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# Experiencing work–family enrichment as a separated parent in Australia

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## Abstract

Contrary to approaching work and family as conflictual roles, a shift towards acknowledgement of the positive interaction between work and family has been detected. This research investigated whether married/cohabiting and divorced/separated parents differ in terms of work–family enrichment, considering their gender and relationship status after separation. Data from 3993 married/cohabiting and 1455 divorced/separated parents from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) database were analysed using regression analysis. The results revealed a complex interplay of relationship status and gender. Single mothers experience more work–family enrichment after a break-up than do mothers with a partner. No differences were found for fathers.

## Keywords

family composition, gender, parents, relationship status, separation, work–family enrichment

In an adult's life, a substantial amount of time and energy is spent on performing the employee and parental roles, which can be experienced as a challenge to balancing work and family life. For separated parents, the balance between both central life spheres can become even more complex. This interaction is often addressed as a conflictual situation, and previous research has identified a complex interplay of marital status, post-divorce relationship status, and gender in the experience of work–family conflict (Van den Eynde et al., 2019). However, more recent research has acknowledged a positive interaction between work and family, which can be scientifically defined as work–family enrichment (Gatrell et al., 2013). The term work–family enrichment refers to ‘the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role’ (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006: 73). Several studies have pointed out that enrichment is associated with more work and family satisfaction, less

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turnover, and improved mental and physical health (for a review, see McNall et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018).

Previous research concerning work–family balance acknowledged the possible influence of family composition, but it was usually included as a control variable and only distinguished between married or partnered couples and singles, which ignores the dynamics and nuances in these differences (Daniel and Sonnentag, 2016; Hunter et al., 2010; Rastogi and Chaudhary, 2018; van Steenbergen et al., 2014). One meta-analysis bundled the antecedents of work–family enrichment and included marital status as a resource-providing family characteristic. The authors found that married (or cohabiting) individuals reported more of the specific enrichment direction from family to work than did those who were not married (Lapierre et al., 2018). The argument is theoretically driven and states that a person's family composition might influence the availability and access to certain enriching resources (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Lapierre et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). However, a clear view on the nuances within these differences and the mechanism behind them is still missing.

The category of divorced/separated parents forms an interesting group when looking at work–family enrichment, as both work and family life can be shaken up by the decision to end a relationship. In terms of the availability and access to resources in particular, they might experience challenges that are unique in relation to those of other parents. It has been argued that divorced/separated parents should not be equated with single parents, although this is often done (Baxter and Alexander, 2008; Nomaguchi, 2012; Van den Eynde et al., 2019). For example, repartnering, which can be interpreted as the restoration of some family resources (such as financial resources, parental support, and sharing household responsibilities), is an important factor to consider, as the relationship status after separation or divorce is not automatically single parenthood (Voydanoff, 2002).

This research was conducted with Australian data. The Australian work and family context is characterized by an increase in more diverse and non-standard work settings, but also higher levels of overall job quality and average real earnings compared with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) participating countries (Campbell et al., 2019; Charlesworth and Malone, 2017; Mares, 2016; OECD, 2016). Although there is raised attention to work–family balance at the level of Australian social policy and culture, an inequality has been noted (Watson, 2016). Australian's initiatives that enhance a healthy balance between work and family commitments (such as family-friendly work culture, workfare benefits and parental leave) are not always flexible in use or easily accessible for all Australian societal groups (Spies-Butcher, 2014; Wilson et al., 2013). For example, research has pointed out a gender inequality, as these arrangements mostly target mothers (Bianchi and Milkie, 2010; Todd and Binns, 2013). In the current study, attention can be drawn to the access to and use of enrichment resources depending on family composition. These circumstances with social expectations, structures, and policies define the work and family life of the Australian population and their ability to manage the interaction between both (Bass et al., 2009; Ford et al., 2007). Regarding contemporary Australian family life, the finding that work–family enrichment and adequate parenting behaviours have a supportive relationship contributes to understanding the reciprocal link between the work and family environments (Cooklin et al., 2015, 2016). Moreover, in international reports of the OECD (2017) the work–life balance of Australian employees scored below the OECD average in a negative sense.

