

Who attains balance? A comparative study of work–life reconciliation across demographics

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ABSTRACT

This study examines work–life reconciliation (WLR) among employees in Québec, analyzing how individual characteristics, socio-economic resources, and institutional supports shape experiences of balance across three dimensions: work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility. Using survey data collected from a family-oriented network in Quebec, we find that overall levels of reconciliation are moderate to moderately high, with modest differences across gender, age, education, and income. Women report slightly lower perceived compatibility, younger employees show lower reconciliation than mid- or late-career workers, and higher education and income are associated with incremental advantages. These patterns indicate that WLR is influenced by cumulative resources and structural conditions rather than individual effort alone. Québec’s policy framework, including publicly funded childcare, parental leave, and family-friendly employment standards, appears to moderate extreme inequalities, though subtle socio-demographic gradients persist. Building on these results, we propose a contextually embedded model of WLR, highlighting the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics, socio-economic position, and institutional environment. This framework integrates stratification, life-course, and resource perspectives, providing a novel lens for understanding both opportunities and constraints in achieving work–life balance. The study offers insights for policy and organizational design, particularly in supporting early-career and lower-resource employees, while advancing theoretical understanding of multidimensional reconciliation.

Keywords: *Educational stratification, Gender differences, Income effects, Institutional context, Life-course perspective, Policy implications, Work-life balance, Work-life reconciliation.*

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Highlights of this paper

- This study examines how individual, socio-economic, and institutional factors shape work–life reconciliation in Québec.
- Women, younger employees, and those with lower education or income report slightly lower levels of balance.
- Québec’s family-friendly policies help reduce inequalities, showing the role of resources and structures in achieving work–life balance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, work–life reconciliation (WLR) has emerged as a central concern in contemporary labor markets, reflecting profound transformations in employment relations, family structures, and demographic composition (Ernst Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Rising work demands, the expansion of dual-earner households, population aging, and increased female labor force participation have fundamentally reshaped how individuals manage the intersection of paid work and personal life (Eurofound, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development (OECD), 2020). As a result, the ability to reconcile work and non-work responsibilities is increasingly recognized not only as a key determinant of individual well-being but also as a critical dimension of social inequality, affecting health, career trajectories, and family stability (Allen, Merlo, Lawrence, Slutsky, & Gray, 2021).

This issue is particularly salient in Québec, where WLR has long occupied a prominent place in public discourse, labor policy, and social research. The province’s institutional arrangements, including publicly funded childcare services, extensive parental leave programs, and employment standards acknowledging family responsibilities, distinguish it from other North American contexts (Fortin et al., 2015; Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016). These policies have contributed to high levels of female labor market participation and framed WLR as a collective social concern rather than solely an individual challenge (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). However, policy support does not automatically translate into equitable outcomes: empirical evidence suggests that reconciliation experiences remain uneven across demographic groups, highlighting the interplay between institutional context, organizational practices, and individual characteristics (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012; Chang, Zhou, Wang, & Heredero, 2017).

Yet, the presence of supportive policies does not ensure that all employees experience work–life reconciliation equally. How individuals navigate the intersection of work and personal life remains deeply influenced by demographic characteristics and social positions, which mediate the opportunities and constraints created by institutional arrangements. Gender, for example, continues to structure the division of paid and unpaid labor, shaping both time availability and role expectations (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Hook, 2010). Similarly, age and life-course stage affect exposure to caregiving responsibilities, job security, and health-related constraints, while family configurations, such as single-parent households or families with dependent children or elderly relatives, introduce additional pressures (Elder, 1998; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). These demographic dimensions interact with Québec’s institutional supports, producing differentiated reconciliation experiences across employees and highlighting persistent inequalities despite progressive policies.

Despite growing scholarly attention to work–life reconciliation, the literature remains fragmented and often narrowly focused. Much research examines specific subpopulations, such as working mothers or parents of young children, or isolated organizational practices within particular sectors (Fagan & Norman, 2016; Voydanoff, 2005a). While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to offer a segmented understanding of reconciliation, limiting our ability to identify broader patterns, social inequalities, and the structural factors that shape access to balance (Allen et al., 2021; Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014). Moreover, many studies emphasize individual strategies

for managing work and family responsibilities, paying less attention to how demographic characteristics, life-course stage, or organizational and institutional contexts mediate these experiences (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Comparative analyses that systematically investigate how WLR varies across multiple demographic groups within the same institutional framework are scarce, leaving important questions about the social distribution of work–life reconciliation largely unanswered.

Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the inclusiveness and effectiveness of reconciliation arrangements. A comparative, demographic perspective enables the identification of groups that benefit most from existing policies and workplace practices, as well as those who continue to face structural or social constraints. By examining variations across gender, age, family composition, and occupational characteristics, such an approach can reveal the mechanisms through which institutional supports, organizational norms, and individual strategies intersect to shape work–life reconciliation outcomes (Bianchi et al., 2012; Voydanoff, 2005b). This analysis not only provides a more nuanced understanding of the social distribution of WLR but also helps to identify persistent inequalities that may be masked in studies focusing on specific populations or single-policy interventions. Insights from such research are essential for informing organizational strategies and public policy interventions that aim to foster equitable and sustainable work–life integration, supporting both employee well-being and broader social cohesion (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Kossek et al., 2014).

The present study offers a descriptive, comparative analysis of work–life reconciliation among employees in Québec, with particular attention to key demographic characteristics. Situated within a distinctive institutional context (Tremblay, 2014) the analysis examines how work–life reconciliation is distributed across social groups and how demographic factors shape individuals' experiences of balancing work and non-work responsibilities. By highlighting patterns, contrasts, and disparities, the study addresses the central question: Who experiences better work–life reconciliation, and how are these experiences structured by demographic characteristics within this policy and labor market context? The article proceeds by reviewing the relevant literature, outlining the data and methodology, presenting the comparative findings, and discussing their implications for organizational practices and public policy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualizing Work–Life Reconciliation

The concept of work–life reconciliation (WLR) has evolved alongside broader changes in labor markets, family arrangements, and social expectations surrounding paid and unpaid work. Early research in this field primarily relied on the notion of work–family conflict, defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of work and family are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek & Lee, 2017). Within this framework, reconciliation was implicitly understood as the reduction or management of conflict, with an emphasis on role strain, time scarcity, and stress-related outcomes.

Subsequent scholarship expanded this perspective by introducing concepts such as work–life balance and work–family enrichment, shifting attention from conflict alone to the possibility of positive interactions between work and non-work domains (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, Genin, & di Loreto, 2011). However, the notion of “balance” has been criticized for its normative and individualistic undertones, often implying an idealized equilibrium that may be neither attainable nor equally defined across social groups (Lewis, Gables, & Rapoport, 2007). As a result, balance-oriented approaches have been seen as insufficient for capturing the complexity of lived experiences, particularly in contexts marked by unequal access to resources and support.

In response to these limitations, the concept of work–life reconciliation has gained prominence, especially in European and Canadian research (Ihsen, Hantschel, & Jeanrenaud, 2010; Salehi & Tremblay, 2024). WLR emphasizes the processes through which individuals manage, negotiate, and align work and non-work responsibilities within specific institutional, organizational, and social contexts (Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Rather than framing reconciliation as an individual achievement, this perspective highlights the role of structural conditions, such as labor market regulations, social policies, and workplace norms, in shaping opportunities for reconciliation. WLR thus shifts analytical attention from individual coping strategies to the broader configurations that enable or constrain the articulation of work and personal life.

