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Do Work Stressors Relate to Social Support Provision? An Actor–Partner Interdependence Model Among Dual-Earner Couples

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Although the benefits of receiving social support are well established, less is known about the antecedents of providing support, particularly to one's partner. As many employees in today's world are members of dual-earner couples, they may face the challenge of dealing with their own work stress while supporting their partner. To extend our understanding of the relationship between work stress and providing social support at home, we conducted a study with 147 dual-earner couples. Bridging the spillover-crossover model and the systemic transactional model, we examined whether individuals facing high work stressors (time pressure and lack of reciprocity) provide less emotional (e.g., signaling empathy) and instrumental (e.g., offering practical help) support and more dysfunctional (e.g., hostile and superficial) support, while receiving more support from their partner. We further explored whether employees' and partners' work stressors interact to predict the provision of social support and whether the hypothesized effects differ across genders. Findings using the actor–partner interdependence model indicated that employees facing higher work stressors tend to provide more dysfunctional support, but not less emotional and instrumental support, while receiving more emotional and instrumental support from their partner. The interaction between employee's and partner's work stressors did not predict social support provision. No gender differences emerged.

Keywords: time pressure, lack of reciprocity, spillover-crossover model, systemic transactional model, actor–partner interdependence model (APIM)

Social support is a critical resource that helps reduce the burden of work stress (Halbesleben, 2006; Viswesvaran et al., 1999), and social support received from one's partner facilitates individual well-being and intimate relationships (Bradbury & Karney, 2004). Yet providing support to one's partner can be challenging, especially for those who work in a stressful job (e.g., Lim et al., 2018). This conundrum raises interesting questions about work stress, social support provision, and social support reception among members of a dual-earner couple who simultaneously manage work and home roles. Do employees who experience more work stressors provide less social support to their partner while receiving more social support from their partner? Do employees' and partners' work stress interact to shape the provision of social support? Do men and women differ in how they provide this support?

To address these questions, we conducted a dyadic study with 147 heterosexual dual-earner couples. Bridging the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) and the systemic transactional model (Bodenmann et al., 2016), we investigated the relation between employees' work stressors and social support they provide *to* their partner (actor effect) and the relation between employees' work stressors and social support provided *by* their partner (partner effect). We also explored whether employees' and partners' work stress interact to shape the provision of social support and whether these relationships are qualified by gender. Dyadic data were analyzed using the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Cook & Kenny, 2005).

This study makes several important theoretical contributions. First, we advance the social support literature by examining the antecedents of social support provision. Although social support as a coping strategy to deal with work stress has been widely studied in the past, research to date has mostly focused on the reception of social support (Verhofstadt et al., 2010). Several scholars called for further investigation (e.g., Morelli et al., 2015; Verhofstadt et al., 2010), but studies on antecedents of social support provision remain scarce. Integrating the spillover-crossover model and the systemic transactional model, we consider both members of a dyad and examine independent effects (of the employee's own work stressors) as well as interdependent effects (the interaction between the employee's and the partner's work stressors) of work stressors on the provision of social support. In so doing, we extend previous research that focused on antecedents of social support provision at the individual level, such as the individual's perceptions of the self (e.g., depressive symptoms; Coyne & Benazon, 2001) or of the situation (e.g., economic pressure; Johnson et al., 2016).

Second, we add to the growing literature that documents the relation between work stressors and behavioral outcomes in the private domain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). Although research to date has shown that work experiences shape individuals' behaviors at home (e.g., Meier & Cho, 2019; Repetti et al., 2009), much

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remains to be known about the effect of work stressors on supportive interactions among couples (Falconier & Kuhn, 2019). In this study, we examine how two work stressors (time pressure and lack of reciprocity) experienced by members of a dual-earner couple shape different types of social support (emotional, instrumental, and dysfunctional support) they provide to each other. This study expands previous research that examined a limited array of stressors and social support (e.g., daily stressors and emotional support provision, Iida et al., 2008). The two work stressors in this study are qualitatively different in that time pressure results from an imbalance between available time and the time required to perform a task (Rastegary & Landy, 1993), whereas a lack of reciprocity refers to a sense of inequity in the distribution between effort and reward (Siegrist, 2016). Examining these work stressors helps establish the generalizability of the proposed model. Considering different types of social support is critical to furthering our understanding of social support, and in that each type has been shown to have different effects and may have unique antecedents (French et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2021).

