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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Family and work-related risk factors in children's social-emotional well-being and parent-educator cooperation in flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care

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Abstract

Non-standard work schedules (NSWS) have become typical, but their associations with childcare arrangements and children's well-being are unknown. This study explores how risk factors are associated with the social-emotional well-being of girls and boys using flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care. Furthermore, the study investigates whether well-functioning cooperation between parents and educators buffers the negative effects of the risk factors. This study, which is a part of a larger survey carried out in three European countries, reports Finnish parents' ($N = 146$) perspectives. The results showed that high parental stress was associated with low child well-being. Strong parent-educator cooperation positively impacted both boys' and girls' social-emotional well-being. The risk factors of reconciling work and family life had negative associations with children's well-being and the fulfilment of their basic needs. The results illustrate the complex interrelations between children's well-being, risk factors relating to NSWS and the buffering effect of protective factors.

KEYWORDS

childcare arrangements, children's social-emotional well-being, flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care, parent-educator cooperation, parenting, work-family interface

Non-standard work schedules (NSWS), such as working regularly at weekends, in evenings and at night or rotating shifts outside of standard 9–5 weekly working hours, have become typical in 24-h economies, and these work patterns have become widespread in many countries and across employment sectors (Bünning & Pollmann-Schult, 2016; Li et al., 2014; Presser, 2003; Rutter & Evans, 2012). Parents' NSWS may have negative implications on family life, for

example, on parenting and the relationship between parent and their children (Li et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020; Tammelin et al., 2017), children's development, behavioural outcomes, and well-being (Kaiser et al., 2019; Li et al., 2014; Rönkä, Malinen, Metsäpelto, et al., 2017; Verhoef et al., 2018). However, some benefits of NSWS have also been reported (Kim, 2020; Salonen, 2020). For example, NSWS and having a flexible work schedule may increase family income,

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parents' time spent with their children (Li et al., 2014) and parents' autonomy regarding working hours (Murtoirinne-Lahtinen et al., 2016), which may benefit especially parents who can match their work schedules with their spouse or someone else to organise childcare (Täht & Mills, 2012) or in other ways reconcile their work and personal lives (Plantenga & Remery, 2009b). However, parents' NSWS may not be chosen and in some occupations, they may be associated with a lack of full-time opportunities (Richardson et al., 2021).

Consequently, NSWS do have consequences for childcare arrangements (Barnes & Helms, 2020; Rutter & Evans, 2012; Verhoef et al., 2016) because formal childcare services that operate in the early mornings, late evenings and overnight are rare in most European countries (Plantenga & Remery, 2009a) and in the world (Barnes & Helms, 2020; Halfon & Friendly, 2015; Richardson et al., 2021). These arrangements are the most challenging for single parents (Barnes & Helms, 2020; Hepburn, 2018; Moilanen et al., 2016). In addition to lack of availability of formal childcare services, these formal arrangements may not respond to parents' scheduling needs, and they can be costly (Barnes & Helms, 2020; Richardson et al., 2021; Rutter & Evans, 2012). However, there is a lack of knowledge about the different aspects related to formal childcare arrangements and parents' NSWS, as studies concerning flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care (ECEC; Rönkä et al., 2019) are relatively sparse. Moreover, there are many different factors that contribute to these childcare arrangements, including workplace demands, family resources, work schedules, work intensity, and job characteristics (Kim & Liu, 2021). There is little research on how various factors, particularly risk factors, are associated with parents' NSWS, their children's social-emotional well-being (Kaiser et al., 2019) and flexibly scheduled ECEC. Moreover, an important but understudied aspect of flexibly scheduled ECEC is parent-educator¹ cooperation, which has been proven to be important for children's well-being and development (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009; Lang et al., 2020). We assume that it is even more significant in flexibly scheduled ECEC; thus, the present study aims to address this gap in the research.