Importantly, WLR is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. Empirical studies have shown that reconciliation encompasses time-related dimensions (e.g., working hours and schedule flexibility), strain-related dimensions (e.g., stress and fatigue), and role-related dimensions (e.g., perceived compatibility between work and family roles) (Allen et al., 2021; Voydanoff, 2005b). These dimensions may not align uniformly: individuals may experience adequate time flexibility while still facing high levels of psychological strain or may perceive strong role compatibility despite limited formal support. Recognizing this multidimensionality is essential for comparative analyses that seek to capture variations across demographic groups.

Finally, conceptualizing WLR requires attention to the social embeddedness of reconciliation processes. Life-course theory emphasizes that work–life experiences are shaped by age, transitions, and accumulated advantages or disadvantages over time (Elder, 1998). Similarly, gender theories underscore the persistence of unequal divisions of paid and unpaid labor, which continue to structure expectations and constraints around reconciliation (A. Hochschild & Machung, 2012). From this perspective, WLR is not a static outcome but a dynamic process that reflects the interaction between individual characteristics, social norms, and institutional arrangements. This conceptual framework provides a foundation for examining how reconciliation is experienced differently across demographic groups within a shared institutional context.

2.2. Socio-Demographic Stratification and Work–Life Reconciliation

Work–life reconciliation is not experienced uniformly among employees. Even within the same institutional and organizational environment, individuals differ in their access to resources, economic security, autonomy, and social support. These differences are often structured by socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, and income (Crompton, Lewis, & Lyonette, 2007) which reflect broader patterns of social inequality, as emphasized in social stratification theory (Grusky, 2019; Sørensen, 2000).

Socio-demographic characteristics influence employees' position within the labor market and shape their capacity to manage competing work and personal demands. From a resource-based perspective, access to material and non-material resources affects individuals' ability to buffer strain and negotiate work arrangements (Hobfoll, 1989). For instance, economic resources may affect the ability to outsource certain responsibilities, while educational attainment may be associated with different types of employment conditions and levels of autonomy. Similarly, life-course theory suggests that age is associated with shifting responsibilities and constraints over time (Elder, 1998) while gender role theory highlights how socially constructed expectations surrounding paid and unpaid work shape reconciliation experiences (Eagly, 2013; Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

From this perspective, differences in work–life reconciliation are not random variations between individuals but reflect structured inequalities embedded in social and economic systems. Analyzing reconciliation across socio-demographic groups therefore provides insight into how access to work-life balance is socially distributed, even

within a shared institutional context. This stratification perspective provides the analytical foundation for examining variations in work–life reconciliation across key demographic characteristics.

2.3. Demographic Determinants of Work–Life Reconciliation

2.3.1. Gender

Gender remains one of the most consistently examined dimensions in work–life reconciliation research. A substantial body of literature documents persistent gender differences in the experience of balancing paid work and personal and family life. Despite rising female labor market participation, women continue to assume a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities, contributing to higher levels of work–life tension and role overload (Bianchi et al., 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Empirical studies (Blair-Loy, 2005; Hochschild, 2018; Milkie & Peltola, 1999) frequently report that women experience greater time-based and strain-based conflict, particularly during periods of intensive family responsibilities. At the same time, men’s reconciliation experiences are shaped by breadwinner norms and organizational cultures that emphasize continuous full-time employment, which may discourage active engagement in non-work roles (Eagly, 2013; Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). Although gender gaps have narrowed in some contexts, differences in expectations, responsibilities, and career trajectories continue to produce differentiated experiences. These findings suggest that gender remains a central axis of variation in work–life reconciliation, even within institutional contexts designed to support balance.

2.3.2. Age

Age constitutes a central life-course dimension shaping work–life reconciliation. Life-course theory emphasizes that individuals’ work and personal experiences are embedded in age-graded transitions and institutional timelines, meaning that opportunities and constraints are structured differently at various stages of life (Elder, 1998; Elder Jr, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Age therefore reflects not only chronological position but also accumulated professional experience, employment stability, and shifting social expectations. Younger employees often encounter career-entry pressures, temporary contracts, and limited organizational seniority, which may reduce their bargaining power and access to flexible arrangements. At mid-career stages, employees typically assume greater professional responsibilities and may face intensified performance expectations, potentially increasing time pressure and strain. Older employees, in contrast, may benefit from accumulated human capital, stronger job security, and enhanced autonomy, factors that can facilitate improved reconciliation (Moen, Kelly, & Hill, 2011; Smith, 2013). However, later stages of the life course may also introduce health-related constraints or new forms of non-work responsibility.

Importantly, age can be understood through the lens of cumulative advantage and disadvantage: inequalities in resources, autonomy, and job quality may accumulate over time, shaping differentiated reconciliation experiences across age groups (Sarah Damaske & Frech, 2016; Moen et al., 2011). Work–life reconciliation is therefore not a static condition but a dynamic outcome that reflects individuals’ evolving position within both the labor market and broader social structures.

2.3.3. Education

Educational attainment is a key indicator of socio-economic position that shapes employees’ work–life reconciliation experiences. Beyond its role in determining occupation, job quality, and income, education reflects individuals’ access to human capital, knowledge, and social networks that facilitate navigation of work and personal responsibilities (Bianchi et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2014).

Studies show (Glavin, Schieman, & Reid, 2011; Schieman, Glavin, & Milkie, 2009; Smith, 2013) higher educational levels are often associated with professional or managerial positions offering greater autonomy, schedule control, and access to flexible arrangements, which can support reconciliation. At the same time, highly educated employees may face stronger performance expectations, intensified workloads, and extended availability norms, introducing new sources of strain despite formal flexibility. Conversely, employees with lower educational attainment frequently occupy positions with rigid schedules, limited autonomy, and fewer opportunities to negotiate work arrangements, constraining reconciliation.

Education can also be viewed through the lens of cumulative advantage: higher educational attainment provides long-term benefits, such as access to better jobs, networks, and resources, which compound over the life course and enhance the capacity to balance work and personal or family life. Conversely, lower educational attainment may reinforce structural constraints and limit access to reconciliation opportunities (Mirowsky, 2017; Smith, 2013). Thus, education functions not only as a descriptive demographic variable but also as a structural factor shaping differentiated experiences of work–life reconciliation.

2.3.4. Income

Income constitutes a central economic resource that shapes employees' work–life reconciliation experiences. Beyond its immediate material benefits, income reflects individuals' access to resources that can buffer work–life tensions, such as the ability to outsource domestic tasks, afford childcare, or adjust work schedules (Hobfoll, 1989; Voydanoff, 2005b).

According to empirical studies Damaske (2011) and Schieman et al. (2009) higher-income employees often enjoy greater flexibility and choice in managing work and personal responsibilities, allowing them to navigate competing demands more effectively. In contrast, lower-income employees may face tighter financial constraints, dependence on fixed schedules, and limited capacity to utilize formal or informal reconciliation strategies, which can exacerbate time pressures and strain. Income can also be conceptualized through the lens of cumulative advantage: economic resources accumulated over time can compound, enabling higher-income employees to maintain and enhance reconciliation opportunities, while lower-income employees may experience persistent structural constraints that limit access to work–life balance (Mirowsky, 2017; Ross & Mirowsky, 2003). Therefore, income functions not only as a demographic characteristic but also as a structural factor shaping differential experiences of work–life reconciliation across employees.