Third, we contribute to the current understanding of gendered patterns in the provision of social support. Gender has been considered a critical aspect in understanding prosocial behaviors such as social support provision because women are socialized more than men are to prioritize caregiving (Eagly, 2009). Although some previous studies suggest that women are more supportive than men (Eagly, 2009; Verhofstadt et al., 2007) and that stressed men tend to show more withdrawal behavior toward their partner (e.g., Schulz et al., 2004), others reported no gender difference (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2005; Pasch et al., 1997). Our research continues this stream of research to better understand the role of gender in the relation between work stress and social support.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

Social Support Among Couples: A Dyadic Approach

Intimate partners are the most common source of social support (Dakof & Taylor, 1990), and their support is considered to be particularly important (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). The systemic transactional model delves into social support between intimate partners by introducing the multidimensional construct of dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 2005). Supportive dyadic coping corresponds to "emotional support" in the stress literature (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which refers to the regulation of emotions through active listening and empathic understanding by the partner, whereas delegative dyadic coping corresponds to "instrumental support," which refers to problem-focused actions such as taking over household or childcare duties. Couples also engage in negative coping, which corresponds to "dysfunctional support," such as providing ambivalent and unmotivated support (e.g., feeling forced to assist the other in coping), showing hostile behavior (e.g., blaming or criticizing the partner during coping), or withdrawal (e.g., avoiding social interactions with the partner).

According to the systemic transactional model, dyadic coping is "a process in which the stress signals of one partner and the coping reactions of the other partner to these signals […] are taken into consideration" to provide support among intimate partners (Bodenmann, 1997, p. 139). Drawing on the assumption that support provision occurs when partners' own resources are sufficient (Bodenmann, 2000), we investigate common and prevalent resource-draining experiences reported by working individuals—work stressors. Guided by the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) and the systemic transactional model (Bodenmann, 1997), we propose that social support provision is shaped by employees' as well as their partners' own work stressors.

In the following sections, we first discuss how employees' work stressors shape their provision of social support to their partners (actor effect) and how employees' work stressors shape their partners' provision of social support to the employee (partner effect). We then describe how employees' and partners' work stressors may interact to predict social support provision between them. Finally, we explain gender differences in the hypothesized relations between work stressors and social support provision.

Providing Social Support: An Actor Perspective

The spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) serves as a conceptual framework to explain how work stress relates to social support provided for the intimate partner. According to the spillover-crossover model, individuals' experiences are transmitted across domains (spillover), which can subsequently be transmitted across individuals (crossover). Because social support provision requires personal resources (e.g., attention, energy, and time), it may be affected by exposure to work stressors that deplete resources. This supposition is well aligned with the systemic transactional model, which posits that the sufficiency of a partner's own resources is an important contributing factor in dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 2000).

Supporting both the spillover-crossover and the systematic transactional models, studies have reported that work stressors that deplete personal resources (e.g., positive mood and energy) relate to more dysfunctional support provision, such as withdrawal and social undermining toward intimate partners (Lim et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2004; Shimazu et al., 2009). Some studies on the link between stressors and the provision of emotional support have yielded mixed findings (e.g., Iida et al., 2008; ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018), suggesting that various factors (e.g., gender, resources at work/home, and relationship quality) may qualify the link between stressors and support provision. In this study, we aim to replicate the positive association between work stressors and the provision of dysfunctional support, obtain additional evidence for the inconsistent relation between work stressors and the provision of emotional support, and extend the literature by considering the relation between work stressors and the provision of instrumental support. Based on the theoretical rationale, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: An employee's work stressors relate to less emotional support the employee provides to the partner.

Hypothesis 1b: An employee's work stressors relate to less instrumental support the employee provides to the partner.

Hypothesis 1c: An employee's work stressors relate to more dysfunctional support the employee provides to the partner.