A review by Li et al. (2014) on the associations between NSWS and family and child outcomes showed that only a few studies have included information on childcare and other community indicators related to family support. However, research suggests that different intra- and extrafamilial resources and their interactions influence on children's development (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1995; Conger et al., 2010; Kaiser et al., 2019). The present study draws from Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological systems theory of human development, according to which children's development and learning occur within a series of nested

systems ranging from proximal microsystems (home and childcare) to exosystems (e.g., parents' work lives) and distal macrosystems (e.g., societal structures and cultures), and the transactional processes within and across these systems affect child development. This study focused on children's social-emotional well-being in the Finnish ECEC, where flexibly scheduled ECEC services are available for families with parents who work NSWS. In addition, guided by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory, our proposition is that well-functioning interactions between home and childcare (Lang et al., 2020)—representing the mesosystem in the theory—is a significant factor that builds continuity into children's experiences and hence forms a solid foundation for their development.

BACKGROUND

Work-family reconciliation and children's wellbeing in 24-h economies

Empirical studies have confirmed various negative effects of NSWS on individual workers' physical and psychological health and social well-being, including sleep disturbances, fatigue, emotional distress, depression, and unsatisfactory relationships (Kaiser et al., 2019; Kalil et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014). These kinds of negative implications have raised concerns about the direct or indirect impact of NSWS on family life and children's well-being (Kaiser et al., 2019; Li et al., 2014). Parents' NSWS, especially night-time schedules, overtime work and irregular hours may challenge parental time, parenting behaviours and childcare arrangements (Bünning & Pollmann-Schult, 2016; Dunifon et al., 2013; Kaiser et al., 2019; Kalil et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014) and contribute to increased parenting stress (Lozano et al., 2016; Presser, 2003; Rönkä, Malinen, Sevón, et al., 2017).

Li et al. (2014) reported significant associations between parents' NSWS and adverse child developmental outcomes, varying from internalising and externalising behavioural problems to lower cognitive outcomes and elevated body mass index. These negative effects are partly mediated through parenting variables, such as low-quality or harsh parenting, reduced parent-child interactions and closeness, depressive symptoms and a lack of support in the home environment (Kaiser et al., 2019; Li et al., 2014). Furthermore, the associations between NSWS and child well-being are the most consequential in lower-income and single-parent families (Han, 2008; Hepburn, 2018; Moilanen et al., 2016).

There have been complex and mixed results from different studies on the well-being of children in the context of parents' NSWS. Li et al. (2020) stated that negative consequences for children's social-emotional well-being seemed to be associated with rotating and infrequent

NSWS, whereas these consequences were absent in fixed shift work. Moreover, working evenings and nightshifts have been shown to be associated with children's behavioural difficulties (Dunifon et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2018). The associations between parents' work schedules and children's outcomes are heavily dependent on various ecological and structural factors within a unique family situation (Barnett & Gareis, 2007). Although some knowledge on these moderating factors (e.g., child's age and gender, parents' genders, family structure, and socioeconomic status) does exist, it is based on only a few studies and more research is needed (Li et al., 2014). For example, some gender differences relating to children's responses to parents' work and forms of childcare have been reported (Li et al., 2014). Claessens and Chen (2013) and Li et al. (2014) found that non-parental care arrangements and parents' working hours affect boys' and girls' development differently, and according to Morrissey (2009), multiple childcare arrangements have negative effects, particularly on girls and younger children. However, studies exploring the associations between the different forms of childcare and the children's gender seem to be limited, especially in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC. Regarding a child's age, Li et al. (2020) found that the younger children were, more emotional and conduct problems were reported related to parent's NSWS. Furthermore, girls experienced more emotional problems, while boys experienced more conduct problems.

Further, there exists sparse literature on the linkage between parent's NSWS and the complexity of childcare arrangements (Hepburn, 2018; Rutter & Evans, 2012; Verhoef et al., 2016). Yet, stable childcare arrangements, important for children's well-being in and adjustment to childcare settings, consist of stability and continuity of relationships with caregivers and peers, environments, and individual rhythms (Claessens & Chen, 2013; Morrissey, 2009) and avoidance of different parallel care arrangements (De Schipper et al., 2004; Hepburn, 2018; Neilsen-Hewett et al., 2014). Conversely, Hepburn (2018) found that NSWSs were associated with reduced continuity of childcare arrangements (see also Richardson et al., 2021). In particular, the unpredictability of NSWSs has been shown to increase the multiplicity of these arrangements (Kim & Liu, 2021). Further, parents' NSWSs and informal care arrangements have been associated with greater parental stress and a decline in children's well-being in comparison to formal centre-based arrangements (Boyd-Swan, 2019), which, in turn, have been associated with a range of academic and cognitive benefits but also some behavioural difficulties (see Hepburn, 2018). Overall, the availability of childcare with trustworthy caregivers is extremely important for both children's well-being and parents' reconciliation of work and family (Hennig et al., 2012).