2.4. Limitations of Existing Research

Although prior research has extensively examined work–life reconciliation, several limitations remain regarding the role of key demographic characteristics. First, much of the literature (Crompton et al., 2007; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Milkie & Peltola, 1999) has focused primarily on gender, often emphasizing women's experiences in relation to caregiving responsibilities, while overlooking how age, education, and income shape reconciliation outcomes across the workforce. Second, studies on age have largely considered life-course transitions in isolation, without systematically analyzing how age interacts with other socio-demographic factors to influence work–life balance (Richert-Kaźmierska & Stankiewicz, 2016; Ruppanner & Huffman, 2014). Third, the influence of educational attainment on reconciliation remains underexplored, despite its connection to occupational status, job autonomy, and access to flexible arrangements. Finally, income is frequently treated as a control variable rather than a central determinant of employees' capacity to manage competing work and personal demands.

In addition, existing studies often examine single policies, isolated organizational practices, or specific subpopulations, limiting our understanding of how demographic differences operate within the same institutional context (Eby et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2007). Few studies have adopted a comparative, multi-dimensional perspective that simultaneously considers gender, age, education, and income to identify which groups benefit most from institutional supports and which continue to face structural constraints.

Addressing these gaps is essential for providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how work–life reconciliation is socially distributed. A systematic examination of these four demographic characteristics within a shared institutional and organizational context can reveal persistent inequalities and inform more equitable organizational strategies and public policies.

3. METHODS

This study used a descriptive-comparative design to examine work–life reconciliation (WLR) among employees in Québec, focusing on how WLR varies across key demographic characteristics. Data were collected from a cross-sectional online survey conducted between June 6 and June 27, 2023, in collaboration with the Réseau pour un Québec Famille. Participation was voluntary, and a total of 3,030 completed questionnaires were collected. The sample reflects a variety of gender, age, education, and income profiles (see Table 1).

Work–life reconciliation (WLR) was conceptualized as employees' capacity to manage and integrate competing demands from work and non-work domains in a sustainable way. WLR was measured using a series of 12 items assessing organizational flexibility, workload management, and access to work–family resources (Mathieu, Tremblay, Treleaven, & Fuller, 2023; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, 2005; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, 2002; Tremblay, 2004; Waddington & Bell, 2021). Respondents rated these items on a four-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree). A composite WLR score was calculated as the mean across items, with higher scores indicating better perceived reconciliation.

Demographic and work-related characteristics were used to define comparison groups. These included gender (male, female), age/life-course stage (<18, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65–74, >75), education (Primary (≤7 years), Secondary (8–12 years), College, University certificates/diplomas, Undergraduate bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctorate), and income (< \$19,999, \$20,000–\$39,999, \$40,000–\$59,999, \$60,000–\$79,999, \$80,000–\$99,999, > \$100,000).

Descriptive analyses were conducted to summarize the overall sample characteristics and levels of work–life reconciliation (WLR). Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the distribution of demographic variables, while means and standard deviations summarized WLR scores. One-sample t-tests were conducted to examine whether WLR mean scores differed significantly from the test value used in the analysis. Moreover, group differences in WLR across demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income) were examined using independent-samples t-tests and descriptive comparisons of group means. All analyses were conducted using standard statistical software, with the focus on describing patterns, differences, and disparities rather than testing causal relationships.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of 3,030 respondents, with females representing the majority (N = 1,923; 63.5%) and males accounting for 36.5% (N = 1,105). Most participants were between 25 and 54 years old, with the largest group aged 35–44 (N = 1,070; 35.3%), followed by 45–54 (N = 862; 28.4%) and 25–34 (N = 691; 22.8%). In terms of

education, the majority had post-secondary qualifications, particularly college (N = 1,029; 34.0%) and bachelor's degrees (N = 810; 26.7%). Participants with postgraduate degrees represented 13.1% of the sample (N = 398). Regarding income, nearly half reported earning more than \$100,000 annually (N = 1,385; 45.7%), while middle-income groups (\$40,000–\$99,999) accounted for 40.5% (N = 1,228). Overall, the sample represents a good mix of participants across key demographic groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample characteristics (N=3030).

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	1105	36.5%
	Female	1923	63.5%
	Prefer not to say	2	0.1%
Age	< 18	-	-
	18-24	164	5.4%
	25-34	691	22.8%
	35-44	1070	35.3%
	45-54	862	28.4%
	55-64	225	7.4%
	65-74	15	5%
	> 75	3	1%
	Prefer not to say	-	-
Education	Primary (7 years or less)	10	0.33%
	Secondary (8 to 12 years)	555	18.32%
	College	1029	33.96%
	University certificates / diplomas	222	7.33%
	Undergraduate bachelor's degree	810	26.73%
	Master's degree	342	11.29%
	Doctorate	56	1.85%
	Prefer not to say	6	0.20%
Income	< 19,999 \$	41	1.4%
	20,000\$ -39,999\$	191	6.3%
	40,000\$ -59,999\$	376	12.4%
	60,000\$ -79,999\$	382	12.6%
	80,000\$ -99,999\$	470	15.5%
	>100,000\$	1385	45.7%
	Prefer not to say	185	6.1%

4.2. Overview of Work–Life Reconciliation Measures

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis for the work–life reconciliation measures. Mean scores ranged from 2.598 to 3.446 on a four-point scale, indicating moderate to relatively high levels of agreement across items. The highest mean scores were observed for access to telework and flexible arrangements (M = 3.446, SD = 0.810), flexibility in choosing vacation (M = 3.361, SD = 0.849), and adjusting work schedule (M = 3.361, SD = 0.849). These items also displayed relatively low standard deviations, suggesting moderate dispersion around the mean.

Several items showed intermediate mean values, including reducing working hours, when necessary (M = 3.011, SD = 0.953), culture supporting use of balance measures (M = 2.985, SD = 0.878), work interfering with family life (M = 2.953, SD = 0.942), and colleague support (M = 2.944, SD = 0.956). These items were characterized by moderate variability in responses. On the other hand, lower mean scores were observed for employer openness to caregiving needs (M = 2.901, SD = 0.952), organizational policies supporting work–life reconciliation (M = 2.746, SD = 0.947), workload allowing time for private life (M = 2.706, SD = 1.023), ability to manage work and family satisfactorily (M = 2.647, SD = 0.780), and employer willingness to adjust workload (M =

2.598, SD = 0.978). These items exhibited comparatively higher levels of dispersion, particularly for workload-related measures.

Standard deviations across items ranged from 0.780 to 1.023, indicating moderate variability in respondents' perceptions of work-life reconciliation conditions. The largest variability was observed for workload allowing time for private life (SD = 1.023), while the lowest variability was found for ability to manage work and family satisfactorily (SD = 0.780).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of work-life reconciliation measures.

Item	Mean	Sd	T-value	Sig.
1 Flexibility in choosing vacation	3.361	0.8489	87.748	<0.001
2 Workload allowing time for private life	2.706	1.023	23.629	<0.001
3 Access to telework/flexible arrangements	3.446	0.8098	97.650	<0.001
4 Employer openness to caregiving needs	2.901	0.9517	51.150	<0.001
5 Culture supporting use of balance measures	2.985	0.8776	61.577	<0.001
6 Reducing working hours when necessary	3.011	0.9529	36.529	<0.001
7 Ability to manage work and family satisfactorily	2.647	0.7797	45.588	<0.001
8 Adjusting work schedule	3.361	0.8489	23.316	<0.001
9 Organizational policies supporting WLR	2.746	0.9473	42.587	<0.001
10 Colleague support	2.944	0.9563	52.533	<0.001
11 Employer willingness to adjust workload	2.598	0.9781	32.561	<0.001
12 Work interfering with family life	2.953	0.9421	87.748	<0.001

Note: Mean = average score for each WLR item; SD = standard deviation, indicating variability in responses; T-value = one-sample t-test comparing the item mean to the scale midpoint; Sig. = significance level (p value) for the t-test. All items are significant at $p < 0.001$.