Providing Social Support: A Partner Perspective

According to the systematic transactional model, intimate partners provide support to each other when they perceive the other as suffering from stressors, aiming to conjointly reduce the burden (Bodenmann et al., 2016). Such social support provision occurs because partners empathize with each other (Devoldre et al., 2010). Previous empirical studies show that increased work stressors experienced by employees are related to the provision of more emotional support by intimate partners (Hilpert et al., 2018; Iida et al., 2008; Repetti, 1989). Because instrumental support is an important mechanism through which intimate partners support each other to deal with stressors (Bodenmann et al., 2016), it is plausible that employees' work stressors lead to greater instrumental support provided by intimate partners. In this study, we aim to replicate the positive association between employees' work stressors and their partners' provision of emotional support, while extending the literature by examining the relation between employees' work stressors and their partners' provision of instrumental support. Based on the theoretical rationale, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: An employee's work stressors relate to their partner's provision of more emotional support.

Hypothesis 2b: An employee's work stressors relate to their partner's provision of more instrumental support.

Interactive Effects of Work Stressors on Social Support Provision

Whereas the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) conceptualizes the transmission of work stress from an individual at work to a partner at home in a serial manner, the systemic transactional model emphasizes the interdependency among intimate partners (Bodenmann et al., 2016). Bridging the two theoretical perspectives, we propose the transmission of interactive effects of employees' and their partners' work stressors into the home in ways that shape the provision of social support. Because both members of a dual-earner couple are challenged to support their partner (i.e., each needs to provide social support) while managing their own stress (i.e., their need to receive social support), work stressors experienced by the two individuals are likely interact to shape their social support provision to each other.

The relation between the employee's work stressors and the employee's social support provision (actor effect) may be moderated by the partner's own work stressors. Employees who experience work stressors are likely to provide less emotional and instrumental support and more dysfunctional support to their partners, but such a pattern may be weakened if partners seem to need support due to their own work stress. Similarly, the relation between employees' work stressors and their partners' provision of social support (partner effect) may be moderated by the partners' own work stressors. For example, stressed employees may receive more emotional and instrumental support from their partners, but this pattern may be weakened when partners are depleted due to their own work stress. In sum, we propose that relation between an employee's work stressors and the employee's social support provision (actor effect) and the relation between an employee's work stressors and the partner's social support provision (partner effect) are moderated by the partner's work stressors.

Hypothesis 3a: The actor effect is moderated by the partner's work stressors, such that the relation between the employee's work stressors and the employee's social support provision is weaker when the partner's work stressors are higher versus lower.

Hypothesis 3b: The partner effect is moderated by the partner's work stressors, such that the relation between the employee's work stressors and the partner's social support provision is weaker when the partner's work stressors are higher versus lower.

Gender Differences in Social Support Provision

Social role theory (Eagly, 2009; Leslie et al., 2016) posits that men and women are expected to value different roles and engage in gender-appropriate behaviors. According to traditional gender role beliefs, men are expected to prioritize the work role and are thought to be agentic and rational, whereas women are expected to prioritize the caregiver role and are often seen as communal and emotional (Eagly, 2009; Eagly et al., 2020). In what is commonly known as the *marital support gap hypothesis*, wives are described as giving more support than husbands do (Cutrona, 1996) while reporting the support provided by their husbands as less useful to themselves (Belle, 1982). Despite changing gender role expectations, traditional gender role beliefs still govern behaviors in the private sphere (Leslie et al., 2016).

Regarding the actor effect (i.e., that employees' work stressors relate to their provision of support to their partners), we expect the effect to be more salient among men than among women. Because women ascribe more importance to the family domain, they may put more effort toward preventing their work from interfering with family life. Also, because gender role beliefs imply that women are interested in the well-being of others, they may support their partners despite their own work stress. In line with this notion, studies have found that work demands are related to less support provision and more withdrawal behavior among men but not among women (Schulz et al., 2004; ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018). Studies targeting couples have shown a similar gendered pattern, such that stressed men tend to provide more negative support and less positive support to their partners than women do (Verhofstadt et al., 2007, 2013).