Flexibly scheduled ECEC services and children's wellbeing

Welfare states differ in terms of the availability and affordability of formal childcare and family policies regarding childcare as a societal, not just familial task (Hennig et al., 2012; Rutter & Evans, 2012). For example, in Finland, municipal centre-based ECEC services responding flexibly to families' needs for childcare during extended hours, overnight, and on weekends have already been available for some decades (Rönkä et al., 2019). At the time of the data collection of the present study, Finnish regulations advised municipalities to provide ECEC for children under school age (i.e., 0–6 years) at the times the families needed (Malinen et al., 2016), but this was not obligatory. Currently, children are eligible by law for publicly subsidised ECEC at the times the service is needed, including parents' NSWS (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, 540/2018). These kinds of formal and governmentally regulated centre-based services are rare worldwide, except in the Nordic countries (Hobson et al., 2011; Plantenga & Remery, 2009a) and in Japan (Anme et al., 2010). Particularly in cases, where both parents work full-time (Hennig et al., 2012; Plantenga & Remery, 2009b), the availability and affordability of comprehensive, flexibly scheduled ECEC services are vital. In Finland, approximately 7% of all children attending ECEC participate in centre-based care at non-standard hours (Säkkinen & Kuoppala, 2017). Most centres run from 5 am to 10 pm, but several centres also provide overnight and weekend services. They all follow good national-level quality standards of the Finnish ECEC (Taguma et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, little is known about children's experiences and well-being in centre-based flexibly scheduled ECEC, creating a gap in the research to which this study contributes. Children's well-being in formal childcare settings has been less studied than their general well-being in the context of 24-h economies. Well-being in childcare can be understood as the degree to which the child feels at ease with educators and other children, how comfortable the child is with other children and in the physical setting of a centre (De Schipper et al., 2004) and whether the child's basic needs in all developmental domains are satisfactorily met (Minkkinen, 2013). Whereas individual well-being is multidimensional in nature, it is generally considered to consist of domains of physical, psychological, social, socio-economic, and environmental well-being (Statham & Chase, 2010). Therefore, well-being can be regarded as a dynamic process, which is 'an outcome of intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, and cultural processes' (Minkkinen, 2013, p. 549).

Minkkinen (2013) referred to the circle of care as one part of the societal frame of children's well-being. Existing studies show somewhat mixed results on the associations between parent's NSWS, formal centre-based childcare arrangements and children's well-being (Boyd-Swan, 2019). Boyd-Swan (2019) suggested that formal childcare arrangements during NSWS provide some advantages compared to informal non-parental care. For example, Anme and Segal (2007) found that high-quality centre-based care decreased children's anxiety and promoted social development in Japanese children. Furthermore, the home environment and parental behaviour, not the length of time spent in extended hours care, explained children's developmental risks in the two- and five-year follow-ups in these Japanese government-authorized centres (Anme et al., 2010). Flexibly scheduled ECEC may benefit well-being, for example, by providing children in evenings, nights, or early mornings more home-like conditions than regular formal ECEC and more time for educators to respond to children's needs (Peltoperä et al., 2020; Salonen, 2020). In addition, relationships between children and educators may become deeper (Salonen, 2020).