The aim of the current study is to provide new insights on work–family enrichment in separated families in Australia. First, this study contributes to the work–family

scientific literature by examining whether married or cohabiting parents differ from divorced, separated, or split-cohabitation parents in their experience of work–family enrichment. Second, the study investigates whether just having a partner is important, by making the distinction between singles after a break-up and couples. Finally, the study takes into account the existing diversity in post-separated relationship status by differentiating between single and repartnered parents. With these three research areas, we fill the scientific gap with empirical evidence and strengthen the theoretical explanation behind this phenomenon. Additionally, it has been acknowledged that this topic is gendered, so answers to the research questions will be formulated separately for men and women. This study considers detailed information about a wide range of family and work characteristics of married/cohabiting parents ( $n = 3993$ ) and divorced/separated parents ( $n = 1455$ ) by drawing on the quantitative data of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), collected between 2004 and 2016 in Australia.

## **Literature overview**

### *Theoretical perspective*

With work–family enrichment defined as an improvement in quality of life by role experiences (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), the theoretical origin of work–family enrichment is built upon the functional role theory (Biddle, 1986), derived from the early works of Linton (1936). The underlying mechanism of work–family enrichment is based on the principle that participating in multiple roles can be positive and rewarding (Barnett et al., 1992; Marks, 1977; Thoits, 1983).

The specific theoretical perspective of work–family enrichment was provided by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), who stated that the quality of life in one domain (work or family) improves when there is a bidirectional transfer of resources gained from the domain of origin to the receiving domain – either work to family or family to work. Available resources can be of different types, namely skills (e.g. coping skills), psychological and physical resources (e.g. optimism), social capital (e.g. networking), flexibility (e.g. flexible work arrangements), and material resources (e.g. money). These resources can enrich the work and family domains as assets that can be used for problem solving or coping. According to the same theoretical perspective, two ways or paths exist whereby a resource can influence the enrichment process. These are the instrumental or direct path (direct transfer of a resource) and the affective or indirect path (via positive emotions and feelings).

Thus, enrichment occurs when a person uses certain resources from one domain to enhance quality of life in the other domain. Thereby, marital and relationship status can be interpreted as a personal characteristic that enhances the provision of resources (Lapierre et al., 2018). For example, in contrast to parents without a partner, married or cohabiting individuals can use their partner’s professional network to benefit their own work career (ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe, 2010).

### *Hypotheses*

No studies, to the best of our knowledge, have specifically investigated whether and how divorced/separated and married/cohabiting parents differ in their experience of work–family enrichment. Thus, the question remains whether individuals in these family constellations differ in terms of work–family enrichment.

First, we will compare married/cohabiting and divorced/separated parents. Based on the theoretical mechanism of available resources provided from the work and family domains, it can be stated that divorced and separated parents are in a more complex situation, which makes the access to available resources more difficult, and they are confronted with more complex demands than married or cohabiting parents are. Compared with married and cohabiting dual-earner families, divorced/separated parents become separately responsible for meeting the demands of their own household and care for their children according to the applied children's residence arrangement. Unique to divorced/separated families is the social complexity of the persistent connection between the two former partners, although they now function separately from each other both physically and emotionally. For example, the practical and pedagogical arrangements regarding the children require a certain degree of communication and appointments between both ex-partners (Emery, 2011). In light of these arguments, our first hypothesis is that divorced/separated parents experience less work–family enrichment (Hypothesis 1) than married/cohabiting parents do.

Second, a comparison is made between single after break-up and coupled parents (married and/or repartnered). This enables investigation of the impact of relationship status on the level of work–family enrichment, regardless of being married/cohabiting or divorced/separated. The argumentation can be made that the presence of a partner in the household can maintain or restore the resources that come with having a partner. For example, one can rely on the partner's social network; a healthy financial situation can be obtained when both partners are working; and support in fulfilling household, childcare, and work-related demands can be found. Previous research has found a positive link between work–family enrichment and relationship satisfaction of both partners, with perceived partner support and positive behaviour playing a crucial mediating role (Liu et al., 2016; van Steenbergen et al., 2014). As such, the second hypothesis states that single parents experience less work–family enrichment (Hypothesis 2) than do coupled parents (either married or repartnered).