Regarding the partner effect (i.e., that employees' work stressors relate to their partners' provision of support to them), we expect the effect to be more salient among women than among men. Because women tend to be more receptive to others' needs (Jensen et al., 2013) and interpret others' emotional states and thoughts more accurately (Hall & Schmid Mast, 2008), they are assumed to be more likely to help those in need. Of importance, studies have reported that men and women are equally capable of engaging in supportive behaviors (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2005; Pasch et al., 1997), though they may differ in their responsiveness to the partner's need such that women give more support when their partner is stressed (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2005; Trobst et al., 1994).

In sum, social role theory and previous empirical research suggest that the relation between work stressors and supportive behavior

at home might be more salient among men than among women (actor effect) and that women provide more social support to their stressed partners than men do (partner effect). Therefore, we posit the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: The actor effect is stronger for men, such that the relation between the employee's work stressors and the social support the employee provides to the partner is stronger among men than among women.

Hypothesis 4b: The partner effect is stronger for women, such that the relation between the employee's work stressors and the social support the partner provides to the employee is stronger among women than among men.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 147 heterosexual Swiss dual-earner couples who were recruited by master's degree students. Individuals were eligible to participate if both partners worked at least 24 hr per week (60% of full-time employment). Participants worked in diverse occupational fields and at different hierarchical levels. A questionnaire was sent via email to participating employees. The mean age of these participants was 36 years for men ($SD = 11.67$) and 34 years for women ($SD = 11.84$). Seven percent of the participants completed only the mandatory years of schooling, 29% completed secondary education, 26% had a bachelor's degree, and 37% had a master's or doctoral degree. On average, men worked 42.27 hr per week ($SD = 5.20$) and women 36.91 hr ($SD = 8.36$). The average relationship duration was 9.69 years ($SD = 10.04$).

Measures

The study was conducted in French. For lack of reciprocity, no French version of the survey was available; therefore, a translation-back translation procedure (Brislin, 1980) was followed.

Time Pressure

Time pressure was assessed with four items from Semmer et al. (1995). A sample item was "How often are you forced to adopt an accelerated pace of work?" Response format ranged from 1 (*very seldom/never*) to 5 (*very often/always*).

Lack of Reciprocity

Lack of reciprocity was assessed with six items from Van Yperen (1996). A sample item was "In my job, I invest more than I receive in return." Response format ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*).

Social Support Provision

Social support provision was assessed with three scales from the Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2008). Participants indicated what they do when their partner is stressed. We measured emotional support (six items; e.g., "I show empathy and understanding to my partner"), instrumental support (two items; e.g., "I take on things that my partner would normally do in order to help him/her out"), and dysfunctional support (four items; e.g., "I blame my partner for not coping well enough with stress"). Response format for all scales ranged from 1 (*very rarely*) to 5 (*very often*).

Analytical Strategy

We investigated the data using APIM (Cook & Kenny, 2005) to account for mutual influence, given the nonindependence of dyadic data. The interdependence of emotional, instrumental, and dysfunctional support was taken into account and examined simultaneously. However, to reduce complexity, separate models were computed for the two work stressors we investigated (i.e., time pressure and lack of reciprocity). We analyzed our data with the Mplus 8.0 program (Muthén & Muthén, 1998/2017), using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. We used APIM to test whether employees' work stressors relate to social support they provide to their partners (Hypothesis 1; actor effect), whether employees' work stressors relate to the social support their partners provide to them (Hypothesis 2; partner effect), and whether employees' and partners' work stressors interact to predict the provision of social support (Hypothesis 3[1]). To examine whether these effects are moderated by gender (Hypothesis 4), we compared three different models: Model 1, in which all effects were freely estimated (unconstrained model); Model 2, in which the actor effects were constrained to be equal for men and women; and Model 3, in which the actor and partner effects and the interaction effects were constrained to be equal for men and women.