All items showed statistically significant t-values ($p < 0.001$), reflecting that mean scores differed significantly from the test value used in the analysis. The positive t-values suggest that employees generally perceive work-life reconciliation at moderate to moderately high levels. These results indicate that employees in Québec experience a moderate degree of work-life reconciliation.

Overall, the result indicates variation across different dimensions of work-life reconciliation, with relatively higher mean scores for flexibility-related measures and lower scores for workload- and policy-related items. These general patterns provide a contextual foundation for examining differences across demographic groups in the subsequent comparative analyses.

4.3. Factor Analysis of Work-Life Reconciliation Items

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the twelve work-life reconciliation items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.638, indicating an acceptable level of common variance among items. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1574.709$, $df = 66$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. The analysis yielded a three-factor solution, which accounted for meaningful patterns of association among the items. Factor loadings and communalities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. KMO and bartlett's test.

Test	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.638
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2)	1574.709, $df = 66$, $p < .001$

Note: KMO values > 0.6 indicate acceptable sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test should be significant ($p < .05$) to support factorability.

As Table 4 shows, the first factor, labeled Work Schedule and Time Flexibility, included items related to employees' ability to adjust working arrangements and manage time demands. This factor comprised adjusting work schedules, access to telework and flexible arrangements, workload allowing time for private life, reducing working hours when necessary, and flexibility in choosing vacation. Factor loadings for this dimension ranged from 0.490 to 0.843, with communalities between 0.242 and 0.753, indicating moderate to strong shared variance.

Table 4. Factor loadings and communalities.

Factor	Item	Factor loading	Communality (h ²)
Work schedule and time flexibility	Adjusting work schedule	0.839	0.753
	Access to telework/flexible arrangements	0.843	0.717
	Workload allowing time for private life	0.821	0.684
	Reducing working hours when necessary	0.697	0.722
	Flexibility in choosing vacation	0.490	0.242
Organizational and social support	Organizational policies supporting WLR	0.795	0.636
	Culture supporting use of WL balance measures	0.748	0.671
	Employer openness to caregiving needs	0.497	0.504
	Employer willingness to adjust workload	0.512	0.315
	Colleagues' support	0.488	0.315
Perceived WF compatibility	Work interfering with family life	0.497	0.504
	Ability to manage work and family satisfactorily	0.766	0.684

Note: 1) Items were assigned to the factor where their loading was highest, with a minimum threshold of 0.40.
 2) Communalities indicate the proportion of variance in each item explained by the extracted factors.
 3) Factor names were selected after examining the items grouped within each factor, ensuring conceptual coherence.
 4) Some items have lower loadings than others within the same factor, which is normal in exploratory research; what matters is the relative highest loading and sufficient communality.

The second factor, labeled Organizational and Social Support, captured formal and informal workplace resources related to work–life reconciliation. This dimension included organizational policies supporting WLR, organizational culture, employer openness to caregiving needs, employer willingness to adjust workload, and colleagues' support. Factor loadings ranged from 0.488 to 0.795, with communalities between 0.315 and 0.671, reflecting moderate associations between these items and the underlying factor.

The third factor, labeled Perceived Work–Family Compatibility, consisted of two items measuring employees' subjective assessment of the interaction between work and personal life: work interfering with family life and the ability to manage work and family satisfactorily. These items displayed loadings of 0.497 and 0.766, respectively, with communalities of 0.504 and 0.684, indicating substantial shared variance.

Overall, this multidimensional structure provides a basis for examining how different aspects of reconciliation vary across demographic groups in subsequent analyses.

4.4. Comparative Analysis of WLR Factors Across Demographic Groups

4.4.1. Work–Life Reconciliation Across Gender

Table 5 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the three work–life reconciliation factors among male and female respondents. For Factor 1: Work Schedule and Time Flexibility, women reported slightly higher overall means ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.67$) compared to men ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.63$), indicating that women perceived slightly more opportunities to manage their work schedules and utilize flexible arrangements. This factor reflects Quebec employees' control over working hours (Adjusting work schedule, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.85$), access to telework (Access to telework/flexible arrangements, $M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.81$), vacation flexibility (Flexibility in choosing vacation, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.85$), and the ability to adjust workload to accommodate personal life demands

(Workload allowing time for private life, $M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.02$; Reducing working hours when necessary, $M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.95$). Overall, women reported slightly higher perceived flexibility than men across the five items. High scores for telework and vacation flexibility suggest that formal arrangements are widely available, whereas slightly lower scores for workload adjustments indicate that managing actual work demands may still present challenges for some employees.

Table 5. Work-life reconciliation across gender.

Gender	N	Factor 1 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 2 Support (Mean ± SD)	Factor 3 (Mean ± SD)
Male	1024	3.09 ± 0.63	2.41 ± 0.44	2.73 ± 0.71
Female	1985	3.17 ± 0.67	2.42 ± 0.47	2.67 ± 0.74
Total	3009	3.13 ± 0.65	2.43 ± 0.46	2.70 ± 0.73

Note: N = number of respondents; Mean = average score; SD = standard deviation; WLR = work-life reconciliation. (±) in the table shows the variation of scores around the mean.

For Factor 2, Organizational and Social Support, which encompasses organizational policies, workplace culture, and support from employers and colleagues, both men ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.44$) and women ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.47$) reported nearly identical overall mean scores. This factor reflects Quebec employees' perceptions of formal and informal support structures, including organizational policies supporting work-life reconciliation ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.95$), workplace culture that encourages the use of WL balance measures ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.88$), employer openness to caregiving needs ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.95$), employer willingness to adjust workload ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.98$), and colleague support ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.96$). Men and women reported nearly identical mean scores across items. While culture and colleague support received the highest ratings, slightly lower scores for employer willingness to adjust workload suggest that formal support may not always fully translate into practical assistance.

Factor 3, Perceived Work-Family Compatibility captures employees' subjective experience of managing work and personal life, as well as the extent to which work interferes with family responsibilities. Men reported a slightly higher overall mean ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to women ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.74$), indicating a marginally more positive perception of overall work-family compatibility. This factor includes the ability to manage work and family responsibilities satisfactorily ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.78$) and the extent to which work interferes with family life ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.94$). The relatively moderate scores suggest that while the employees feel reasonably capable of balancing work and personal-family life, work-related interference remains noticeable.

The small gender difference indicates that men may perceive slightly less interference or slightly better overall compatibility, whereas women may experience marginally more challenges in aligning work and family demands. Scores were moderate, with men reporting slightly higher compatibility than women. Higher ratings for work interference compared to the ability to manage work and family satisfactorily indicate that, despite general capability, work demands continue to affect personal and family life for many employees.