Third, to disentangle the differences in work–family enrichment in depth, a distinction is made between married/cohabiting, repartnered, and single separated parents. More specifically, we ask whether being separated or not having a partner is most important in influencing the experience of work–family enrichment. Based on previous arguments and the theoretical perspective, we can hypothesize that being single after a break-up is the least favourable situation for experiencing work–family enrichment, due to being confronted with a twofold underlying social complexity. Their family context is characterized by having no partner to rely on, having their own household, and at the same time maintaining a connection with their former household. For repartnered parents, one aspect of this twofold complexity is removed by having a new partner to rely on. Married/cohabiting parents are able to use the full resources provided by having a steady partner in the original family. Taking these arguments together, Hypothesis 3 states that single separated parents experience the least work–family enrichment (Hypothesis 3), followed by repartnered parents and married/cohabiting parents.

## *Gender differences*

In addition to these still unclear nuances in the differences on the level of family composition, gender-related dynamics underlying the balancing act between work and family make this issue even more complex. With gender often included as a moderator in relation to different antecedents and consequences, men and women are said to experience their work and family roles differently (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999;

Lapierre et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). According to gender role theory, being a man or a woman entails different expected social roles. Men are expected to be the main breadwinners of the family, and women are expected to take primary responsibility for the household and children (Craig and Mullan, 2009; Eagly et al., 2000; Gali Cinamon and Rich, 2010). Despite the more recent gender role shift, with women increasingly participating in the labour market and contributing to the financial situation of their families, the family role is still interpreted as being more salient to women and the work role more salient to men (Craig et al., 2020; Huerta et al., 2011; Mortelmans et al., 2016). Craig et al. (2020) identified the reflection of parental gender roles in the Australian context of policy, arrangements, and social norms. The researchers described Australia as a liberal, market-oriented welfare state and highly familialistic, but this interacted with gendered parental workloads.

Applied to the work–family enrichment subject, a person’s gender can influence their level of enrichment through the access to and use of resources (Wayne et al., 2007). For example, flexible work arrangements are more accepted and used by women than by men (McNall et al., 2010). As such, the experience of work–family enrichment is often expected to have stronger effects on women than on men. However, research reports very inconsistent results, with often weak or no differences, which calls the moderating position of gender into question (Lapierre et al., 2018). Methodological issues could be the reason for this (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

Furthermore, both genders experience events that change the family, such as family dissolutions, differently, as confirmed by existing sociological literature (Craig et al., 2020; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Lapierre et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). For example, in terms of employment and the financial consequences of divorce, divorced persons are found to have fewer economic resources in comparison with their married counterparts. This finding is especially true for women. Men, who mostly work full time during a marriage, continue to do so when a divorce occurs. Consequently, they do not suffer as much from this possible financial downturn. Women, who work less on a full-time basis during marriage, often have to increase their working hours when they divorce to maintain a healthy financial situation (Baxter et al., 2007; de Regt et al., 2013). Australian demographic research has also investigated the likelihood of men and women repartnering after a family dissolution. Men were found to have a higher likelihood of repartnering, and repartnering more quickly, than women. This trend was also found in European and Canadian research (Hughes, 2000; Mortelmans, 2013; Wu and Schimmele, 2005).

## **Method**

### ***Data***

The current study used the LSAC, which is a large-scale, longitudinal, and multi-actor database in collaboration with the Australian Department of Social Services, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It includes information on the development and well-being of 10,000 children and their families. A representative sample of parents was selected from different families of all areas in Australia. The first parent was selected as the parent who knew the study child the best, most commonly the mother. The second partner, if present, was another adult who had a parental relationship with the study child or was the partner of the first parent, most commonly the father. The LSAC currently consists of seven waves, with the first wave collected in 2003 and from then on repeated bi-annually. Every wave

consists of two cohorts: in the first wave (2003–4), the first cohort includes around 5000 children aged 0 to 1, and the second cohort includes 5000 children aged 4 to 5. In the last available wave, the first cohort is between 12 and 13 years old, and the second cohort between 16 and 17.

