



REVIEW ARTICLE

Work–Family Guilt in Contemporary Organisations: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to review Work-Family Guilt (WFG) literature, identifying key antecedents, decisions, outcomes, theories, contexts, and methodologies, and thereby suggesting directions for future research.

Methods/approach/design: The review integrates the Antecedents-Decisions-Outcomes (ADO) and Theory-Context-Methods (TCM) frameworks. Following PRISMA guidelines, 53 articles were retrieved from the Scopus database and Google Scholar and systematically analysed.

Findings: The findings indicate that work and family demands, individual characteristics, organisational norms, and societal/interpersonal influences are key antecedents of WFG. These shape emotional regulation, compensatory engagement, boundary management, withdrawal, shifting priorities, and prosocial or deviant behaviours. WFG is associated with psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, reduced satisfaction and well-being, strained relationships, fluctuations in work performance, and compensatory prosocial behaviours.

Implications: Organisations should strengthen inclusive caregiving policies, flexible work-family support, effective boundary-management practices, and sector-specific interventions.

Originality/value: The Integration of ADO and TCM frameworks consolidates fragmented WFG evidence and provides directions for future research.

JEL Classification: J16; J28; M12

Introduction

The dynamics of work–family relationships have undergone substantial transformation over recent decades, driven by profound organisational, demographic, and societal changes (Allen & French, 2023). The increasing participation of both men and women in paid employment, the proliferation of dual-career households, and the growing prevalence of multiple-job holding have blurred the boundaries between work and family domains. At the same time, many working adults are simultaneously responsible for caring for young children and ageing family members, intensifying the demands associated with managing competing work and family responsibilities (Chen et al., 2022). These changes have rendered the work–family interface increasingly complex, creating new challenges for employees as they navigate the expectations, obligations, and resource demands arising from their professional and family roles.

In parallel, “organisational structures have changed to

adapt to these societal shifts, with the introduction of flexible work arrangements”, accompanied by higher workloads and prolonged working hours, which frequently lead to role overload (Silva & Guarda, 2025; Simkhada et al., 2024). This excessive role overload leads to a negative emotional state, primarily depleting mental, physical, and emotional resources. More recent studies have concentrated on the emotional impact that emerges from the challenge of managing the new obligations of parenting alongside work responsibilities (Gómez-Ortiz & Roldán-Barrios, 2021). For instance, high-pressure and demanding tasks might necessitate working extra hours, limiting employees’ ability to participate in their children’s school activities or assist with household responsibilities.

In another case, employees who remain constantly connected to work after office hours through smartphones may experience physical fatigue and emotional strain, as they are unable to mentally disengage from work. The

greater the number of these situations, the stronger the feelings of guilt they experience for not fulfilling family/work obligations (Chen et al., 2024).

Guilt is an emotion that involves self-assessment and occurs when individuals believe they have breached a social or moral norm, perceiving that they warrant criticism for their misdeeds (Borelli, 2017). Recently, scholars have shown interest in exploring guilt in the context of the work-family interface. This guilt has its origins in research that examines the emotional consequences of Work-Family conflict, and this conflict can trigger negative emotions at work and home (Timothy, 2006). One such negative feeling is guilt encountered when workers feel that their job duties obstruct their family commitments. Building on this perspective, Livingston and Judge (2008) explore how individuals emotionally respond to work-family conflict. Their findings showed that individuals who strongly endorse traditional gender role beliefs are more likely to experience guilt when they believe they have not adequately fulfilled expected responsibilities at work or within the family.

Further, Lianne Aarntzen and his colleagues (2019, 2021, and 2023) studied WFG among working parents, with a focus on how gender stereotypes and societal norms intensify guilt, especially in mothers. Borelli (2017) studied WFG among parents of young children and highlighted differences in experiences of guilt in mothers and fathers in relation to parenting and work involvement. Beyond parenting and gender context, studies in WFG have also explored the caregiving role. For example, Allard and Whitfield (2024) compared guilt experiences between working carers and care workers, while Aoyagi and Munro (2024) examined guilt in relation to work-life balance.

WFG is a self-evaluative emotion rooted in individual moral standards and perceived social expectations of how they should balance work and family roles (Chen & Cheng, 2023). There are two types of WFG (Korabik, 2015): (1) Work-to-Family guilt - The guilt arises when work responsibilities interfere with family. For instance, an employee feels guilty when they miss family events, spend less time with children, or are mentally engaged with work while at home. (2) Family-to-Work guilt – Guilt arises when family responsibilities interfere with work. For instance, an employee feels guilty for leaving work early, taking time off for caregiving, or being less productive due to family demands.

Research on WFG has expanded across work, family, and social contexts, the existing literature remains fragmented across antecedents, behavioural responses, outcomes, theoretical perspectives, and research contexts. Studies examining WFG through specific aspects through Work-Family Conflict, parenting, gender roles, and organisational expectations, make it difficult to understand how WFG develops, how individuals respond to it, and what consequences it produces. Preliminary review indicated that the existing research concentrated on working parents while emerging work

arrangements, diverse populations, and several sectors remained comparatively underexplored. Theoretical and methodological approaches also vary across studies. Therefore, a systematic literature review is necessary to consolidate the fragmented evidence, identify patterns and gaps in the existing knowledge, and to establish future research directions.

To address these gaps, this review integrates the ADO framework developed by Paul and Benito (2018) with the Theories–Contexts–Methods (TCM) framework proposed by Paul et al. (2017). The integration of these complementary frameworks enables the review to systematically examine the theoretical foundations, contextual settings, methodological approaches, antecedents, decision-related factors, and outcomes reported in the existing literature. Guided by these frameworks, the study seeks to address the following research questions

RQ1: What do we know? What are the key antecedents, decisions, and outcomes (ADO) associated with work–family guilt identified in the existing literature?