Model fit was assessed by the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), based on recommendations by Hu and Bentler (1999) and MacCallum and Austin (2000); good fit is indicated by values greater than or equal to .95 for CFI and TLI and less than or equal to .06 for RMSEA. Because these indices are not available for models with latent interactions, the Akaike information criterion, the Bayesian information criterion, and the log-likelihood value are reported for the APIM models. Although their absolute values cannot be interpreted, they can be used to compare models. We used one-tailed tests for our directional hypotheses.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of the measures. In the analyses, measures were examined as latent variables. Following Little (2013), we used three-item parcels as indicators for each construct because they produce more reliable latent variables than individual items (as an exception, dysfunctional social support was measured with two indicators because the scale has only two items). In the first step, we tested whether measurement invariance existed for the latent variables across gender. We tested for configural, weak, and strong factorial invariance. Configural factorial invariance indicates that the same indicators load on the same latent variables across gender; weak factorial invariance

[1] Although Hypotheses 3a (i.e., the actor effect is moderated by the partner's work stressors) and 3b (i.e., the partner effect is moderated by the partner's work stressors) describe different theoretical processes, they are tested with the same coefficient (i.e., interaction of the employee's work stressors and the partner's work stressors). Thus, no distinction is made in reporting the test results of the hypotheses.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Female partner												
1. Time pressure	3.11	0.96	(.83)									
2. Lack of reciprocity	3.56	1.47	.49	(.93)								
3. Emotional support provision	3.97	0.68	−.07	−.04	(.84)							
4. Instrumental support provision	3.39	0.94	−.11	.03	.37	(.80)						
5. Dysfunctional support provision	1.60	0.65	.07	.17	−.32	−.05	(.73)					
Male partner												
6. Time pressure	3.21	0.82	.02	.10	.03	.06	.08	(.80)				
7. Lack of reciprocity	3.61	1.38	.14	.22	.07	.11	.12	.30	(.91)			
8. Emotional support provision	3.76	0.74	.15	.16	.24	.12	−.24	−.03	.05	(.86)		
9. Instrumental support provision	3.48	0.86	.23	.20	.04	.09	−.13	.05	.11	.59	(.82)	
10. Dysfunctional support provision	1.84	0.74	−.00	.04	−.26	−.10	.08	.11	.14	−.22	−.06	(.75)

Note. $N = 147$ dyads, 294 individuals. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Cronbach alphas are reported on the diagonal. Correlations between |.17| and |.20| are significant at $p < .05$, and correlations greater than |.22| are significant at $p < .01$.

indicates that the pattern of the loadings of the indicators is the same across gender, and strong factorial invariance indicates that observed differences in the constructs across gender are true differences (differences in the means, e.g., women have more stressors than men) and do not reflect measurement artifacts, assuming that each corresponding estimated intercept of the indicators is equal across gender. Given that our hypotheses make no assumptions about mean differences, only weak factorial invariance is required for our analyses (Little, 2013). In testing for differences in model fit, a change in CFI of less than .01 combined with a change in RMSEA of less than .015 was considered evidence of measurement invariance (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Results suggested at least weak factorial invariance for all measures across gender (see Table 2).

In the second step, we examined the factorial validity of the five measures (time pressure, lack of reciprocity, emotional, instrumental, and dysfunctional support) with a confirmatory factor analysis. We used Mplus' COMPLEX command that adjusts the standard errors to take the violation of independence into account because we have data from couples. The five-factor model fitted the data well, Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2(67) = 73.47$, $p = .27$, CFI = .996, TLI = .995, RMSEA = .018, and better than all alternative models (see Table 3).

Hypotheses Testing

To test our hypotheses, we first compared the three models explained in the Analytical Strategy subsection. As reported in Table 4, findings showed that Model 2 (actor effects constrained to be equal across gender) did not fit our data significantly worse than Model 1 (all effects freely estimated) did, and that Model 3 did not fit significantly worse than Model 2 did (actor and partner effects and interaction effects constrained to be equal across gender). This finding indicates that none of the effects were moderated by gender, leading us to reject Hypothesis 4. We used the parsimonious (fully constrained) Model 3 to test our Hypotheses 1–3. Table 5 shows the results of the APIMs.