A subsample was selected to perform the current research. As the measurement of work–family enrichment is adopted in each wave, we could have performed a longitudinal (fixed or random effects) regression. However, this choice would have been hampered by the dynamic nature of families. As we aimed to compare different family types in this study, we decided to use only the latest available wave (wave 7). We considered family dynamics, as we used the panel data to reconstruct family decomposition and recomposition. Wave 7 had a response rate of 78.3% for Cohort B and 73.9% for Cohort K, resulting in 3381 and 3089 interviews, respectively. Non-response and family forms excluded from our models decreased our analytical sample. The final analytical subsample consisted of 5448 respondents, 73.2% (3993) of whom were married or cohabiting and 1455 of whom were divorced or had separated from a cohabiting relationship. Of the separated/divorced parents, 492 were single (9.0%) and 963 repartnered (17.8%); 3309 were mothers (60.7%), and 2139 were fathers (39.3%). The data from both cohorts were used, accounting for the children’s age differences by controlling for them in the analysis.

## Measures

*Work–family enrichment.* The measurement of work–family enrichment is derived from Marshall and Barnett’s (1993) Work–Family Gains Scale. The scale assesses the positive interaction between employment and parenting (e.g. ‘How strongly do you agree or disagree with these statements? The fact that I work makes me a better parent’) and themselves (e.g. ‘Having both work and family responsibilities: Makes me a more well-rounded person’), with three items for each subscale. The respondents answer the questions on a five-point rating scale with the categorical labels from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An individual’s eventual score is calculated by taking the mean score of the six items. The scale has a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  value of 0.87.

*Partnership composition.* We used three comparisons in this study to test our hypotheses. The first comparison was between married or cohabiting couples and divorced, separated, or split-cohabitation couples. To determine the parents’ relationship status, we started from their marital status in wave 1 and used the longitudinal information in the panel to determine their relationship status in wave 7. The broken relationships were identified based on the factual situation of whether the partner lived in the same household and if respondents considered the other parent to be their partner. For the second comparison, we used the household composition as the basis of comparison: single parents were compared with parents living together with a partner (whether the original parent of the child or a new partner after the break-up). The final comparison was between single parents and intact original households and the newly constellated families. Here, we combined the previous two groups to make a three-way comparison.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for work–family enrichment (WFE) according to the different comparisons and the control variables, separately for mothers and fathers. Regarding the first comparison, married/cohabiting mothers reported a mean WFE of 3.88 and divorced/separated mothers a mean of 3.85. Similar numbers were found for the fathers, with a mean of 3.90 for married/cohabiting fathers and a

mean of 3.83 for divorced/separated fathers. Second, mothers who remained single after break-up ( $M = 3.91$ ) experienced more WFE than did partnered mothers ( $M = 3.86$ ). Single ( $M = 3.88$ ) and partnered fathers ( $M = 3.89$ ) reported almost the same level of WFE. Finally, for the third comparison, single mothers were again found to report the highest level of WFE ( $M = 3.91$ ), followed by still married or cohabiting mothers ( $M = 3.88$ ) and repartnered mothers ( $M = 3.82$ ). For fathers, still married or cohabiting fathers reporting the most WFE ( $M = 3.90$ ), followed by those who were single after break-up ( $M = 3.88$ ) and repartnered ( $M = 3.82$ ).

*Educational level.* Educational level is a combination of information about the years of education. This leads to three categories, namely primary education, secondary education, and higher education. Of the mothers, 6.55% had completed primary education, 7.85% had completed secondary education, and 85.94% had completed higher education. Of the fathers, 7.11% had completed primary education, 6.92% had completed secondary education, and 85.98% had completed higher education.

*Age of the parent.* The average age of the mothers in the sample was 45.64 years, and that of the fathers was 45.86 years. Because we used data from cohorts B and K, children’s ages are limited to 12/13 and 16/17, which implies that parents are older. A consequence is that most families have a complete fertility history at that age, which also explains why the families under study are, on average, larger.

*Number of children in the household.* The number of children present in the household is derived from a question asking how many siblings the child has in the household. This variable includes all types of siblings, such as full biological, step, half, adopted, and foster siblings. A plus-one operation is done to include the selected child as well. The average number of children in the household for mothers was 2.42 and for fathers was 2.54.