RQ2: How do we know? What theoretical perspectives, contextual settings, and methodological approaches (TCM) have been employed in work research–family guilt?

RQ3: Where should we be headed? What are the key research gaps and promising directions for future research on work–family guilt?

This review contributes to WFG research by applying the ADO-TCM framework to organise and synthesise the existing literature. The integrated framework provides a structured review of this field and helps the researcher identify underexplored areas for future investigations. This review also offers implications for organisations seeking to understand and address WFG in diverse work-family contexts. This study is organised as follows: the next section presents the research method and review planning, followed by findings. The subsequent section identifies research gaps and future research directions, and the final section presents conclusions and findings.

Research Methods

The study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesise the existing literature on work–family guilt and develop future research directions. Following the framework-based approach suggested by Paul and Criado (2020), the review systematically examines the literature through the TCM and ADO frameworks. The review focuses on identifying the key antecedents, decisions, and outcomes associated with WFG, while also examining the theoretical perspectives, contextual settings, and methodological approaches adopted in prior studies. The findings are subsequently used to identify gaps in the literature and propose directions for future research.

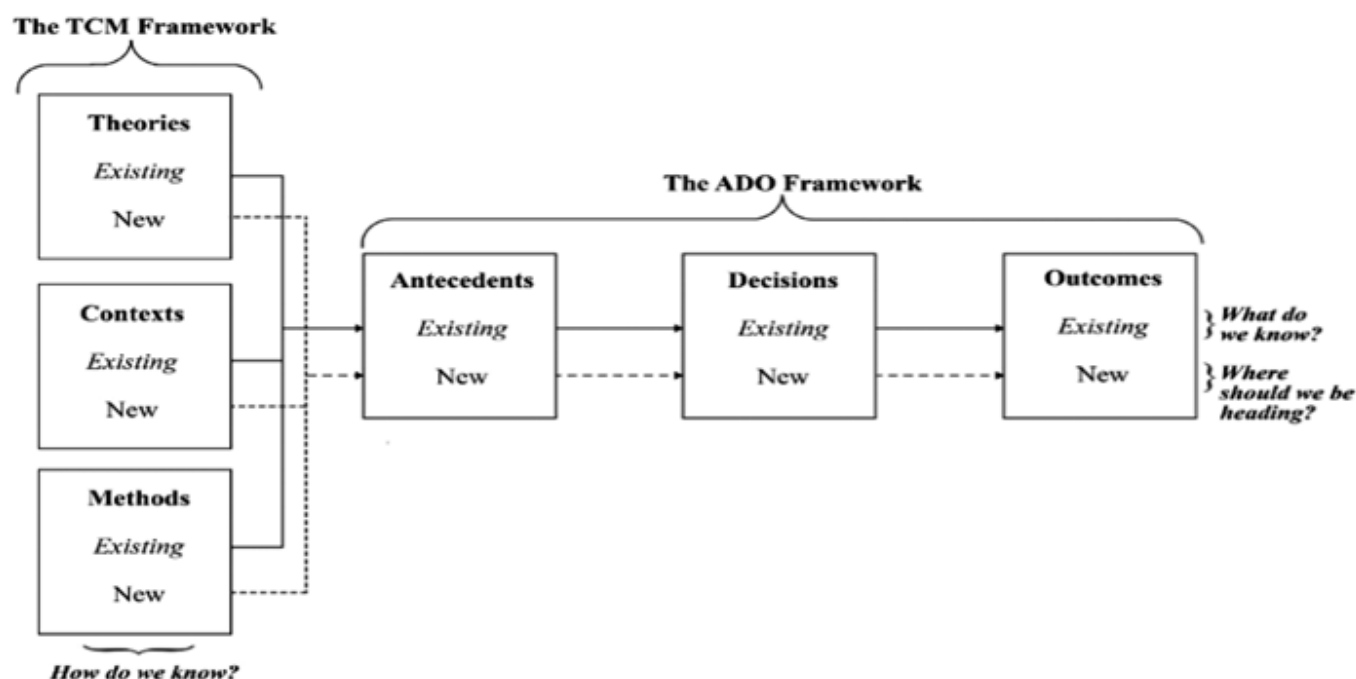


Figure 1: The ADO-TCM framework adapted from Mushtaq and Nasir (2026)

Review Planning

A well-defined review protocol establishes systematic procedures for literature searching, study selection, and data extraction, thereby reducing potential bias and enhancing the reliability and transparency of the review process (Kumar & Kushwaha, 2024). Accordingly, this study adopts the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework to ensure a transparent and systematic review process. PRISMA 2020 provides a structured approach for reporting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies. The review procedures were further guided by the approach outlined by Priya and Sathish (2024), with the detailed search, screening, selection, and data-extraction procedures presented in the following sections.

Identification: In the identification phase, articles related to WFG were identified using clearly defined criteria such as source type, source quality, search engine, search period, and search keywords. The research articles were identified from the major academic database Scopus and included only journal articles in this review because journal articles undergo rigorous peer review, which ensures higher credibility and reliability by excluding other sources such as book chapters and conference proceedings. Scopus database was selected because it offers broad, multidisciplinary coverage and includes high-quality publications. Also, Google Scholar was chosen to identify articles due to its accessibility and ease of use. Its wide coverage of academic publications helped us efficiently locate relevant articles. Most of the selected studies were published by well-known publishers such as SAGE, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, and Elsevier. Regarding

the search period, articles published between 2000 and 2026 were considered for the review. The timeframe was chosen to include studies from the period when it emerged and gained attention, so it provides a strong foundation for future research. For the search process, we used keywords such as “Work-Family guilt,” “Work to family guilt,” and “Family to work guilt”. The search strategy employed “work-family guilt” as the primary keyword, with additional relevant terms identified through an initial review of the related literature. A total of 94 articles were identified during the identification stage.