Table 2
Test of Factorial Invariance Across Gender

Variable	SB-χ^2	df	SB-χ^2 women	SB-χ^2 men	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	RMSEA	ΔRMSEA
Time pressure									
1. Configural	0	0	0	0	1.000		1.000	.000	
2. Weak	1.054	2	0.437	0.617	1.000	.000	1.010	.000	.000
3. Strong	12.782	4	7.011	5.771	.968	.032	.952	.122	.122
Lack of reciprocity									
1. Configural	0	0	0	0	1.000		1.000	.000	
2. Weak	0.485	2	0.299	0.186	1.000	.000	1.010	.000	.000
3. Strong	1.901	4	1.088	0.813	1.000	.000	1.007	.000	.000
Instrumental and emotional support provision[a]									
1. Configural	16.742	8	12.504	4.238	.982		.956	.086	
2. Weak	21.748	11	15.840	5.908	.978	.004	.960	.082	−.004
3. Strong	32.455	14	22.014	10.441	.963	.015	.947	.095	.013
Dysfunctional support provision									
1. Configural	0	0	0	0	1.000		1.000	.000	
2. Weak	0.355	2	0.208	0.147	1.000	.000	1.040	.000	.000
3. Strong	5.361	4	2.847	2.514	.989	.011	.983	.048	.048

Note. SB = Satorra–Bentler; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.
[a] Because instrumental support has only two indicators, the models for testing its configural and weak invariance are not identifiable. For this reason, we tested the measurement invariance for instrumental support provision together with emotional support provision.

Table 3
Model Fit Indices for Testing Factorial Validity

Model	SB-χ^2	*df*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	*p* of SB-χ^2 difference test
Five factors	73.472	67	.996	.995	.018	
Four factors (time pressure and lack of reciprocity as one factor)	297.867	71	.862	.823	.104	<.001
Four factors (emotional and instrumental support provision as one factor)	187.761	71	.929	.909	.075	<.001
Two factors (the two stressors as one and the three types of support provision as another factor)	580.848	76	.692	.631	.150	<.001
One factor	1034.867	77	.416	.309	.206	<.001

Note. SB = Satorra–Bentler; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

In contrast to the predictions of Hypotheses 1a and 1b, employees' time pressure and lack of reciprocity were unrelated to employees' provision of emotional and instrumental support to their partners. In line with Hypothesis 1c, both stressors were positively related to employees' provision of dysfunctional support. Supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b, employees' time pressure and lack of reciprocity were positively related to their partners' provision of emotional and instrumental support to them. In contrast to the prediction of Hypothesis 3, employees' and partners' work stressors did not interact to predict employees' or partners' provision of support. Finally, as mentioned earlier, no gender differences in the hypothesized relations emerged, thus disproving Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to broaden our understanding of the relation between work stress and social support provision among dual-earner couples. To this end, we examined whether employees' and their partners' work stressors independently as well as interactively predict the provision of emotional, instrumental, and dysfunctional support. We also examined whether these effects differ across gender. Our results indicate that stressed employees tend to provide more dysfunctional support to their partners and that partners provide more emotional and instrumental support to stressed employees. Employees' and partners' stress did not interact to predict the provision of social support, and all these effects were equally strong for men and women.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our study offers several theoretical contributions. First, we extend knowledge on the nomological network of social support. Although the existing research on the benefits to well-being of receiving social support is substantial (Halbesleben, 2006; Viswesvaran et al., 1999), much is unknown about the antecedents of social support provision (Devoldre et al., 2010; Verhofstadt et al., 2010). In line with the spillover-crossover model and previous studies (Schulz et al., 2004; ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018), we found that stressed employees provided more dysfunctional support to their partners, likely because work stressors depleted personal resources such as energy and empathy (Verhofstadt et al., 2011) and psychological availability (i.e., one's ability and motivation to direct psychological resources to the partner; see Danner-Vlaardingerbroek et al., 2012). However, employees' work stressors did not relate to their provision of emotional and instrumental support to their partners. Although this result contradicts our hypotheses, previous research reported similar null findings. For instance, daily stressful events individuals experienced did not predict the degree of emotional support they provide to their partner (Iida et al., 2008); wives' work demands did not relate to the degree of emotional support they provide to their husbands, though such a relationship was significant among husbands (ten Brummelhuis & Greenhaus, 2018). Collectively, it seems that stressed employees manage to offer emotional and instrumental support to their partners but struggle to restrain themselves from providing dysfunctional support due to lack of personal

