how useful or not useful for you was the possibility of organized day care of children of employees in critical infrastructure.	1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)	168	3.10
		1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)	225	3.72
		1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)	206	4.05
		1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful)	195	3.23
Hypothesis 2	Gender	Male, Female	M: 176 F: 42	/
		1 (SAF) 2 (spouse is employed by the SAF), 3 (we are both employed by the SAF) 4 (neither of us is employed by the SAF)	Dual-serving families: 21	/
Hypothesis 3	Where do you work? Due to daily commuting, I have spent less time with my children. Due to daily commuting, I lack time for domestic obligations. Due to daily commuting, most of the daily family obligations have been taken over by my spouse. Please evaluate the impact of the reduced daily commuting on your family life during the lockdown.	1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)	253	2.81
		1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)	254	2.76
		1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree)	255	2.95
		1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive), 6 (my daily commuting has not been reduced during the lockdown)	285	/

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Hypothesis	Item	Scale	n	Mean
Hypothesis 4	How many children do you have?	One child, two children, three or more children (classified as a big family in Slovenian legislation)	1 child: 56, 2 children: 103, 3 or more children: 27	/
	The family structure	Nuclear family, extended family, single-parent family	Nuclear family: 135, Extended family: 31, Single-parent family: 6	/
	What is the status of your children?	Preschool, primary school, preschool and primary school, older	Preschool: 32, Primary school: 45, Preschool and primary school: 37, Older: 74	/
Hypothesis 5	Please evaluate what kind of problems you are facing due to the lack of grandparents' and extended family support during the lockdown.	1 – no problems as the extended family did not anyway help before, 2 – no problems as the extended family is still helping, 3 – no problems as reorganizing their daily routines and adapting them to the current situation, 4 – minor problems, 5 – serious problems	227	/
	Please evaluate what kind of problems you face due to the closure of the education system.	1 – no problems as children are anyway not at school or kindergarten, 2 – no problems as they have reorganized their daily routines and adapted them to the current situation, 3 – minor problems, 4 – serious problems	213	/

been successful in balancing between work and the family. One-third of the service members thought there was no need to establish a balance, while not a single spouse felt this way.

Hypothesis 3: The influence of reduced daily commuting and distance working has had a positive impact on successful balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling

As explained in this article, daily commuting is a problem for some military families, especially those that do not live close to the extended family and have a poor social network. It was thus contended that the reduced daily commuting and reorganization of work during the lockdown would have a positive influence on establishing a balance between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.

The analysis revealed that only one-quarter of the respondents were able to reorganize their work from the traditional form to distance work. For 38% of service members, distance work was sometimes possible while for 34% this was not an option at all.

Still, the self-evaluation of success in balancing between work and the family was highest among those who were working from a distance (mean value 3.58). Half of all respondents believe the influence of distance working is positive or highly positive.

When evaluating the sharing of domestic obligations, their opinion is divided (mean value 2.95). Pearson's correlation coefficient revealed (sig. = .003; $r = -.253$) that in families where the spouse is forced to carry a bigger burden of unpaid housework and childcare due to the service member's daily commuting the service members felt less successful in balancing between the family and work during the lockdown.

On average, military families positively evaluated the impact of the reduced daily commuting on family life (mean value 3.4).

Hypothesis 4: The number of children (one child, two children, three or more children) and their status (preschool, primary school, older)¹³ influences the self-evaluation of success in balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling

As expected, the research among military families revealed that the number of children influences the self-evaluation of one's success with balancing work and the family. Military families with one (mean value 3.58) or two children (3.49) felt more successful than families with three (2.92) or more children.

The results regarding the self-evaluation of success depending on the status of the children were surprising. The most successful of all seem to be those families with both preschool and primary school children (mean value 3.53), while the least successful were families with only primary school children (mean value 3.31).

The analysis revealed that, besides the status of the children and the size of the family, what seems to be important is the structure of the household. Nuclear families (mean value 3.40) and extended families (together with grandparents) (mean value 3.39) very similarly self-evaluated their success with balancing between work and the family during the pandemic – as more successful than unsuccessful.