Screening: During the screening phase, 27 records were excluded, comprising 3 non-journal articles, 15 duplicates, and 9 studies unrelated to the work–family context. Conference proceedings, book chapters, theses, and books were excluded to ensure that the review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles. Following the screening process, 67 articles were retained for further analysis.

Eligibility: In the eligibility phase, the study assessed the eligibility of articles based on their type and relevance to the content. Regarding article type, the authors only focused on empirical studies published in journals, as conference papers, book chapters, and other non-journal works are typically excluded from the peer review process. After verifying the article type for eligibility, the study proceeded to analyse the full texts to ensure that only empirical research related to WFG was considered. In the end, 14 articles were disqualified for not satisfying the criteria concerning article type and content relevance.

Inclusion: In the final stage of the inclusion phase, a total of 55 empirical articles were included for content analysis

in the review. Data from the reviewed publications were gathered and structured through a content analysis based on the “ADO” and “TCM” frameworks (Paul and Benito,

2018). All finalised articles were cross-checked to ensure completeness and validity.

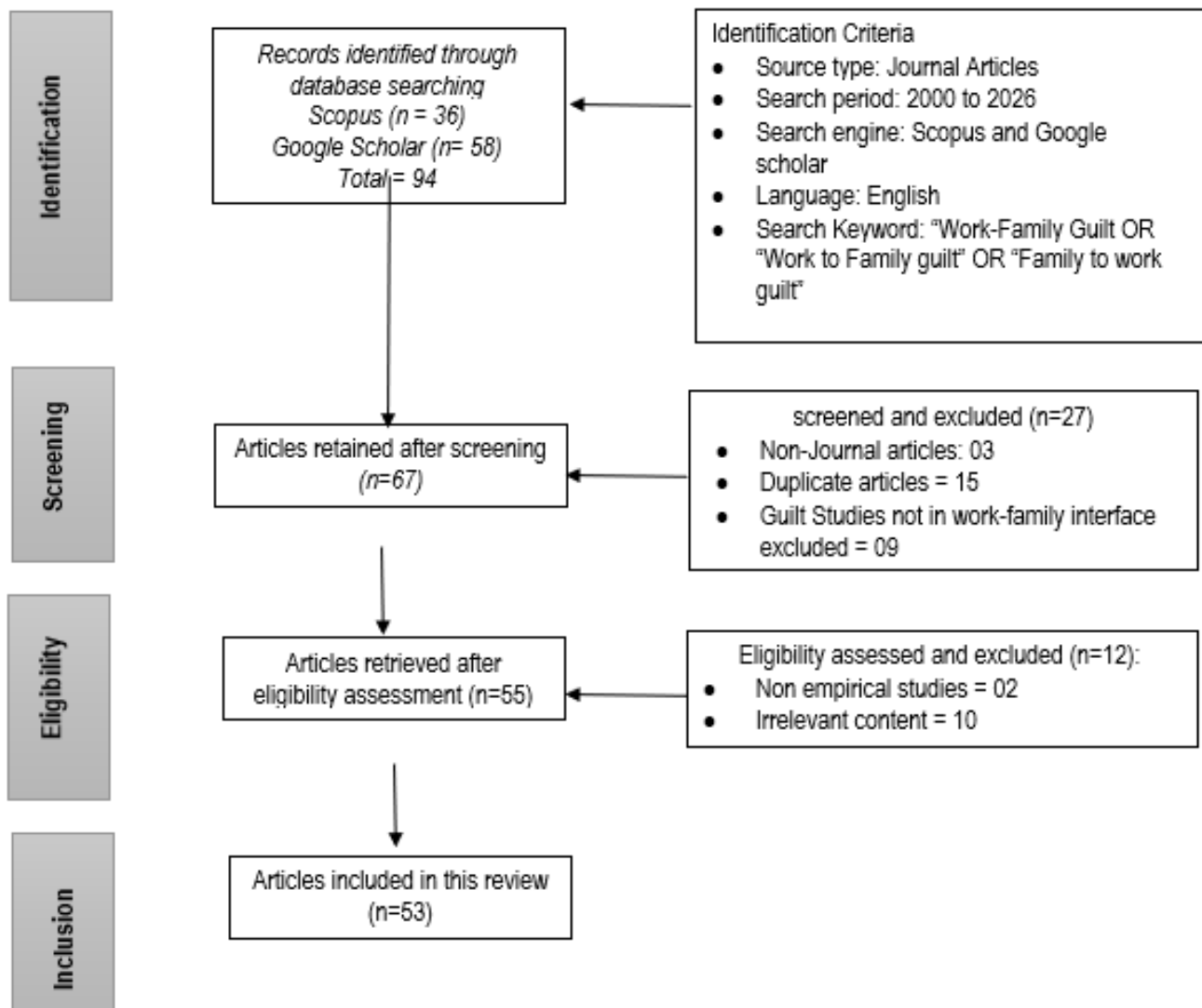


Figure 2: Flowchart of article selection process using the PRISMA protocol (Source: Author)

Results

The following paragraphs present the findings and results of this study.

What do you know (ADO)

In the context of the ADO framework, this section aims to provide clear and comprehensive answers to research questions. Although WFG is a well-explored area through Work-Family conflict. Recently, scholars have shown interest in exploring the construct of work-family guilt in modern workplaces. To develop a comprehensive understanding of WFG and identify directions for future research, the study applies the ADO framework to examine: (a) the factors influencing WFG through its antecedents, (b) how individuals respond to WFG through decisions, and (c) the effects of WFG through outcomes.