*Age of youngest child in the household.* Respondents were asked to indicate the age of the youngest child in the household. The average age of the youngest child in the mothers’ household was 11.96 years and in the fathers’ household was 11.56 years.

*Indigenous.* The indigenous status of the respondent was determined by the question, ‘Is the family member of Aboriginal origin, Torres Strait Islander origin, or both?’ The answer was registered as *No*; *Yes, Aboriginal*; *Yes, Torres Strait Islander*; or *Yes, both*. For analyses, these were recategorized as yes or no. Of the mothers and fathers, 1.36% and 0.94%, respectively, were of indigenous origin.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for all comparisons and variables (N = 5448).

	Mothers (N = 3309, 60.7%)		Fathers (N = 2139, 39.3%)	
	Mean WFE		N	
Comparison 1				
Married/cohabiting	3.88	2198	3.90	1795
Divorced/separated	3.85	1111	3.83	344
Comparison 2				
Single after break-up	3.91	443	3.88	49
Partnered	3.86	2866	3.89	2090
Comparison 3				



Single after break-up	3.91	443	3.88	49
Repartnered after break-up	3.82	668	3.82	295
Still married or cohabiting	3.88	2198	3.90	1795
	<i>Mean – %</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean – %</i>	<i>N</i>
Educational level				
Primary education	6.55%	216	7.11%	151
Secondary education	7.85%	248	6.92%	147
Higher education	85.94%	2836	85.98%	1827
Age of the parent	45.64	3308	45.86	2139
Number of children	2.42	3309	2.54	2139
Age of the youngest child	11.96	3309	11.56	2139
Indigenous (Yes)	1.36%	45	0.94%	20
Born in Australia (Yes)	80.48%	2663	78.92%	1688
State				
New South Wales	29.25%	968	31.00%	663
Victoria	21.97%	727	23.47%	502
Queensland	23.87%	790	20.94%	448
Southern Australia	7.10%	235	6.50%	139
Western Australia	10.49%	347	11.27%	241
Tasmania	3.17%	105	2.66%	57
Northern Territory	1.24%	41	1.12%	24
Australia Capital Territory	2.90%	96	3.04%	65
Household income	2830.96	2952	3139.35	1943
Working hours	31.86	3276	45.30	2093
Level of job security	3.22	3307	1.89	2104
Freedom to decide how to work	3.61	3309	3.86	2137

**Born in Australia.** The respondents' country of birth was recorded in the questionnaire and resulted in two categories for the analysis, namely *Yes* for born in Australia or *No*. Of the mothers and fathers in the sample, 80.48% and 78.92%, respectively, were born in Australia.

**State.** The respondents' state of residence was categorized as one of the six states of Australia (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania), and two additional main areas: Northern Territory and Australia Central Territory. For both mothers and fathers, the majority of the respondents lived in New South Wales (29.25%<sub>M</sub>; 31.00%<sub>F</sub>), Victoria (21.97%<sub>M</sub>; 23.47%<sub>F</sub>), and Queensland (23.87%<sub>M</sub>; 20.94%<sub>F</sub>).

**Household income.** The household income of the respondents was calculated as the sum of the usual weekly income of parent 1, parent 2, and other adults in the household, and was the imputed version. As a continuous variable, the average household income was AUD 2830.96 for the mothers and AUD 3139.35 for the fathers. We used the imputed version of the income variable, as this is considered to be statistically superior to the original one (Mullan et al., 2015).

**Working hours.** The number of working hours per week was defined as the amount of hours the respondent usually spends working each week at all jobs. If this was less than one hour, the response was transformed to zero. To test for non-linearity, working hours squared was included as a covariate. On average, the female respondents worked 31.86 hours per week. The average was 45.30 hours per week for the fathers.

*Level of job security.* Respondents answered on a 4-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (*very insecure*) to 4 (*very secure*), as to how secure they felt in their present job. The average level of job security in the subsample of the mothers was 3.22. The fathers’ average was 1.89.

*Freedom to decide how to work.* Respondents indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘I have a lot of freedom to decide how I do my own work.’ On a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), the average was 3.61 for mothers and 3.86 for fathers.