4.4.2. Work-Life Reconciliation Across Age

Table 6 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the three work-life reconciliation factors across different age groups among Quebec employees. For Factor 1, Structural Flexibility, younger employees aged 18-24 reported slightly lower perceived flexibility ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.65$) compared to those in the 25-34 age group ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.66$). Employees aged 35-44 ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.66$), 45-54 ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.64$), and 55-64 ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.63$) showed relatively similar perceptions of flexibility. Older employees, aged 65-74 ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.59$) and over 75 ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.83$), reported slightly higher mean scores, although these groups were small. Scores suggest that structural flexibility is moderately available across all age groups in Quebec, with young adults

reporting slightly lower perceptions and older employees slightly higher, possibly reflecting career stage differences and experience in navigating workplace arrangements.

For Factor 2, Organizational and Social Support, which includes organizational policies, workplace culture, employer and colleague support, employees aged 18–24 reported a mean of 2.38 (SD = 0.45), slightly lower than the 25–34 group (M = 2.45, SD = 0.47). Employees aged 35–44 (M = 2.41, SD = 0.45), 45–54 (M = 2.40, SD = 0.46), and 55–64 (M = 2.38, SD = 0.41) reported moderately similar scores, while the 65–74 age group showed a slightly lower mean (M = 2.29, SD = 0.44). These patterns indicate that mid-career employees perceive slightly better organizational and social support compared to the youngest and oldest workers, though overall support is moderate across all age groups. The distribution of scores suggests that while formal policies and cultural support exist, accessibility or perceived effectiveness may vary by employees’ career stage and family status such as having children under the age of 18.

Table 6. Work–life reconciliation across age.

Age Group	N	Factor 1 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 2 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 3 (Mean ± SD)
18–24	155	3.06 ± 0.65	2.38 ± 0.45	2.65 ± 0.72
25–34	877	3.14 ± 0.66	2.45 ± 0.47	2.72 ± 0.72
35–44	1082	3.12 ± 0.66	2.41 ± 0.45	2.69 ± 0.73
45–54	642	3.08 ± 0.64	2.40 ± 0.46	2.68 ± 0.73
55–64	220	3.11 ± 0.63	2.38 ± 0.41	2.71 ± 0.71
65–74	31	3.18 ± 0.59	2.29 ± 0.44	2.88 ± 0.81
>75	5	3.19 ± 0.83	2.76 ± 0.50	3.00 ± 1.41
Total	3012	3.11 ± 0.66	2.42 ± 0.46	2.70 ± 0.73

Note: N = number of respondents; Mean = average score; SD = standard deviation; WLR = work–life reconciliation. (±) in the table shows the variation of scores around the mean.

For Factor 3, Experienced Compatibility, which captures the subjective ability to manage work and personal life and the degree of work interference, scores were moderate. The youngest employees, aged 18–24, reported a mean of 2.65 (SD = 0.72), slightly lower than the 25–34 group (M = 2.72, SD = 0.72). Employees aged 35–44 (M = 2.69, SD = 0.73), 45–54 (M = 2.68, SD = 0.73), and 55–64 (M = 2.71, SD = 0.71) showed similar experiences of compatibility, while older employees, aged 65–74 (M = 2.88, SD = 0.81) and over 75 (M = 3.00, SD = 1.41), reported slightly higher perceptions, likely due to smaller sample sizes and differing work engagement at later life stages. Overall, the patterns suggest that while most employees feel moderately capable of reconciling work and personal life, younger employees perceive slightly more challenges in achieving compatibility, and older employees may experience either fewer demands or more flexible arrangements.

In summary, age-related differences in work-life reconciliation among Quebec employees are modest. Structural flexibility is perceived as slightly higher among older workers and lower among the youngest adults. Organizational and social support is perceived as strongest among mid-career employees, while experienced compatibility is relatively consistent across age groups, with some variability at the extremes of the age spectrum.

Overall, scores were moderate across all age groups, suggesting that most employees feel reasonably capable of reconciling work and personal life, though younger adults may face marginally greater challenges, and older employees may benefit from greater autonomy or flexible work arrangements.

4.4.3. Work–Life Reconciliation Across Education Levels

As Table 7 indicates, for Factor 1, Work Schedule and Time Flexibility, employees with lower education levels (Primary ≤7 years and Secondary 8–12 years) reported slightly lower perceived flexibility, with means of 3.03 (SD

= 0.86) and 3.09 (SD = 0.64), respectively. Those in the mid-level education group (College, University certificates/diplomas, and Undergraduate bachelor's degrees) reported similar experiences of flexibility, with means ranging from 3.11 to 3.13 (SD = 0.61–0.67). Employees with higher education levels (Master's and Doctorate) reported the highest perceived flexibility, with means of 3.17 (SD = 0.67) and 3.23 (SD = 0.73), respectively. Overall, the results indicate that perceptions of structural flexibility are moderately high across all education levels, with a slight upward trend as educational attainment increases, particularly among employees with postgraduate qualifications.

Table 7. Work–life reconciliation across education.

Education Level	N	Factor 1 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 2 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 3 (Mean ± SD)
Primary (≤7 yrs)	10	3.03 ± 0.86	2.25 ± 0.43	2.65 ± 0.88
Secondary (8–12 yrs)	530	3.09 ± 0.64	2.41 ± 0.45	2.67 ± 0.72
College	1038	3.11 ± 0.65	2.43 ± 0.46	2.69 ± 0.74
University (Cert./ Dipl.)	236	3.11 ± 0.61	2.37 ± 0.40	2.77 ± 0.72
Undergraduate (bachelor)	802	3.13 ± 0.67	2.40 ± 0.44	2.70 ± 0.73
Master's degree	332	3.17 ± 0.67	2.43 ± 0.53	2.69 ± 0.74
Doctorate	53	3.23 ± 0.73	2.48 ± 0.44	2.77 ± 0.71
Total	3001	3.12 ± 0.66	2.41 ± 0.45	2.70 ± 0.73

Note: N = number of respondents; Mean = average score; SD = standard deviation; WLR = work–life reconciliation. (±) in the table shows the variation of scores around the mean.

For Factor 2, Organizational and Social Support, which reflects employees' perceptions of organizational policies, workplace culture, and support from employers and colleagues, the patterns across education levels were modest but noticeable. Employees with primary and secondary education reported slightly lower perceived support, with means of $M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.43$ and $M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.45$, respectively, suggesting that lower-educated employees may feel somewhat less supported in workplace arrangements. Respondents with college, university certificates/diplomas, and undergraduate bachelor's degrees formed a middle cluster, with mean scores ranging from $M = 2.37$, $SD = 0.40$ to $M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.46$, indicating moderate perceptions of organizational and social support. Employees holding master's and doctoral degrees reported slightly higher levels of support ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.53$ and $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.44$, respectively), suggesting that those with advanced education perceive greater access to formal and informal workplace resources. Overall, while differences were modest, the trend indicates that organizational and social support tends to increase slightly with higher education, and employees with lower educational attainment may perceive fewer supportive resources or opportunities in their workplaces.

For Factor 3, Perceived Work–Family Compatibility, which captures employees' subjective experience of managing work and personal life and the extent to which work interferes with family responsibilities, the patterns across education levels were generally consistent, with slight variations. Employees with primary and secondary education reported $M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.88$ and $M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.72$, respectively, indicating moderate compatibility. Respondents with college, university certificates/diplomas, and undergraduate bachelor's degrees showed similar experiences, with mean scores ranging from $M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.74$ to $M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.73$, suggesting fairly stable perceptions of reconciling work and personal life among mid-educated employees. Employees holding master's and doctoral degrees reported $M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.74$ and $M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.71$, respectively, reflecting slightly higher perceived compatibility among those with advanced education. Overall, while differences were modest, the pattern indicates that employees across educational levels generally feel capable of managing work and personal life, with slightly higher perceived compatibility among employees with the highest educational attainment.