Antecedents

Antecedents pertain to the fundamental elements influencing a person's choice to either participate in or avoid a specific behaviour (Paul & Bernito, 2018). WFG depends on individual emotions that impact individual behaviour; understanding this concept is essential to analyse the elements that lead to its emergence. These antecedents are classified into the following aspects based on work-domain, family-domain, individual-level, social and interpersonal, and societal or cultural antecedents.

Work-domain related: On the basis of work-domain antecedents, it clearly shows that pressure originating from the workplace spills over into the family domain and shapes the WFG in the individuals. Research consistently identifies work-family conflict as a primary predictor of

guilt (Aarntzen et al., 2022; Chen & Cheng, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020; Judge et al., 2006). According to Glavin et al., 2011 and Chen et al., 2023, workplace factors such as workload and long working hours increase employees' feelings of guilt, which leads them to feel that they neglect their family roles. Scholars argue that boundary-spanning work demands blur the separation between work and family roles, which intensifies guilt (Glavin et al., 2011). Similarly, evidence shows that bringing work into the home domain increases feelings of guilt among employees (Borelli et al., 2019). Further, excessive smartphone use after work hours increases guilt, which keeps employees constantly connected to work and prevents them from fully engaging in family life (Liu et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). At the same time, organisations promote ideal worker norms; this pressures employees to prioritise work over family, which in turn leads to failure in family obligations (Allard & Whitfield, 2018; Aarntzen et al., 2023). These are the work-related antecedents that lead to feeling guilt.

Family-domain related: Family is a significant factor that contributes to work-family guilt, as it creates expectations that individuals may struggle to fulfil while balancing their work duties. Guilt can emerge when conflicts between family and work arise, indicating that family obligations disrupt work and lead individuals to feel that they cannot adequately perform their job responsibilities (Sousa et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). This kind of guilt is primarily felt by parents with young children who require time, attention, and emotional engagement; if these family expectations are not fulfilled, it can lead to feelings of guilt in the employee (Borelli et al., 2017; Cho & Allen, 2013). Childcare responsibilities can create pressure in an individual, as they perceive a gap between what they should provide and what they actually provide (Wang et al., 2021). Individuals set standards for involvement and availability for family needs; when these standards are not fulfilled and leads to feelings of guilt (Rehman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2017). Expectations from partners influence how people assess their performance in their roles, and when expectations are not met, feelings of guilt can arise (Farnsworth & O'Neal, 2020). Collectively, these family dynamics cause individuals to feel they are not meeting their family obligations, which heightens WFG.

Individual-level related: Individual-level factors, influence like gender and personality traits, affect how employees perceive and evaluate their ability to manage work and family roles. Aarntzen et al. (2022), Korabik (2019), and Livingston and Judge (2008) found that gender role beliefs influence how individuals perceive their roles at work and at home; when their behaviour does not align with socially defined expectations such as family responsibilities or caregiving responsibilities leads to feelings of guilt. Personality traits also strongly influence guilt in individuals who are more sensitive to stress or highly responsible in their role (Irak et al., 2020). Similarly, work orientation influences guilt when people who prioritise their career or

family experience guilt when they fail (Sousa et al., 2017; Sousa et al., 2018). In addition, Maclean et al. (2019) and Collins (2021) note that personal identity, such as beliefs in the "ideal mother" role, increases expectations, which leads to feelings of guilt in individuals. Siddiqi et al. (2020) listed that high personal standards and perfectionism also give pressure to individuals, which makes them self-critical. Uysal Irak et al. (2021) added that resilience helps an individual cope better with these pressures and reduces feelings of guilt.

Organisational-level related: Organisational – level studies highlight how emotional triggers at workplace shapes the guilt feeling in an individual. Aarntzen et al. (2022) demonstrate that societal gender norms within organisations shape perceptions regarding the prioritisation of work and family for both men and women. Allard and Whitfield (2018) argue that guilt arises when ideal worker culture in an organisation makes employees place work above all other roles. Rynkiewicz et al. (2019) and Singe et al. (2019) observe that employees find it difficult to balance both areas and feel increased guilt when organisations fail to give sufficient support. Boren and Johnson (2014) show that workers hesitate to utilise work–family policies because of stigma, and this hesitancy leads to feelings of guilt when they struggle to balance their responsibilities effectively. Peltokorpi (2018) describes how job embeddedness fosters a deep sense of duty towards the organisation, which compels employees to stay loyal and heightens feelings of guilt when they focus on family.

Social and interpersonal related: Research concerning societal and interpersonal factors highlighted the importance of receiving support from both family and colleagues. Apostol et al. (2019) and Foucault et al. (2018) indicate that when individuals do not receive adequate support from their partners, they struggle to balance their work and family duties. On the other hand, Bayyar et al. (2020) and Hackney et al. (2022) suggest that people can alleviate guilt by seeking help from family, friends, and supervisors in managing their various responsibilities. Boren and Johnson (2014) note that guilt can arise when co-workers react negatively, such as through messages of resentment, which pressures employees to utilise work-family policies. Gómez-Ortiz and Roldán-Barrios (2021) explain that guilt increases as individuals engage in social comparisons; these comparisons affect their views on whether they meet the expected roles.

Societal and cultural related: General expectations from societal and cultural influences WFG regarding suitable roles and responsibilities. Aarntzen et al. (2022) focused on national gender norms influence experiences of guilt by the way individuals prioritise their work and family life. Aoyagi and Munro (2021) addressed how cultural expectations, like collectivist values, will pressure the importance of fulfilling family duties, which can increase feelings of guilt when individuals focus on their careers. Maclean et al. (2020) and Collins (2021) emphasise on

ideology of intensive motherhood sets high standards for caregiving, causing mothers to feel guilty if they believe they do not meet these expectations. Martínez et al. (2018), Gómez-Ortiz and Roldán-Barrios (2021) pointed out that traditional gender roles within families strengthen the expectations about the division of work and family responsibilities between men and women.