**Analytical strategy**

The data were analysed using linear regression analysis to test the three hypotheses. Due to the gendered nature of this issue, the analyses were performed separately for mothers and fathers. Educational level, age of the parent, number of children in the household, age of the youngest child in the household, indigenous status, born in Australia, state of residence, household income, working hours per week (+ the squared term), level of job security, and freedom to decide how to work were included as control variables, because previous research often counted these as important factors influencing the work–family balance (Lapierre et al., 2018). The original dataset was made up separately according to cohort but was adjusted by creating one subset of data for the current study. Due to the age differences of the selected children in cohorts B and K, this variable was also included as a control variable.

**Results**

Table 2 presents the results of the linear regression analysis of the three hypotheses. The analysis was broken down by gender, which enabled us to gain more insights into the differences within one gender category. However, the results of the fathers should be interpreted with caution, due to the lower number of fathers in the subsample. The goodness of fit of the model, measured with *R*<sup>2</sup>, shows different results according to fathers and mothers. Across the three comparisons, the proportion of total variance explained by the model for mothers is between 0.103 and 0.104. For fathers, this is between 0.074 and 0.084.

**Table 2.** Regression analysis of WFE by gender.

	Comparison 1 (Ref. = Married/ cohabiting)		Comparison 2 (Ref. = Partnered)		Comparison 3 (Ref. = Still married or cohabiting)	
	Mother <i>β</i>	Father <i>β</i>	Mother <i>β</i>	Father <i>β</i>	Mother <i>β</i>	Father <i>β</i>
Intercept	2.60 ***	3.33 ***	2.54 ***	3.28 ***	2.55 ***	3.32 ***
Comparison 1 (Ref. = Married/cohabiting)						
Divorced/separated	0.02	−0.04				
Comparison 2 (Ref. = Partnered)						
Single after break-up			0.09 **	0.17		
Comparison 3 (Ref. = Still married or cohabiting)						
Single after break-up					0.09 *	0.15
Repartnered after break-up					−0.00	−0.06
Cohort (Ref. = cohort B – age child = 12/13)						

Cohort K (age child = 16/17)	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05
Educational level (Ref. = Higher education)						
Primary education	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03	-0.05
Secondary education	-0.13	-0.03	-0.13 **	-0.02	-0.12	-0.02
					**	
Age of the parent	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00
Number of children	-0.04 **	0.00	-0.04 **	0.01	-0.04 *	-0.00
Age of the youngest child	-0.01 **	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00
Indigenous (Yes)	-0.06	-0.06	-0.05	-0.06	-0.05	-0.05
Born in Australia (Yes)	-0.01	-0.08 *	-0.01	-0.08 *	-0.01	-0.08 *
State (Ref. = New South Wales)						
Victoria	0.009	-0.06	0.01	-0.07	0.01	-0.07
Queensland	-0.05	-0.08 *	-0.04	-0.08 *	-0.04	-0.08 *
Southern Australia	-0.00	-0.05	-0.00	-0.04	-0.00	-0.05
Western Australia	-0.03	-0.07	-0.03	-0.07	-0.03	-0.07
Tasmania	-0.06	-0.05	-0.06	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06
Northern Territory	0.00	0.09	-0.00	0.09	-0.00	0.10
Australia Cap. Terr.	0.03	-0.16 *	0.02	-0.15 *	0.02	-0.14 *
Household income	0.07 ***	0.05 *	0.09 ***	0.05 *	0.09 ***	0.06 *
Working hours	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00
Working hours (squared)	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Level of job security	0.06 ***	-0.05 **	0.06 ***	-0.06	0.06 ***	-0.06 ***
				***		
Freedom to decide how to work	0.16 ***	0.14 ***	0.16 ***	0.14 ***	0.16 ***	0.14 ***
$R^2$	0.103	0.084	0.104	0.074	0.104	0.075

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

First, when looking at the analysis of hypothesis 1, which investigated the differences between married/cohabiting and divorced/separated parents, the results indicate that there is no difference in WFE between both categories of family composition when controlling for background characteristics. Moreover, with this analysis done separately for both genders, no significant differences were found between either married/cohabiting and divorced/separated mothers or married/cohabiting and divorced/separated fathers.