Further, regression analysis was conducted to explore how the number of children and their status influences the self-evaluation of success. The model is not statistically significant ($R^2 = .029$; sig. = .08). However, the number of children predictor has a statistically significant effect on the self-evaluated success ($\beta = -.225$; sig. = .025), showing that indeed families with fewer children felt more successful.

Hypothesis 5: The lack of support on the micro level (closure of both preschool childcare and schools as well as the lack of extended family support) has had a negative influence on balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling

The data reveal that 30% of military families were facing minor or serious problems due to the lack of extended family support. The other two-thirds did not feel any problems, either because they did not rely on such help before the pandemic (30%) or they had managed to reorganize their daily routines and adapt them to the current situation (27%), with 7% of them having retained their grandparents' support during the lockdown.

It seems that those who managed to adapt their daily routines to the pandemic situation and did not feel any pressure due to a lack of extended family support self-evaluated their ability to balance between work and family life the highest (mean value 3.76).

Over one-third of respondents expressed difficulties (37%): namely, 10% had serious and 27% minor problems, while 30% did not have problems because they had managed to reorganize their daily routines. The latter expressed greater success with overall balancing between work and the family (mean value 3.88).

This indicates that those with problems due to the closure of educational institutions also encountered difficulties in balancing between work and family life. The support of the education system is related and influences the ability to successfully achieve a balance between work and the family.

Testing the hypothesis also with regression analysis ($R^2 = .075$; sig. = .002) shows that those with problems because of the closure of educational institutions reported feeling less successful in balancing between work and the family ($\beta = -.308$; sig. = .001).

Discussion

The data reveal that on the macro national level the financial support given was the most beneficial for military families. It was important for service members to earn some extra money during the lockdown as well as for their spouses to stay at home with the children and to be reimbursed by the state for their salary. The analysis revealed that those who perceive the institutional military support as more useful also felt more successful in balancing between the family and work during the lockdown. The state's support did not have such an impact on the self-evaluated success. This permits us to partially confirm the first hypothesis: *the support measures on the macro level helped military families with balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.*

The second hypothesis was not confirmed since the data do not support our prediction about dual-serving military families facing more challenges due to the lockdown than

other military families. On the contrary, based on previous research (e.g., Juvan and Jelušič, 2007; Vuga Beršnak and Juvan, 2013a; Vuga Beršnak, 2021) and supported by these data, it seems that the dual-serving families have become resilient after years of coping with the burden of military life (e.g., operations abroad, field trainings).

As discussed in the theoretical part of this article, women remain the main carriers of unpaid domestic and childcare work and thus the lockdown placed an additional burden on their shoulders (e.g., McLaren et al., 2020; Power, 2020; UN Policy Brief, 2020). While they were mainly responsible for daily household chores and childcare, after the shutting down of the education system and withdrawal of extended family support, the burden became even heavier. It seems that during the lockdown women in military families (either service members or spouses) felt more confident and evaluated their ability to balance between work and the family higher than men. This extraordinary situation reveals the latent resilience¹⁴ of women, whose share in the work–life balance exceeds that of men, and confirms the strong gendered roles expectations in Slovenian society. The circumstances of Covid-19 mean that individual perceptions of strength and the ability to combine multi-tasks in the family are more emphasized by women.

Moreover, the data reveal that one-third of the service members did not feel any need to establish a balance between their military job, childcare, and the home schooling of their children. On the other hand, not one woman felt this way. The data can be interpreted within the context of the masculine character of a military organization, where men believe themselves to be the primary financial providers and do not see family care as being their obligation. The data can further be interpreted in the context of the division of gender roles in Slovenian society, whereby men are disengaged as fathers or see their role merely as supporting mothers. Despite the prevailing dual-career families in Slovenian society, women remain the chief providers of unpaid housework, childcare, and other family support functions. Accordingly, it appears that the female spouses assumed the biggest burden of the family in the lockdown during the first pandemic wave in 2020.