Table 4
Model Fit Indices for the APIMs

Variable	AIC	BIC	Parameters	Log likelihood	*p* of log likelihood difference test
Time pressure					
Model 1	7527.630	7805.740	93	−3670.815	
Model 2	7522.063	7791.202	90	−3671.032	.933
Model 3	7514.353	7765.549	84	−3673.177	.637
Lack of reciprocity					
Model 1	7899.091	8177.201	93	−3856.546	
Model 2	7893.444	8162.583	90	−3856.722	.950
Model 3	7885.347	8136.543	84	−3858.673	.690

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; APIMs = actor–partner interdependence models.

Table 5
Standardized Estimates (β) and R^2 of the APIMs

Variable	Emotional support provision	Instrumental support provision	Dysfunctional support provision
Actor effect (H1)			
Time pressure	−.05/−.06 (.24)	−.06/−.07 (.19)	.10*/.11* (.04)
Lack of reciprocity	−.03/−.03 (.36)	.04/.04 (.30)	.17*/.22* (.01)
Partner effect (H2)			
Time pressure	.12*/.11* (.05)	.20*/.16* (.01)	.05/.05 (.26)
Lack of reciprocity	.13*/.13* (.03)	.17*/.15* (.01)	.06/.07 (.21)
Interaction of actor and partner effect (H3)			
Time pressure	.05/.05 (.29)	−.11/−.10 (.12)	.01/.01 (.48)
Lack of reciprocity	.08/.09 (.14)	−.02/−.02 (.40)	−.07/−.08 (.15)
R^2			
Time pressure	.02/.02	.06/.04	.01/.02
Lack of reciprocity	.02/.03	.04/.03	.04/.07

Note. $N = 147$ couples. Although the coefficients were constrained to be equal across gender, the constraints were imposed on unstandardized coefficients (Little, 2013), which led to slight variations in the resulting standardized coefficients. Coefficients for men are presented before the slash, and coefficients for women are presented after the slash. p values are reported in parentheses. APIMs = actor–partner interdependence models.
* $p < .05$.

resources (Meier & Cho, 2019). Given the positive valence of emotional and instrumental support, providing such support might be not only affected by adverse work experiences but also by faciliatory factors such as empathy or relationship quality (cf. relationship satisfaction positively relates to emotional support provision, Iida et al., 2008). In sum, our results reiterate that work stress is a threat that not only harms employees' well-being but also damages intimate relationships by instigating dysfunctional support toward the partner. Building on our findings, future research is warranted to explore the observed differences for emotional and instrumental support versus dysfunctional support.

Second, our finding that partners provide more emotional and instrumental support to stressed employees supports the central tenet of the two theoretical models and corroborates previous empirical research (e.g., Hilpert et al., 2018; Iida et al., 2008; Shrout et al., 2006). As proposed by the spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), work stress spills over into the private life domain, which in turn affects intimate partners. As posited by the systematic transactional model (Bodenmann et al., 2016), partners recognize that employees' stress is a shared problem that potentially threatens the relationship; thus, they provide emotional and instrumental support to build up the employees' resources (Bodenmann, 2000; Howland, 2016; Morelli et al., 2015). In sum, our research reaffirms that intimate partners are a common and critical source of social support (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Dakof & Taylor, 1990).

Third, we found no evidence for the interactive effects of employees' and partners' work stressors in shaping social support provision. Taking the actor's perspective, this means stressed employees provided similar levels of support regardless of their partners' work stress, that is, neither increasing emotional and instrumental support nor decreasing dysfunctional support. Given that employees are likely drained while offering comparable levels of emotional and instrumental support despite their own work stress (i.e., there's a nonsignificant relationship between employees' work stressors and the emotional and instrumental support they provide to partners), perhaps they were simply not capable of being further sensitive to their partners' stress. Taking the partner's perspective, the null finding indicates that partners did not decrease the emotional and instrumental support they provide to employees despite their own work stress. Although unexpected, this is in line with the earlier finding that employees' own work stressors do not affect how much they support their partners.