Decisions

In the ADO framework, decisions refer to the actions that individuals decide to take or avoid based on various factors (antecedents). These decisions stem from particular situations, and it influences future occurrences (Paul & Benito 2018). Work-related guilt leads the individual to adopt decisions such as self-restrictive and over-compensatory behaviour. Boren and Johnson (2014) found that employees fear negative judgement from colleagues; hence, they hesitate to use work-family policies available in organisations. Similarly, guilt drives presenteeism, which means individuals continue working despite illness to fulfil their perceived work obligation (Brosi & Gerpott, 2022). Family-related guilt regulates employees' decisions by prompting them to greater involvement and emotional investment. Individuals increase their parental involvement by dedicating more time and attention to the children Cho and Allen (2013).

Similarly, guilt leads individuals to change their parenting behaviours to compensate for perceived failings in fulfilling family roles (Farnsworth & O'Neal, 2020). Similarly, Borelli et al. (2019) highlight that individuals use closeness and engagement as a way to manage guilt by deepening their emotional investment in family relationships. Individuals regulate and cope with work–family guilt through a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies. Aarntzen et al. (2023) have shown that individuals prioritise roles by consciously deciding whether to focus on work or family. Chen et al. (2018) and Chen et al. (2023) explain that individuals engage in compensatory behaviours, attempting to make up for perceived failings in one domain by increasing effort in the other. Borelli et al. (2017) highlight that an individual relies on emotional regulation strategies to manage the discomfort, while Aoyagi and Munro (2021) emphasise cognitive reframing, where individuals reinterpret their situations to reduce feelings of guilt.

At the same time, Maclean et al. (2019) argue mothers internalise or suppress guilt instead of openly addressing it. These perspectives show individuals do not passively experience guilt but actively manage it through diverse coping and regulation mechanisms. Studies highlight that individuals make decisions by allocating their time and energy across conflicting roles during WFG. Cho and Allen (2013) show that guilt leads individuals to actively adjust their involvement between work and family by reallocating effort to restore balance. Rehman et al. (2021) further explain that individuals shift their priorities toward either family or work depending on where they perceive a loss.

Glavin et al. (2011) highlight an individual uses withdrawal as a way to cope with guilt when they feel reducing engagement in one domain when pressures become high. In contrast, Foucreault et al. (2018) demonstrate that people enhance their engagement with children or family members as a way to compensate for guilt stemming from work-related stress. According to Wang et al. (2017), individuals who experience guilt may rationalise unethical pro-family actions, such as placing family needs above formal regulations and organisational standards. Morgan and King (2012) further elaborate that guilt impacts individuals' moral reasoning by motivating them toward what is right or acceptable in specific situations, which can lead to both prosocial and deviant behaviour.

In this context, individuals balance ethical principles with family responsibilities, as emphasised by Wang et al. (2017). WFG influences how individuals manage boundaries between their professional and personal lives. Depending on the guilt, individuals may either blur or reinforce work-family boundaries, with some allowing work into family and some having clear separation (Glavin et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2019). People regulate their technology usage, such as restricting smartphone engagement to manage boundary permeability and reduce guilt arising from constant connectivity (Liu et al., 2021). In addition, people adjust their role in work and family depending on fluctuating feelings of guilt (Chen et al., 2020).

Outcomes

The outcomes are the results of individual decisions shaped by the circumstances, which can be either positive or negative. This section summarises the consequences of WFG in the literature, categorising them into the following outcomes. WFG reduces job satisfaction and organisational commitment, with an increase in negative work attitudes (Dong et al., 2022; Judge et al., 2006; Singe et al., 2019; Sousa et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Guilt reduces work performance through emotional exhaustion because it motivates overcompensatory behaviour (Chen & Cheng, 2022; Chen et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2023). Sometimes, employees respond maladaptively by engaging in presenteeism (Brosi & Gerpott, 2022). Furthermore, guilt develops moral outcomes in the workplace by encouraging prosocial behaviours such as helping others (Morgan & King, 2012; Wang et al., 2017).

Within the family domain, WFG alters parenting behaviours and family interactions in meaningful ways. It reduces the quality of parent–child interactions while simultaneously motivating compensatory caregiving efforts as individuals attempt to restore balance (Cho & Allen, 2013; Farnsworth & O'Neal, 2020). Guilt can also lead to emotional overinvestment in children, reflecting an effort to meet internalised expectations of caregiving (Borelli et al., 2019). Importantly, the effects extend beyond parents themselves to influence children's outcomes, as higher levels of parental guilt are associated with increased behavioural problems and greater psychological distress

among children and adolescents (Farnsworth & O'Neal, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). WFG increases psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Glavin et al., 2011; Hu et al., 2022; Montazer et al., 2020; Siddiqi et al., 2020). This emotional burden reduces life satisfaction, well-being, and personal happiness (Apostol et al., 2019; De Simone et al., 2018; Foucreault et al., 2018; Rehman et al., 2021). The guilt experienced by an individual impacts the overall interaction at the work-family interface. It intensifies the work-family conflict instead of reducing tensions (Chen & Cheng, 2022). Those who feel guilty experience increased role strain and imbalance at work and family roles (Gómez-Ortiz & Roldán-Barrios, 2021).