This last conclusion is also supported by the fact that those feeling most successful in balancing between work and the family were service members who had retained the usual intensity of their daily commuting, hence they had preserved their traditional working pattern. This may be attributed to the following: (1) the pandemic had not affected their work intensity and thus they were not actively involved in the new family dynamics during the lockdown; and (2) the daily commuting was never that time-consuming that it had a negative impact on the family.

Service members generally do not feel much pressure from their daily commuting on their family life, yet they recognized the positive impact of distance working during the pandemic. It appears that military families are used to the military way of life, including long-term absences and daily commutes. Nevertheless, those who were able to transfer their job to distance working showed appreciation for having ‘time off the road’. This allows us to partly confirm the third hypothesis: *the influence of reduced daily commuting and distance working has had a positive influence on successful balancing between paid work, childcare, and distance school work.*

Success with balancing between work and the family is inherently linked to the family structure as well as the number and age of children. As expected, the analysis revealed that

the lockdown was the least problematic for small families with older children. Big families with primary school children who needed parental supervision and assistance with distance learning felt the least successful with balancing. The fourth hypothesis is thus confirmed: *the number of children and their status influences the self-evaluation of success.*

This finding reveals the importance of the institutional support offered to families by the public system and the availability of the public education system and preschool care. Moreover, the findings show that, while extended family support might be important, it is not the main source of support. The lack of grandparents' support was an emotional problem and has had a psychosocial impact, yet it was not crucial to the military families' reorganization of their everyday life. The help of grandparents is needed in families that have preschool children. Families with school-age children benefit much more from the educational institutions. The latter perform several other important care functions on top of education.

Therefore, the fifth hypothesis may be partially confirmed: *the lack of support on the micro level has had a negative influence on balancing between paid work, childcare, and home schooling.*

Conclusion: Who has paid the biggest price?

The analysis revealed that when it comes to military families the highest price has been paid by women, mainly the civilian spouses. In line with previous research, women are still the primary carriers of unpaid domestic work and largely take on the care for dependent family members. This pattern was generally followed and even strengthened during the lockdown. The consequences of the lockdown measures, such as the closure of childcare and schools, increased unpaid domestic work and care, the lion's share of which is done by women. The Eurofound study (2020), UN Policy Brief (2020), and the recent research findings discussed in this article show that women have taken over more burden of work–life balance than men, particularly if they have younger children. Big families with primary school children were facing the most challenges. Overnight they became teachers and computer experts (with or) without much knowledge of how to use the devices needed for distance learning. It was somewhat easier for families with preschool and older children. The amount of domestic work also increased, especially cooking and cleaning, because most family members were at home 24/7.

It is necessary to wait for the situation after the second and third waves and conduct more research by the end of 2021 to see whether the gender differences in the division of domestic chores and childcare remain or even increase, and thus also whether gender inequality has grown significantly. For the time being, it is apparent that a multitude of individual factors influenced the ability to balance between work, childcare, and home schooling, as did some inputs on the micro and macro levels. Furthermore, the closure of childcare and schools seems to be by far the most important factor affecting the work–life balance during the pandemic.

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Notes

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2. The dual-career family (and dual-earner work model) is common in Slovenia, therefore the military cannot completely rely on a spouse's support since they are also employed.
3. Slovenia is a small welfare state, with well-developed family policies as well as mechanisms to support families in daily life. Another source of support is a strong three-generational familial network.
4. Various experts have warned about the negative impact of the lockdown on various social groups (e.g., Human Rights Ombudsman's Report [2020] on the psychosocial consequences of Covid-19).
5. Another lockdown followed in October 2020 and lasted until mid-January 2021.
6. Data for June 2020. 600 service members included among contracted reserves did not play a significant role during the lockdown. Hence, we did not survey them nor any veterans.
7. In Slovenia, the currently applicable paid leave scheme was adopted in 1986. It stipulates 105 days of maternity leave and 260 days of parental leave.
8. The survey about the division of care work and responsibilities forms part of the project *Masculinities, equality, care practices* (2017–2020), funded by the Slovenian Research Agency and led by the Peace Institute. Project's website: www.mirovni-institut.si/projekti/moskosti-enakost-skrbstvene-praksemes/
9. Vuga Beršnak et al., 2020.
10. This corresponds to the ratio between men (85%) and women (15%) in the Slovenian Armed Forces. The same goes for the average age (the SAF average is 43 years) of the respondents (read more in Brožič and Pešec, 2017).
11. In Slovenian society preschool childcare is available for children aged between 11 months and 6 years. Primary school is obligatory and attended by children between 6 and 15 years old.
12. Due to the gender structure of the SAF, the civilian spouses are mostly women.
13. Preschool children are all children aged from 0 to 6 years. Primary school children are all children from 6 to 15 years old. Older children are high school children (aged between 15 and 19).
14. The resilience of the military families has been researched intensively by Alla Skomorovsky (e.g., Skomorovsky, 2014; Skomorovsky et al., 2019)