However, flexibly scheduled ECEC services during non-standard hours often emphasise care and leisure activities, not education (Rönkä et al., 2019; Salonen, 2020), and place children into multi-age groups with continuously varying compositions (Malinen et al., 2016). These different arrangements pose many administrative (Rönkä et al., 2019) and pedagogical challenges (Peltoperä et al., 2020) for educators, and these may also challenge children's peer relations and access to age and developmentally appropriate activities, especially if children attend a regular daytime program infrequently (Halfon & Friendly, 2015). Furthermore, flexibly scheduled ECEC, especially during the night increased emotionality in Finnish children, which suggests that night shifts have some disruptive consequences for children's well-being (Verhoef et al., 2018). Moreover, Rönkä et al. (2019) studied educators' perspectives and discovered that communication and cooperation with parents were challenging in flexibly scheduled ECEC contexts. For example, there were difficulties in exchanging information, as circumstances changed frequently, and parents' decisions regarding children's care times were sometimes hard to respect and understand.

In sum, a variety of care-related factors might decrease children's well-being and experiences of stability and continuity, and predictability and emotional security, despite the availability of flexibly scheduled ECEC. Therefore, in addition to benefits, challenges also exist in flexibly scheduled ECEC and meeting children's educational needs during nonstandard hours (Rönkä et al., 2019).

Cooperation between parents and educators

Parent-educator cooperation represents the dynamic transactions between two of the most proximal and influential systems affecting child's growth: family and ECEC settings. The emphasis of parent-educator cooperation has been highlighted in Finnish ECEC curricula for some decades. At the time of the data collection, the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes, 2004, p. 31) stated that 'cooperation in ECE signifies the awareness and joint commitment of parents and educators in supporting together the children's growth, development and learning processes. This presumes joint trust, equality and respecting each other [...] Parent-educator cooperation bases on child's needs and therefore, the ECE activities are guided by the execution of child's best interests and rights.' Since then, the emphasis placed upon parent-educator cooperation has increased. According to the current Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Stakes, 2004) and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018, 3§), 'The aim of early childhood education is to cooperate together with the child and child's parent or other guardian in order to promote the child's balanced development and holistic well-being and to support the child's parent or other guardian in parenting'.

In addition, the Finnish curricula (FNAE, 2018; Stakes, 2004) emphasise that daily interactions and discussions between parents and educators on children's experiences and learning create the foundation for children's holistic well-being. Research shows that parent-educator relations benefit outcomes the most when representing true cooperation, including two-way communication, respect and trust between parents and educators, as well as shared expectations concerning how to support the child (Kuhn et al., 2017; Pirchio et al., 2011; Pirchio et al., 2013; Vickers & Minke, 1995). Furthermore, by facilitating parent-educator communication and cooperation, children's academic and social-emotional development (Bierman et al., 2017), well-being and adjustment (Pirchio et al., 2013) can be boosted.

However, building mutual, trusting cooperative relationships takes not only time and effort (Pirchio et al., 2013) but also the balancing of power between the status of educator and parent, as 'parents are dependent on the staff becoming the parent's eyes and hands' (Vuorinen, 2020, p. 10) in ECEC; from this perspective, the quality of the relationship between parent and educator becomes essential. Regarding children's well-being, parents can acquire information from educators about their children's daily lives and assess how well the

children's individual needs are fulfilled through the information shared by educators, which underlines the importance of well-functioning cooperation (Malinen et al., 2016; Vuorinen, 2020; see also Pirchio et al., 2013). However, a study by Murphy et al. (2021) showed that many parents expressed the need for better communication with educators and more information about their children's development and learning. Moreover, Vasiljević-Prodanović et al. (2021) found differences in information sharing depending on a child's development; for example, teachers may perceive their cooperation with parents as better, if a child is typically developed.

The findings of many studies underline the significance of parental participation in children's education, which has positive associations with a child's achievement and well-being (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2006). Parental participation in ECEC may have a long-term impact on children's later academic and personal development (DeMeo Cook et al., 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010). Furthermore, there is evidence that more frequent communication about children between the parents and educators correlates with educators' having more sensitive interactions with children and a higher quality of ECEC (Owen et al., 2000). In a study examining the effects of parent engagement intervention, researchers found positive ratings of the parent-educator relationship by both educators and parents to be related to higher levels of children's social-emotional competence (Sheridan et al., 2010).