Guilt drives an individual towards behavioural responses by engaging in reparative efforts (Chen et al., 2018; Dong et al., 2022; Foucreault et al., 2018). However, not all coping strategies are adaptive; sometimes they can lead to maladaptive behaviours such as overwork and an inability to psychologically disengage from work (Brosi & Gerpott, 2022). Even employees avoid using available work-family policies in organisations (Boren & Johnson, 2014). Finally, work–family guilt also influences social relationships and identity. Guilt increases relationship strain when individuals feel unable to meet both work and family expectations, while simultaneously amplifying reliance on partner support as a coping resource (Apostol et al., 2019; Foucreault et al., 2018). Guilt contributes to identity conflict, as individuals struggle to reconcile the competing ideals of being a “good worker” and a “good parent” (Allard & Whitfield, 2018). It also reinforces gendered identity pressures in women by spreading societal expectations around caregiving and work roles (Macleane et al., 2019; Collins, 2021).

How do we know?

Research on WFG has evolved significantly over the past decade. Following the ADO framework, this section applies the TCM framework to examine the theories, contexts, and methodological approaches underpinning WFG research (Mehta et al., 2025). This analysis provides a structured understanding of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the existing literature and highlights areas for future research.

Theories: In WFG research, various theoretical perspectives have been employed to enhance understanding of the phenomenon and provide a foundation for developing research hypotheses. According to Paul et al. (2017), theories recognised from the literature enhance the credibility and authority of research endeavours. A systematic review of 53 articles found that the studies used the following theories to explain how guilt influences the work-family context.

The literature on WFG relies heavily on a few dominant theoretical frameworks that explain its emergence and outcomes. Gender role theory is used frequently by the authors to study how societal expectations shape guilt among women. Studies show that individuals internalise

gender norms and experience guilt when they deviate from expected roles (Aarntzen et al., 2022; Collins, 2021; Livingston & Judge, 2008; Korabik, 2019; Maclean et al., 2019). Next, role conflict theory explains the structural tension between work and family roles and recommends that mismatched demands create pressure and guilt (Chen & Cheng, 2022; Rehman et al., 2021; Siddiqi et al., 2020; Sousa et al., 2019).

In addition, conservation of resources (COR) theory highlights how the loss of key resources such as time and energy leads to stress, which in turn triggers guilt and its outcomes (Chen & Cheng, 2022; Hu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Apart from these dominant perspectives, several theories serve a complementary yet significant role. Boundary theory focuses on the interface between work and family roles; this supporting theory author explored blurred boundaries increase guilt in individuals, so that they struggle to maintain separation in roles (Glavin et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2019).

Social exchange theory explains the buffering role of family and organisational support: when individuals receive proper support systems from the respective role, this can reduce the negative impact of guilt (Apostol et al., 2019; Bayyar et al., 2020; Hackney et al., 2022). Emerging theoretical perspectives, affective events theory (AET) conceptualises guilt as an emotional response to specific work–family conflict events that subsequently shape behaviour (Judge et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2020). At the same time, moral emotion theory positions guilt as a moral regulator, capable of driving both ethical and unethical actions depending on the context (Morgan & King, 2012; Wang et al., 2017).

Table 1: Key Theories Covered in Work-Family Guilt Research

Theories	Authors
Role Theory	Aarntzen et al. (2019); Aarntzen et al. (2021); Borelli et al. (2017); Eason et al. (2021); Singe et al. (2022)
Gender Role Theory	Aarntzen et al. (2023); Martínez et al. (2011); Siddiqi et al. (2025)
Spillover Theory	Chen and Cheng (2025); Zhang et al. (2019); Hu et al. (2023); Liu et al. (2021)
Affective Events Theory	Boren and Johnson (2013); Brosi & Gerpott (2023); Chen et al. (2024)
Conservation of Resources Theory	Aarntzen et al. (2019); Foucreault et al. (2023); Zhang et al. (2019); Peltokorpi (2022)
Social Exchange Theory	Chen et al. (2024); Morgan and King (2012); Dong et al. (2024)
Boundary Theory	Chen and Cheng (2023); Hu et al. (2023)

Contexts

In this evaluation, “contexts” denote the specific settings or conditions in which research occurs. Examining the context of a study is crucial in research, as different contexts provide unique perspectives and insights within the same research field (Mehta et al., 2025). The categorisation of contexts in this evaluation is divided into three separate elements: countries, sectors, and population. Each component offers a distinct viewpoint on the research.

Countries: Many countries have conducted extensive research on work-family guilt. The studies cover a broad range of countries that have been grouped into European, Asian, and North American groups. Asia follows closely behind Europe as the leading contributor of research in this area. The understanding of WFG has improved in both areas. However, global coverage remains limited, with several regions of the world underrepresented in the existing literature.

Table 2: Countries covered in Work-Family Guilt

Continent	Countries	Authors
Europe	Netherlands; Spain; Portugal; Italy; Germany; United Kingdom	Aarntzen et al. (2023); Martínez et al. (2011); Gómez-Ortiz and Roldán-Barrios (2021); Gonçalves et al. (2018); Góis et al. (2023); De Simone et al. (2022); Brosi and Gerpott (2023); Allard and Whitfield (2024); Hwang and Hoque (2023)
Asia	China; Pakistan; Japan; Turkey; Mixed Asian samples	Chen et al. (2024); Dong et al. (2024); Wang et al. (2023); Zhang et al. (2019); Rehman et al. (2025); Aoyagi and Munro (2024); Uysal Irak et al. (2022); Liu et al. (2021)
North America	United States; Canada	Borelli et al. (2017); Boren and Johnson (2013); Cho and Allen (2012); Judge et al. (2006); Morgan and King (2012); Maclean et al. (2021); Foucreault et al. (2023)

Sectors: The existing literature has examined WFG across a range of industries, with most studies focusing on its effects on employees. However, research remains limited across several other sectors. Table 4 summarizes the industries represented in the literature, highlighting the breadth of contexts in which WFG has been examined.