Hypothesis 2 compared the partnership status by distinguishing between single parents after a break-up and those who have a partner (married/cohabiting and repartnered parents) and their level of WFE. The analysis showed different results depending on gender. Our attention was focused especially on the mothers, as the results revealed that single mothers reported significantly higher levels of WFE compared with partnered mothers. No difference was found between fathers.

Third, a comparison was made between single parents, people who repartnered after break-up, and married/cohabiting parents (Hypothesis 3). This enabled us to consider the history of separation and the present relationship status simultaneously. The results showed that the strength of the difference between the three groups differed according to gender. Mothers who were single after a break-up experienced significantly more WFE than women who were still married or cohabiting. The comparison between repartnered and married/cohabiting mothers appeared to be non-significant. Additional analysis (not presented) revealed that the comparison between single and repartnered mothers was not significant, although this effect did approach the statistical significance level of  $p \leq .05$ , with  $p = .055$ . All three comparisons for fathers concerning hypothesis 3 were again non-significant. Given the lower number of fathers included in the analysis, no emphasis will be placed on these findings. However, the

current results show bigger coefficients for the fathers compared with the mothers. Additional analysis (not presented) of the interaction effect of family composition and gender show no statistical significance, which most likely indicates no difference between fathers and mothers.

Regarding the control variables, different patterns were found for fathers and mothers. For mothers, the educational level (except for the first comparison) and number of children appeared to be significantly related to the level of WFE. Furthermore, the age of the youngest child impacted the relationship with WFE significantly for mothers, but only for the first comparison. For fathers, whether they were born in Australia and their state of residence mattered. Some control variables also affected the regression for both genders, namely the household income, level of job insecurity, and the freedom to decide how to work. Our attention is drawn to the opposite effects of job security in the regression of both genders. Also the mean difference ( $M_{mothers} = 3.22$ ,  $M_{fathers} = 1.89$ ) in Table 1 is surprising. A possible explanation can be found in worrying more about not meeting the traditional gender role expectation of the male being the main breadwinner of the household and thus being more sensitive to the consequences of losing their job (Cheng and Chan, 2008). However, the opposite effects for mothers and fathers is more difficult to align with this possible explanation. Previous research found that job security is positively related to work–family enrichment (Bandeira et al., 2021) and emphasizes the importance of including interaction factors with gender (e.g. gender ideology) due to the unclear and inconsistent results on the gender effect on job insecurity (Gaunt and Benjamin, 2007). As such, we believe that underlying characteristic differences (e.g. occupational level) between both genders in the sample are triggering this finding.

## Discussion

In an adult's life, work and family form the central life spheres and evidently do not function separately from each other. The recent work–family enrichment concept acknowledges the positive interaction of participating in both roles. However, research investigating this experience in contemporary families remains limited and unclear. This study is the first to inquire into this issue in depth by comparing married/cohabiting with divorced/separated parents, with the reasoning that this family characteristic possibly affects the availability of, and access to, a person's resources. This group of interest offers unique insights and is important because family dissolution and alternative family formations are very common nowadays (Chen and Yip, 2018; Skew et al., 2009). In addition, the current study addresses the underlying gendered nature of this balancing act by focusing on the within-group differences. The lower number of male respondents in the subsample necessitates cautious interpretation for this group. We argue that it is not a difference in gender itself but rather the cultural and social role expectations that are rooted in our societies (Eagly et al., 2000; Gali Cinamon and Rich, 2010; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999).

First, the difference in work–family enrichment between married/cohabiting and divorced/separated parents was investigated. We expected that divorced or separated parents would experience less work–family enrichment than married or cohabiting parents would because of facing more complex demands of work and family life, and available resources being more difficult to access. However, based on the analysis results, we have to reject this hypothesis. It appears that the fact of being married/cohabiting or divorced/separated has no association with the experienced level of work–family enrichment.