Finally, our findings inform the extent to which the relation between employees' work stressors and social support provision is generalizable. Concerning the types of stressor, results suggest that the resource-depleting nature might be similar across a task-related stressor (time pressure) and a social stressor (lack of reciprocity), so as to increase dysfunctional support provided to partners or to increase the emotional and instrumental support provided by partners. Concerning the types of social support, we observed that partners' work stressors, but not employees' own work stressors, were positively associated with employees' emotional and instrumental support provision. In contrast, employees' own work stressors, but not partners' work stressors, were positively associated with employees' dysfunctional support provision. This suggests that emotional and instrumental support may have commonalities in terms of the antecedents, which has not been considered in the literature that emphasizes the distinction across types of social support in relation to outcomes of social support (e.g., Jolly et al., 2021).

Concerning gender, we found that the relation between work stressors and social support provision did not differ between men and women. Scholars have argued that gender role orientations (i.e., the degree to which one identifies with the traditional conceptions of one's gender role; Livingston & Judge, 2008, p. 208) may better explain gender differences in support behavior (Mickelson et al., 2006; Verhofstadt & Weytens, 2013), in that considerable within-gender variance, has been observed regarding gender role expectations. Indeed, studies have shown that women in a more traditionally oriented couple provide more support (Verhofstadt & Devoldre, 2012), whereas these gender differences are not observed in more egalitarian couples (Verhofstadt & Weytens, 2013). Of relevance, as people with a higher education tend to adopt a rather egalitarian orientation (Coltrane, 2000), the hypothesized gender differences may have been absent in the

present study sample, nearly two-thirds of which were highly educated couples. We recommend future studies on the social support provision among dual-earner couples considering gender role orientation and utilizing a more heterogenous sample.

Regarding practical implications, interventions in the provision of support have been thought to strengthen the empathic closeness between intimate partners (Sullivan et al., 1998). Thus, understanding how partners in two-earner couples adapt to each other's needs is useful for practitioners to design appropriate interventions (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). As the current findings show that employees' work stress relates to more dysfunctional support they provide their partners, practitioners in family and couples therapy may need to consider work-related factors in their attempts to understand the complex process of social support provision among dual-earner couples.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Findings from our study should be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, although our hypotheses are solidly grounded in theory, the use of a cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences (Spector, 2019). Building on the current findings that identify links between work stressors and social support provision, future research should adopt a more rigorous study design. As existing findings suggest that support behavior among couples varies from day to day (Neff & Karney, 2005), daily diary studies that examine intraindividual variation in support provision among dual earners would be a fruitful direction. Next, the present study examined emotional, instrumental, and dysfunctional support, but research suggests that individuals may also receive informational and appraisal support (Siu & Ng, 2021). As our findings indicate that various types of social support at home are shaped by different factors, we echo the call for future research to examine predictors of a wider array of social support for a comprehensive understanding of social support provision (Jolly et al., 2021). Another promising direction for future research is the relationship between family demands and supportive behavior at work. Family responsibilities deplete personal resources and thus may prevent employees from engaging in behaviors that require efforts and initiatives (e.g., work engagement, safety behavior; Siu & Ng, 2021), such as providing social support for coworkers. Given that coworkers are an important source of support at work with whom employees spend much time (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), a better understanding of the predictors of coworkers' provision of social support to each other is warranted.

Conclusion

Dual-earner couples are a hallmark of today's world. Our study expands the current state of research by revealing the extent to which work stressors affect the way social support is provided among intimate partners in a dual-earner couple. Our findings show that employees who face work stressors tend to provide more dysfunctional support to their partners while receiving more emotional and instrumental support from them. Individuals' work stressors had independent, but not interactive, effects on social support provision. Finally, these patterns did not differ by types of work stressor or by gender. In sum, the current research highlights that work stress is a critical precursor of social interactions among dual-earner couples and reiterates that social support is a coping strategy that working men and women commonly adopt against various work stressors.

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