Table 3: Countries covered in Work-Family Guilt Research

Sector	Authors
General Workforce (Cross-sector employees)	Aarntzen et al. (2023); Borelli et al. (2017); Chen et al. (2024); Zhang et al. (2019); Livingston and Judge (2008); Morgan and King (2012); Sousa et al. (2021)
Healthcare Sector	Apostol et al. (2025); Rehman et al. (2025); Siddiqi et al. (2025)
Athletics Professionals	Eason et al. (2021); Rynkiewicz et al. (2022); Singe et al. (2022) (Athletic trainers in educational institutions)
Corporate Employees	Boren and Johnson (2013); Brosi and Gerpott (2023); Dong et al. (2024); Peltokorpi (2022); Wang et al. (2024)

Population: Table 5 illustrates the population included in research on WFG. A majority of the studies focused on guilt experienced by working mothers, working parents, and the general workforce. Due to the numerous responsibilities undertaken by women, researchers have placed greater emphasis on the populations of working mothers and parents.

Table 4: Population covered in Work-Family Guilt research (Source: Author)

Population Studied	Authors
Working Mothers	Aarntzen et al. (2019, 2023); Maclean et al. (2021); Góis et al. (2023); Siddiqi et al. (2025); De Simone et al. (2022)
Working Fathers	Aarntzen et al. (2023); Gonçalves et al. (2018)
Working Parents (Both Mothers & Fathers)	Borelli et al. (2017); Chen and Cheng (2025); Zhang et al. (2019); Wang et al. (2023); Foucreault et al. (2023); Gómez-Ortiz and Roldán-Barrios (2021)
Dual-earner Couples	Hu et al. (2023); Montazer et al. (2022)
Healthcare Professionals	Apostol et al. (2025); Rehman et al. (2025)
Employees (General Workforce)	Aarntzen et al. (2021); Chen et al. (2024); Dong et al. (2024); Timothy A. Judge et al. (2006); Morgan & King (2012); Livingston and Judge (2008)
Athletic Trainers (Education)	Eason et al. (2021); Rynkiewicz et al. (2022); Singe et al. (2022)
Women Employees	Martínez et al. (2011); Hwang and Hoque (2023); Siddiqi et al. (2025)

Discussion

The ADO–TCM framework was used to synthesise the existing literature on WFG by examining its antecedents, decisions, and outcomes, alongside the theoretical

perspectives, contexts, and methodological approaches adopted in prior studies. The contextual analysis considered countries, sectors, and study populations, while the methodological analysis examined quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches.

The review of studies published between 2017 and 2025 identified several key patterns. Work demands, family expectations, societal expectations, organisational norms, and co-worker behaviour emerged as major antecedents of WFG. Key responses included role prioritisation, compensatory behaviours, emotional regulation, withdrawal, cognitive reframing, and prosocial behaviour. Common outcomes included emotional exhaustion,

psychological distress, reduced job satisfaction, and impaired work performance, whereas areas such as leadership effectiveness, decision-making quality, psychological capital, paternal guilt, and masculinity norms remained comparatively underexplored. Geographically, research was concentrated in Europe and Asia, with limited evidence from other regions. Most studies examined the general workforce rather than specific industries. Role theory, gender role theory, and spill-over theory were among the most frequently applied theoretical perspectives. Methodologically, quantitative and qualitative approaches predominated, while mixed-method research remained limited.