Overall, scores were moderate across all education groups, indicating that most employees feel capable of managing work and personal life, with a modest upward trend in perceived reconciliation among employees with the highest educational attainment.

4.4.4. Work–Life Reconciliation Across Income Groups

Table 8 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the three work–life reconciliation factors across different income groups among Quebec employees. For Factor 1, Work Schedule and Time Flexibility, employees earning less than \$19,999 reported the lowest perceived flexibility (M = 3.06, SD = 0.55), while those earning \$20,000–39,999 reported a similar mean (M = 3.08, SD = 0.70). Perceived flexibility increased gradually among middle-income groups, including \$40,000–59,999 (M = 3.11, SD = 0.67) and \$60,000–79,999 (M = 3.14, SD = 0.64). Employees earning \$80,000–99,999 (M = 3.18, SD = 0.65) and over \$100,000 (M = 3.21, SD = 0.66) reported the highest levels of flexibility. These results suggest that structural flexibility is moderately available across all income levels, with slightly more favorable perceptions among higher-income employees, possibly reflecting greater access to flexible work arrangements and autonomy.

Table 8. Work–life reconciliation across income.

Income level	N	Factor 1 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 2 (Mean ± SD)	Factor 3 (Mean ± SD)
< \$19,999	41	3.06 ± 0.55	2.30 ± 0.47	2.54 ± 0.88
\$20,000–39,999	149	3.08 ± 0.70	2.38 ± 0.38	2.64 ± 0.74
\$40,000–59,999	359	3.11 ± 0.67	2.43 ± 0.46	2.71 ± 0.76
\$60,000–79,999	387	3.14 ± 0.64	2.41 ± 0.44	2.68 ± 0.70
\$80,000–99,999	463	3.18 ± 0.65	2.42 ± 0.46	2.71 ± 0.76
> \$100,000	1466	3.21 ± 0.66	2.42 ± 0.46	2.70 ± 0.71
Total	2865	3.13 ± 0.66	2.42 ± 0.45	2.70 ± 0.73

Note: N = number of respondents; Mean = average score; SD = standard deviation; WLR = work–life reconciliation. (±) in the table shows the variation of scores around the mean.

For Factor 2, Organizational and Social Support, employees in the lowest income group (< \$19,999) reported the lowest perceived support (M = 2.30, SD = 0.47). Perceived support increased slightly among employees earning \$20,000–39,999 (M = 2.38, SD = 0.38) and \$40,000–59,999 (M = 2.43, SD = 0.46). Similar levels of support were reported by employees earning \$60,000–79,999 (M = 2.41, SD = 0.44), \$80,000–99,999 (M = 2.42, SD = 0.46), and over \$100,000 (M = 2.42, SD = 0.46). Overall, organizational and social support appears moderate across income groups, with slightly lower perceptions among lower-income employees. These findings suggest that access to supportive workplace resources may improve marginally with income, although differences remain relatively small.

For Factor 3, Perceived Work–Family Compatibility, employees earning less than \$19,999 reported the lowest compatibility (M = 2.54, SD = 0.88), indicating greater challenges in managing work and personal life. Slightly higher scores were observed among employees earning \$20,000–39,999 (M = 2.64, SD = 0.74) and \$40,000–59,999 (M = 2.71, SD = 0.76). Similar levels of compatibility were reported by employees earning \$60,000–79,999 (M = 2.68, SD = 0.70), \$80,000–99,999 (M = 2.71, SD = 0.76), and over \$100,000 (M = 2.70, SD = 0.71). These results indicate that perceived work–family compatibility is relatively consistent across middle- and higher-income groups, while lower-income employees experience slightly more difficulty reconciling work and personal responsibilities. Overall, scores were moderate across income levels, indicating that most employees feel reasonably capable of managing work and personal life, although financial position appears to be modestly associated with more favorable work–life reconciliation experiences.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Overview of Key Findings

This study examined how work–life reconciliation is distributed across key demographic groups among employees in Québec. Overall, the findings indicate that employees report moderate to moderately high levels of work–life reconciliation across the three dimensions of work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility. One-sample t-tests confirmed that mean scores on all items differed significantly from the scale midpoint, suggesting that respondents generally perceive some degree of access to reconciliation resources and strategies, although important challenges remain.

Across demographic groups, differences in work–life reconciliation were generally modest rather than pronounced. Gender differences were small, with men reporting slightly higher perceived compatibility and women reporting marginally higher structural flexibility. Age-related patterns showed relatively stable levels of reconciliation across most life stages, with slightly lower scores among younger employees and somewhat higher scores among older workers. Educational attainment and income displayed gradual upward trends, with higher levels of education and income associated with slightly more favorable perceptions of flexibility, support, and compatibility.

Overall, the findings indicate that work–life reconciliation in Québec shows moderate to moderately high levels of work–life reconciliation across all measured dimensions, with subtle differences across demographic groups. These descriptive patterns provide a foundation for the more detailed analyses of how gender, age, education, and income relate to reconciliation experiences in the following sections.

5.2. Gender Differences in Work–Life Reconciliation

The analysis of gender differences in work–life reconciliation reveals a small but persistent gap between men and women. Overall, men reported slightly higher levels of perceived work–family compatibility, whereas women reported marginally higher levels of work schedule and time flexibility and similar levels of organizational and social support. Despite these minor differences, both genders continue to experience moderate levels of work–family tension, indicating that work–life reconciliation challenges remain relevant for all employees.

These findings can be interpreted through the lens of gender role theory, which emphasizes the influence of socially prescribed roles on the division of labor at home and in the workplace (Bianchi et al., 2012; Eagly, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women often face the “second shift,” as described by Hochschild and Machung (2012) in which paid work is followed by a disproportionate share of household and caregiving responsibilities. Empirical research by Bianchi et al. (2012) further demonstrates that, despite increased male participation in domestic tasks, women continue to assume the majority of unpaid care work. The slightly lower compatibility reported by women in this study aligns with these theoretical and empirical observations, reflecting the ongoing negotiation of dual professional and family responsibilities.

At the same time, the small magnitude of gender gaps observed in this Québec sample suggests the moderating role of institutional support. Previous research has shown that access to childcare services, parental leave, and family-friendly workplace practices can reduce gender disparities in work–life reconciliation (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, 2012). Nevertheless, the persistence of a modest gap indicates that structural supports do not fully offset the influence of gendered expectations and the unequal distribution of domestic labor.

In summary, gender continues to matter for work–life reconciliation, even in a context characterized by relatively strong institutional support. Women experience slightly lower perceived compatibility and remain exposed to the cumulative pressures of paid and unpaid work, while men report marginally higher levels of balance.

These patterns underscore the enduring influence of social norms and care responsibilities, highlighting the limits of policy interventions in fully equalizing gendered experiences of work–life reconciliation.

5.3. Age and Life-Course Patterns

The analysis of age-related differences in work–life reconciliation reveals modest but consistent variations across life stages. Younger employees reported slightly lower levels of work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility. In contrast, employees in mid-career stages displayed relatively stable levels of reconciliation, while older workers reported slightly higher scores across most dimensions. Although these differences are limited in magnitude, they suggest that reconciliation experiences evolve gradually over the life course.