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Résumé

En avril 2020, une enquête a été menée auprès de familles de militaires slovènes. Il s'agissait de l'une des premières enquêtes réalisées dans le pays après l'apparition de la pandémie. L'armée a été qualifiée d'institution cruciale dans les efforts de lutte contre le virus SRAS-CoV-2 et s'est vue confier diverses missions, ce qui a entraîné une augmentation considérable de la charge de travail des militaires. Le poids des responsabilités familiales et du travail non rémunéré s'est également alourdi à cette époque, se reportant sur les familles des militaires, en particulier sur leurs conjointes civiles. L'objectif de l'enquête était de mesurer comment les familles militaires évaluaient leur réussite dans la recherche d'un équilibre entre le travail à domicile, les tâches ménagères, la garde des enfants et l'enseignement à domicile pendant le confinement lié à la pandémie. Les facteurs de risque ont été observés au niveau social micro (c'est-à-dire le manque de soutien de la famille élargie, les services institutionnels de garde des enfants et la fermeture des écoles) et macro (c'est-à-dire le soutien de l'armée, les mesures de soutien à l'échelle nationale). L'analyse montre que dans le cas des familles de militaires, ce sont les conjointes civiles qui ont payé le plus lourd tribut. Le nombre d'enfants et leur âge ont une influence sur l'auto-évaluation que font les parents de leur réussite en matière de conciliation entre leur vie professionnelle et leur vie privée. Les résultats montrent que les familles nombreuses et les familles avec des enfants scolarisés en primaire sont celles qui ont eu le plus de difficultés pendant le confinement. Étonnamment, les familles où les deux parents travaillent dans l'armée ont eu le sentiment de mieux s'en sortir.

Mots-clés

Confinement, équilibre entre vie professionnelle et vie privée, famille de militaires, pandémie, résilience, SRAS-CoV-2

Resumen

En abril de 2020, se realizó una encuesta entre familias de militares eslovenos, siendo una de las primeras encuestas que se realizan en el país después del estallido de la pandemia. El ejército fue etiquetado como una institución crucial en los esfuerzos para combatir el virus SARS-CoV-2 y fue designado para diversas actividades, lo que llevó a un aumento considerable de su carga de trabajo. La carga del cuidado y el trabajo no remunerado también se intensificó en ese momento, pasando a la familia de los militares, particularmente a las esposas civiles. El propósito de la encuesta ha sido medir cómo las familias de militares evalúan su éxito en la conciliación entre el trabajo desde el hogar, el trabajo doméstico, el cuidado de los niños y la educación en el hogar durante el confinamiento por la pandemia. Los factores de riesgo se han observado en los niveles sociales micro (falta de apoyo familiar extendido, cuidado infantil institucional y cierre escolar) y macro (apoyo de la institución militar, medidas de apoyo nacional). El análisis revela que, en el caso de las familias de militares, el precio más alto lo han pagado las esposas civiles. El número de hijos y su edad influyen en la autoevaluación de los padres sobre su éxito en la conciliación entre

la vida laboral y personal. Los resultados muestran que las familias numerosas y las familias con niños de escuela primaria son las que más dificultades han tenido durante el confinamiento. Sorprendentemente, las familias con dos progenitores en el ejército se sintieron como las más exitosas.

Palabras clave

Conciliación de la vida laboral y personal, confinamiento, familia militar, pandemia, resiliencia, SARS-CoV-2