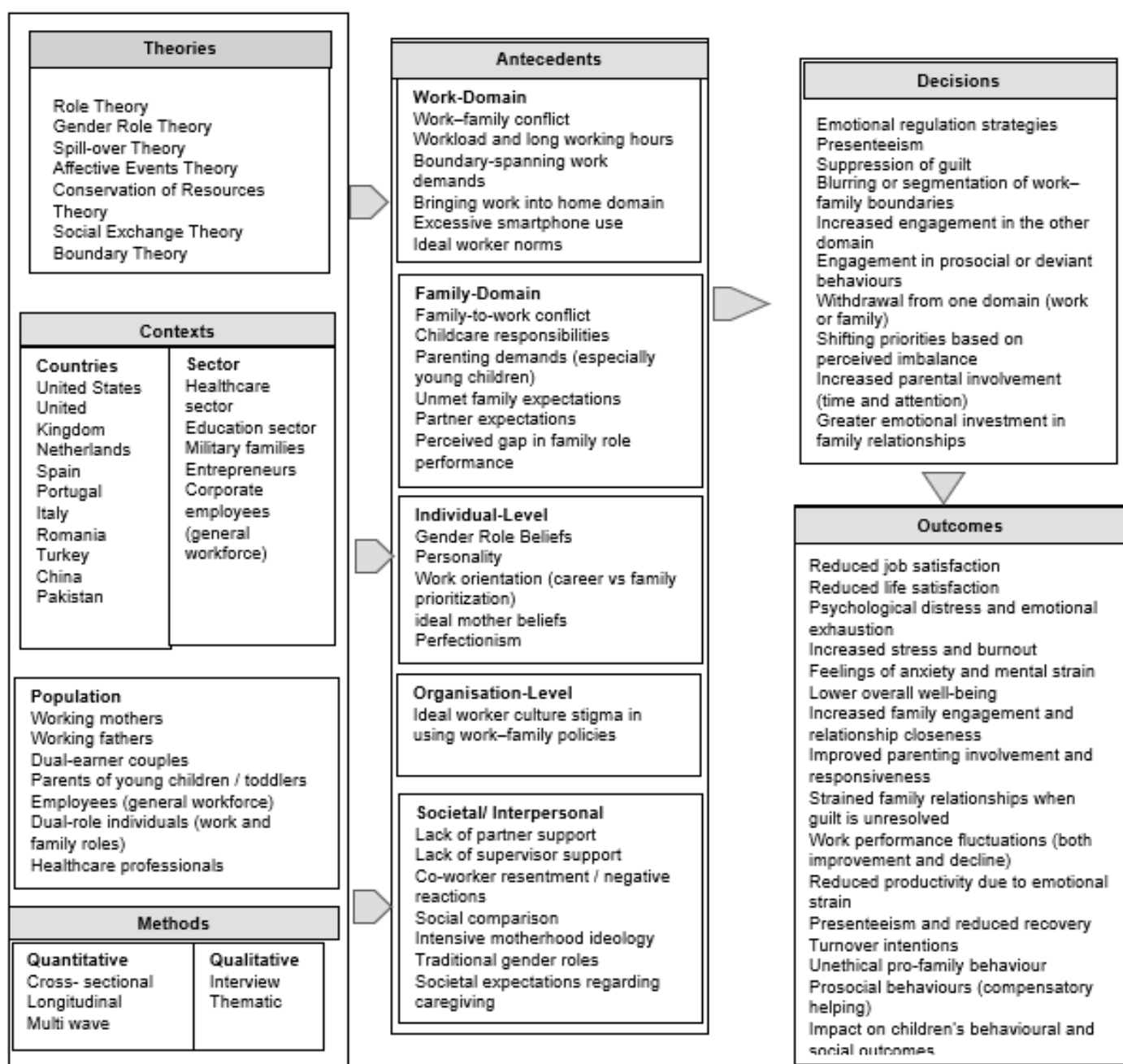


Figure 3: ADO-TCM framework

Note. Compiled by the author

Gap identification and future research: The objective of this study was to identify significant gaps and offer directions for future research in the field of WFG. Through a structured review of the literature using the ADO-TCM

framework, the study has identified a number of research gaps and associated future research directions to help scholars and researchers advance this multidisciplinary field (Table 5).

Table 5: Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

Research Gaps	Future Research Questions	Guidance for Researchers and Practitioners
Over-focus on mothers; limited father and dual-role comparison	How does guilt differ across genders in evolving roles?	Design gender-inclusive policies; promote shared caregiving norms
Limited developmental/child-age perspectives	How does guilt vary across child life stages?	Examine organisational support based on parenting stage
Limited focus on ethical decision-making	When does guilt lead to unethical pro-family behaviour?	Develop ethical guidelines and awareness training
Overemphasis on negative outcomes	Can guilt produce positive or growth-oriented outcomes?	Encourage constructive coping and reframing strategies
Limited health-related behavioural insights	How does guilt influence presenteeism and burnout over time?	Promote well-being programs and discourage overwork culture
Western-centric samples	How does work–family guilt manifest in non-Western contexts (e.g., India)?	Adapt policies to cultural norms and societal expectations
Underexplored caregiving professions	How does guilt differ across caregiving roles vs other sectors?	Provide sector-specific support systems
Limited research in remote/hybrid work	How does WFH reshape guilt dynamics?	Develop digital boundary management strategies
Limited intersectional analysis	How do gender, ethnicity, and class interact in shaping guilt?	Promote inclusive and equitable workplace practices
Lack of experimental evidence	How does guilt influence decision-making under controlled conditions?	Encourage experimental and behavioural research designs
Limited healthcare-specific interventions	How can guilt be managed in high-stress professions?	Develop sector-specific mental health interventions

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This systematic review employs the integrated ADO-TCM framework to explore the impact of guilt at the work-family interface, with a primary focus on the general workforce and working mothers/fathers across European and Asian contexts. Although research in these populations and geographical contexts offers valuable insights into how work and family demands, individual characteristics, and organisational and societal expectations contribute to WFG.

However, the research literature provides limited understanding of how guilt arises across diverse cultural, occupational and work contexts. The consequences of WFG are associated with both positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcomes include compensatory helping, increased parental involvement, greater emotional regulation, and greater engagement in family relationships. The negative outcomes include psychological distress, reduced well-being, emotional exhaustion, work performance fluctuations, and strained relationships.

A key takeaway from the review is that WFG emerges through the interaction of work, family, individual, organisational, and societal/interpersonal factors, and its

consequences extend beyond individual well-being to work performance and family relationships. The research also points to critical gaps in leadership and communication dynamics, psychological capital, digital work environments, generational shift, and particular sectors. From a policy and managerial perspective, organisations should strengthen work-family support policies, facilitate flexible work arrangements, reduce stigma associated with policy use, and promote effective boundary-management practices to help employees manage work-family guilt. The result indicates the need for interdisciplinary research, sustainable organisational interventions, and equitable work practices to promote employee well-being and balanced work-family integration.

Future studies need to address bias by including a wider range of geographies and sectors, exploring different theories, and employing additional methodologies. Addressing these gaps will enable researchers, policymakers, and managers to develop balanced strategies, resulting in equitable, innovative, and sustainable work environments. This study focuses on issues related to WFG and the literature examined is limited to papers included in the Scopus database. As the data was gathered all at once, important trends that take

place over time may have been missed. Additionally, only journals published in English were selected, which could have left out perspectives from non-English language literature. The findings may have limited generalisability, as this review is based on studies indexed in Scopus.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Authors Contributions

Divya M: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Data Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, and Visualization

Kavin Mary S: Validation, Writing - Review and Editing, Resources, and Supervision.

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Disclosure of Ai Use

The authors acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools, including generative AI applications, solely for language editing, grammar checking, readability enhancement, and the organization of ideas during manuscript preparation. No AI tools were used for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the generation of original scientific content. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.