These patterns can be interpreted in light of life-course theory, which emphasizes that individual trajectories are shaped by age-related transitions, institutional contexts, and cumulative experiences (Elder Jr et al., 2003; Hutchison, 2010). From this perspective, work–life reconciliation reflects not only current job characteristics but also prior career experiences and accumulated resources. Younger workers, who are often in the early stages of their professional trajectories, may face greater insecurity, limited autonomy, and fewer opportunities to negotiate flexible arrangements. These conditions are consistent with their lower reported levels of perceived compatibility and support.

During mid-career stages, employees typically experience increased job stability and professional responsibilities. While this may provide greater access to organizational resources, it is also frequently accompanied by heightened work demands and family obligations, particularly for those with dependent children (Moen & Sweet, 2004; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Ruppner & Huffman, 2014). As a result, work–life reconciliation among mid-career employees remains relatively stable, reflecting a balance between improved employment conditions and intensified role pressures.

Among older workers, slightly higher reconciliation scores may reflect greater occupational autonomy, accumulated workplace capital, and increased control over work schedules. From a cumulative advantage perspective, long-term access to stable employment, organizational knowledge, and professional networks may enhance individuals' capacity to manage competing responsibilities over time (Dannefer, 2003; Moen et al., 2011). These accumulated resources can translate into more favorable perceptions of flexibility, support, and compatibility in later career stages. At the same time, caution is warranted in interpreting age-related differences, particularly for older employees, due to smaller sample sizes in this group. Limited representation may constrain the generalizability of findings and suggests that observed patterns should be interpreted conservatively.

Overall, the results indicate that work–life reconciliation changes gradually across the life course rather than shifting sharply between age groups. Lower scores among younger workers highlight the challenges associated with early career insecurity and limited bargaining power, while stable mid-career patterns reflect the coexistence of professional and family pressures. Slightly higher scores among older workers suggest the benefits of accumulated experience and autonomy. These findings underscore the importance of developing targeted organizational and policy measures to support younger employees, particularly in facilitating access to flexible arrangements and supportive workplace practices during the early stages of their careers.

5.4. Educational Stratification and Work–Life Reconciliation

The analysis of educational differences in work–life reconciliation reveals a clear, though moderate, upward gradient across levels of educational attainment. Employees with higher levels of education reported slightly more

favorable perceptions of work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility. In particular, individuals holding postgraduate degrees consistently displayed the highest scores across these dimensions, while employees with lower levels of education reported comparatively lower levels of support and compatibility.

These patterns are consistent with human capital and stratification perspectives (Bianchi et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2014) which emphasize the role of education in shaping access to employment opportunities, job quality, and workplace resources. Higher educational attainment is typically associated with entry into professional and managerial occupations characterized by greater autonomy, task discretion, and bargaining power. These job characteristics enhance employees' capacity to negotiate flexible schedules and to access supportive organizational practices, thereby facilitating work–life reconciliation.

In contrast, employees with lower levels of education are more likely to occupy non-professional or semi-skilled positions that offer limited control over working time, fewer opportunities for remote work, and weaker access to formal or informal support mechanisms (Schieman et al., 2009; Smith, 2013). These structural constraints are reflected in their lower reported levels of organizational support and perceived compatibility. Although overall differences remain modest, the persistence of these patterns indicates the presence of hidden inequalities in access to reconciliation resources that operate through educational stratification.

From this perspective, education functions as an indirect mechanism linking individual qualifications to working conditions and, ultimately, to work–life outcomes. The observed gradient suggests that educational attainment influences reconciliation primarily through its effects on job quality and occupational positioning. Professional and managerial employees benefit from greater flexibility and institutional support, whereas workers in less advantaged positions face more rigid schedules and fewer adaptive resources.

Overall, the findings indicate that education structures access to work–life reconciliation in cumulative and incremental ways. While Québec's institutional context appears to limit extreme disparities, educational stratification continues to shape employees' opportunities to achieve balance. These results highlight the importance of addressing structural barriers in lower-skilled and non-professional sectors, where limited autonomy and support may constrain employees' capacity to reconcile work and personal life.

5.5. Income and Economic Resources

The analysis of income-related differences in work–life reconciliation reveals a gradual but consistent association between economic resources and perceived balance. Employees in the lowest income groups reported comparatively lower levels of work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility. As income increased, scores on these dimensions improved progressively, indicating more favorable reconciliation experiences. However, this upward trend tended to level off at higher income levels, suggesting a plateau in perceived benefits among upper-income employees.

These patterns are consistent with resource theory, which emphasizes the central role of material, social, and psychological resources in enabling individuals to cope with competing demands (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Foa & Foa, 2012; Hobfoll, 1989). From this perspective, income functions as a key resource that can buffer stress, increase perceived control, and facilitate access to supportive arrangements. Higher-income employees are more likely to possess the financial security and bargaining power necessary to negotiate flexible schedules, reduce excessive workloads, or seek alternative work arrangements that promote balance.

Economic resources also shape reconciliation through the capacity to outsource domestic and care-related tasks (Bianchi et al., 2012; Damaske, 2011; Kalleberg, 2011). Employees with higher incomes are better positioned to

purchase childcare, housekeeping services, or other forms of external support, thereby reducing time pressures and role overload. In contrast, lower-income workers often lack access to such options and must rely primarily on personal or family resources, intensifying work–family tensions. This limited capacity for outsourcing contributes to their lower reported levels of perceived compatibility and support.

The disadvantages faced by lower-income employees are further compounded by greater exposure to employment precarity, irregular schedules, and limited job autonomy. Financial insecurity may constrain workers' ability to refuse overtime, request flexible arrangements, or prioritize family responsibilities without risking income loss (Clawson & Gerstel, 2014; Kalleberg, 2011; Williams et al., 2013). In this context, flexibility itself can become a costly resource, one that is more readily accessible to economically advantaged employees. As a result, income-related inequalities in reconciliation reflect not only differences in earnings but also broader disparities in job quality and employment stability.

At higher income levels, the observed plateau suggests that additional financial resources do not necessarily translate into proportionally greater improvements in work–life reconciliation. High-income positions are often associated with intensified workloads, extended working hours, and increased performance expectations, which may offset the benefits of material security (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Schieman et al., 2009). Consequently, while economic resources provide important buffers, they do not eliminate work–life tensions entirely.

Overall, the findings indicate that economic resources play a central role in shaping access to work–life reconciliation. Lower-income employees face structural constraints linked to financial insecurity and limited workplace autonomy, while higher-income workers benefit from greater material buffers and adaptive capacity. These patterns highlight the policy relevance of income-related inequalities, particularly the need for measures that strengthen protections and support mechanisms for economically vulnerable workers. Enhancing access to affordable childcare, stabilizing work schedules, and expanding employment protections may contribute to reducing income-based disparities in reconciliation outcomes.

5.6. Institutional Context of Québec

The relatively modest differences observed across gender, age, education, and income groups suggest that work–life reconciliation in Québec is strongly shaped by its institutional and policy environment. Compared to many other contexts, disparities in perceived flexibility, organizational support, and work–family compatibility remain limited in magnitude. This pattern indicates that public policies and labor regulations play a central role in structuring employees' opportunities to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

These findings are consistent with welfare regime and work–family policy perspectives, which emphasize the importance of institutional arrangements in shaping individuals' capacity to reconcile work and family life (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Hobson, 2011). Québec's policy framework is characterized by extensive public investment in childcare services, relatively generous parental leave provisions, and employment standards that recognize family-related needs (Harvey & Tremblay, 2020; Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2008). Together, these measures reduce employees' dependence on private resources and employer discretion, thereby limiting the extent of socio-demographic inequalities in access to reconciliation supports.