Second, we hypothesized that single parents after a break-up would report lower levels of work–family enrichment than would parents who have a partner (married/cohabiting and repartnered). This prediction was based on the resources that come with having a partner (assuming that the partner is supportive). The results revealed, contrary to this prediction, that single mothers experience more work–family enrichment than do mothers with a partner. This difference was not found for fathers. It was unexpected that single mothers would experience more work–family enrichment compared with partnered mothers. Somehow, single mothers have access to enrichment enhancers and/or can use their resources beneficially, which leads to an improved quality of life in these roles. A possible reason could be the strong social network of single parents. Previous research has indicated that single employees have a greater social network and rely more strongly on it as compensation for not having the resources that come with having a helpful partner (ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe, 2010). Zhang et al. (2018) found the same result, although they did not distinguish between genders. They found, in particular, that the moderation effect of marital status on the relationship between work–family enrichment and work engagement was stronger for single than for married employees. This is possibly due to the higher level of family demands of married workers, which prevents them from being more positively engaged in work as a consequence of work–family enrichment. Furthermore, another sociological reason could be that single women engage in full-time work more. This is often necessary to ensure a healthy financial situation. By working full time and building a career, single mothers can obtain more access to and use the resources that come with working more, in contrast with part-time working mothers. Because of this increase in resources, they can take the enrichment factors from work into family life. As a critical reflection on our respondents' characteristics, is it noteworthy to keep in mind that mothers are likely to increase their working hours when their children grow older (Baxter, 2013). Without a doubt, this tendency of single mothers requires further investigation.

Last, we analysed parents who repartnered and married/cohabiting parents as separate groups, and we compared them with single parents after a break-up. The findings indicate that single mothers experience significantly higher levels of work–family enrichment compared with married mothers and their repartnered counterparts (marginal non-significant difference). For fathers, no significant differences were found. These results confirm the previous reasoning that the absence of a partner in the mother's household can be compensated for by reliance on her stronger social network and making use of resources that come with the need to work more.

Along with the contributions of the current study, it is important to note some limitations, which indicate some suggestions for future research. First, we treated the data as cross-sectional, and the measurements are self-reported, which prevents us from making causal generalized interpretations. As a next step, future researchers should look at the dynamics over time with regard to changing family dynamics and work–family enrichment. Second, we were not able to derive information about the work–family balance of the parent who does not live in the household (e.g. the ex-partner), as this was not included in the questionnaire. Especially with the focus on divorced/separated parents, having this information about the former partner could be interesting. Third, two directions of influence between work and family are distinguished theoretically and empirically, namely work enriching family and family enriching work. However, the operationalization in this dataset does not make this distinction. Future researchers should examine in more detail how different both directions of work–family enrichment are (Lapierre et al., 2018). Last, we used data on

Australian families, and although their society is considered a Western country, we believe that this context is different from Europe and America; therefore, no generalizations across Western countries can be made. Cross-country comparisons are necessary to gain more insights into this issue on a global level.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature about work–family balance by offering new insights into the work–family enrichment process according to family constellation. The current study is one of the first to focus directly on this subject. Unexpectedly, the results revealed that it is not the family composition that matters, but rather whether a person has a supportive partner. In addition, it is suggested that gender plays a role, although no interpretations can be made for the fathers. Single mothers seem to benefit more from having a stronger social network and the incoming work-related resources to improve the quality of life in both roles. As McNall et al. (2010) suggested, one must not only reduce work–family conflict, as is often introduced in policy contexts, but also develop strategies to enhance work–family enrichment while incorporating knowledge about the type of, and access to, resources typically associated with gender and household structure. Because different groups (e.g. singles, parents, couples) have different resources and needs, a plea for egalitarian and adaptive arrangements at the policy level is necessary to promote enrichment according to the target group (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Pocock and Charlesworth, 2017). For example, flexible work arrangements and telecommunication possibilities were most beneficial for single employees in terms of helping behaviour towards co-workers, whereas couples without children showed more helping behaviour and improved their work performance when they had access to supervisor support, and better work outcomes were associated with family-friendly organizational cultures for parents with a partner, as ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe (2010) found. Thus, acknowledging the positive influence on quality of life when participating in family and work roles, the current study stresses the importance of taking into account the interaction between family status and gender when considering work–family enrichment for future scientific research and policy alignments.

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