In particular, the availability of affordable, publicly funded childcare has played a central role in facilitating labor market participation and reducing work–family conflicts, especially for parents of young children (Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2008; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, 2012). Parental leave policies further contribute to supporting continuity in employment while accommodating caregiving responsibilities (Tremblay, 2014). Employment standards related to working hours, leave entitlements, and job protection also establish a baseline of rights that

applies across occupational and income groups. These institutional features help explain why differences in work–life reconciliation remain relatively moderate in this sample.

From a comparative perspective, Québec’s work–family model reflects a stronger public commitment to supporting reconciliation than is found in many liberal welfare regimes. Previous research (Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2008; Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, 2012; Tremblay, 2014) has shown that such policy configurations are associated with lower levels of work–family conflict and narrower social inequalities. In this context, the present findings provide empirical support for the argument that institutional arrangements can effectively moderate the impact of social stratification on work–life outcomes.

At the same time, the persistence of small but consistent differences across groups indicates that public policies do not fully eliminate inequalities in reconciliation experiences. Access to childcare, leave benefits, and flexible arrangements may vary according to employment status, sector, or organizational practices. Non-standard workers, employees in small firms, and individuals in lower-skilled occupations may face greater barriers in accessing available supports. As a result, formal entitlements do not always translate into equal opportunities in practice.

Moreover, institutional support cannot fully counterbalance differences in job quality, workplace cultures, and gendered expectations. Even within a relatively supportive policy environment, employees’ capacity to benefit from available measures remains shaped by occupational position, income, and organizational context. These dynamics help explain why inequalities remain limited but persistent.

Overall, the findings suggest that Québec’s institutional framework has been largely successful in reducing extreme disparities in work–life reconciliation. Public childcare, parental leave, and employment standards provide important structural foundations for balance across social groups. However, remaining gaps and unequal access highlight the need for continued policy attention and organizational commitment. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, extending coverage to precarious workers, and promoting equitable workplace practices may further enhance the inclusiveness of Québec’s work–family model.

5.7. Theoretical Contributions

The findings contribute to theoretical debates on work–life reconciliation by supporting a multidimensional perspective. By distinguishing between work schedule and time flexibility, organizational and social support, and perceived work–family compatibility, the analysis shows that reconciliation cannot be captured by a single indicator. Instead, it reflects the combined influence of working conditions, organizational resources, and employees’ own evaluations of how well work and personal life fit together. This interpretation is consistent with Voydanoff (2005b) which views work–family relations as shaped by both demands and resources across multiple domains.

Across socio-demographic groups, the results support stratification-based and cumulative advantage perspectives. Although differences by gender, age, education, and income are modest, they are systematic and persistent, indicating that access to flexibility, support, and compatibility is shaped by positions within broader systems of social inequality. Education and income structure access to favorable job conditions, while gendered and age-related career trajectories further influence reconciliation outcomes, allowing small disparities to endure over time.

The study also challenges individualistic models of work–life balance that emphasize personal preferences or coping strategies. While individual agency matters, reconciliation is shown to be largely conditioned by structural and institutional factors, including job autonomy, employment stability, and access to supportive policies. This

supports theoretical approaches that highlight institutional embeddedness and the role of social context in shaping work–family outcomes.

Finally, the relatively narrow gaps observed in Québec illustrate how institutional arrangements can moderate, though not eliminate, social inequalities. Public childcare, parental leave, and employment standards reduce reliance on private resources and employer discretion, yet persistent differences across groups demonstrate that institutional support operates within existing stratification systems. Overall, the study advances theory by conceptualizing work–life reconciliation as a socially structured and institutionally embedded process shaped by cumulative and contextual forces.

5.8. Practical and Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for employers and policymakers seeking to promote equitable work–life reconciliation. Although overall levels of reconciliation in Québec are moderate and group differences are limited, the persistence of small but systematic inequalities indicates the need for targeted action.

For employers, the results underscore the importance of inclusive workplace practices that support employees across life stages and social positions. Expanding access to flexible arrangements, such as adaptable schedules, remote work options, and predictable hours, can improve employees' ability to manage competing demands, particularly for lower-skilled and lower-paid workers who currently have the least access. Supervisor training and organizational cultures that normalize the use of reconciliation measures are essential to ensure that formal policies translate into effective support.

Organizations should also strengthen mechanisms of organizational and social support through clear communication about available benefits, transparent procedures for requesting accommodations, and protection against negative career consequences. Such measures are critical for encouraging employees to use reconciliation resources without fear of stigma or penalty.

From a policy perspective, the findings reaffirm the importance of Québec's public investment in childcare, parental leave, and employment standards in limiting extreme inequalities and supporting labor market participation. Remaining gaps suggest the need to improve coverage and accessibility for workers in non-standard and precarious employment. Policies that stabilize work schedules, enhance income security, and strengthen employment protections may be especially beneficial for younger and lower-income workers. Expanding access to affordable childcare and reinforcing eligibility and enforcement mechanisms can further reduce structural barriers to reconciliation.

Overall, effective work–life reconciliation requires coordinated action at multiple levels. Employers shape everyday working conditions, while public policies provide the structural foundation for equitable access. Continued investment in both domains is necessary to ensure that reconciliation resources are available to all employees, regardless of socio-demographic background.

5.9. Limitations and Future Research

Despite providing a broad overview of work–life reconciliation in Québec, this study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. Associations between socio-demographic characteristics and reconciliation may reflect selection effects or unobserved factors rather than direct causal relationships. Longitudinal research would allow a more precise analysis of how reconciliation evolves across the life course and in response to policy or organizational change. Also, some groups, particularly workers in highly precarious, part-time, or informal employment, may be underrepresented, which could lead to an underestimation of inequalities.

Future studies should adopt more inclusive sampling strategies that better capture vulnerable labor market positions.

Furthermore, the study relies on self-reported measures, which are subject to response bias and differing interpretations. Although validated scales were used to measure flexibility, support, and compatibility, complementary methods such as time-use data, qualitative interviews, or organizational records could provide deeper insight into actual practices and working conditions. Finally, while the analysis is grounded in Québec's institutional context, comparative research across provinces or countries would help clarify the role of policy frameworks and labor market structures in shaping reconciliation. Future research should also examine intersections between gender, age, education, and income, as well as the long-term consequences of reconciliation for careers, health, and well-being. Overall, addressing these limitations will strengthen the evidence base for developing more effective and equitable work–life reconciliation strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that work–life reconciliation in Québec is shaped by a multidimensional process in which individual characteristics, socio-economic resources, and institutional supports intersect. Differences by gender, age, education, and income are generally modest, yet persistent, revealing subtle inequalities that are moderated—but not erased—by a supportive policy context. Reconciliation therefore emerges not as a fixed outcome, but as a socially structured experience influenced by both life-course position and access to resources.

By integrating stratification, life-course, and institutional perspectives, the study highlights how reconciliation is produced through cumulative and relational processes rather than individual choice alone. Its main contribution lies in demonstrating that supportive contexts can buffer inequalities while still allowing them to endure in muted forms. This insight underscores the importance of targeting groups with fewer resources and less stability and offers a conceptual foundation for future research and policy aimed at promoting more equitable work–life outcomes.

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