This study supposes that families' resources to participate in their children's education vary. There may also be some differences in the perceptions of parental involvement between parents and educators; namely, parents see their rate of involvement as higher than educators see it as being (Vasiljević-Prodanović et al., 2021). However, there also exist some hindrances to parent-educator cooperation, which are affected by different interpersonal, structural and organisational factors (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Murphy et al., 2021; Vuorinen, 2020). For example, a lack of staff, time constraints for discussions (Murphy et al., 2021), or parents' time constraints due to NSWs (Rönkä et al., 2019) can pose challenges for cooperation. However, a high-quality ECEC setting, where strong relationships are built between educators, children (Winer & Phillips, 2012), and families, may serve as an important protective factor for children's well-being. The trustful relationship may buffer against the risk factors found in the contexts where families live and work.

Although there are many studies about parents' participation in their children's education, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined parent-educator cooperation and its relation to children's social-emotional well-being within the context of day-and-night

care settings, where parents' NSWs challenge the implementation of this cooperation. Thus, guided by an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), the present study focuses on the relation between parent-educator cooperation and children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC, including extended hours, night-time, and weekend care. We address the research gaps by examining factors of the work-family interface and challenging childcare arrangements using a statistical model to determine connections between parent-educator cooperation and children's social-emotional well-being in ECEC settings. We also developed and tested a novel measure, an index of inconvenient childcare arrangements (ICCA), to represent a combination of care-related risk factors (e.g., daily and monthly length of care time).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Previous studies have focused on the impact of a parent's NSWs on child well-being (Li et al., 2014) and on the stability of childcare arrangements (Hepburn, 2018; Täht & Mills, 2012) and their relations with children's well-being (De Schipper et al., 2004). However, little is known about how various factors may relate to a child's social-emotional well-being in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC. We presume one important factor within day- and night-care services is parent-educator cooperation, which has been proven to be important for children's well-being and overall development generally (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2006). To investigate these phenomena, we propose the following three research questions (RQ) and accompanying hypotheses.

- RQ1 How are the family- and work-related risk factors associated with the social-emotional well-being of children in flexibly scheduled ECEC? Based on previous studies (De Schipper et al., 2004), we expected higher levels of these risk factors to be related to the children's reduced social-emotional well-being in the ECEC setting.
- RQ2 Does satisfactory parent-educator cooperation experienced by the parent buffer the negative effects of risk factors related to family and work domains on the social-emotional well-being of children in flexibly scheduled ECEC? Based on previous studies (Birbili & Karagiorgou, 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2006), we expected that satisfactory cooperation between parents and educators buffers the effects of the aforementioned risk factors on the social-emotional well-being of children in ECEC settings.

RQ3 Do boys and girls differ in the aforementioned linkages? Based on previous research (Claessens & Chen, 2013; Li et al., 2014), we hypothesised that the associations between various family- and work-related risk factors would affect boys' and girls' social-emotional well-being in flexible scheduled ECEC differently. However, we did not make more specific gender-related expectations concerning the work and care arrangement effects on boys and girls due to contradictory findings in previous research (Li et al., 2020; Morrissey, 2009; Rönkä, Malinen, Metsäpelto, et al., 2017).

METHODS

Participants and procedure

Data were collected from parents via a web questionnaire at the beginning of the year 2013 as part of the research project 'Children's Socio-emotional Wellbeing and Daily Family Life in a 24 Hour Economy'. The families were recruited through flexibly scheduled ECEC settings, labour unions and employers by letter or e-mail to promote the study. The survey aimed to reach a holistic picture of the daily life of families, where parents' NSWS and topics concerning work characteristics, daily life, work-family interface, economic status, spousal relationship, parenting, childcare arrangements, child well-being and parent-educator cooperation were addressed.

The web questionnaire was implemented in three European countries: Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK, but for this sub-study, the data were limited to Finnish families, where parents worked NSWS and had at least one child in the age range of 1–7 years attending formal, flexibly scheduled ECEC services. In each family, the parents were requested to respond to the questionnaire regarding one child, who was closest to the age of 5 years.

Our sample consisted of 146 families; 67% had two care-takers, and 33% were single-caretaker families. The answers were given mostly by the mother (92.5%). In 72.6% of the families, both adults and single parents had NSWS, and in 7.5% of the families, only one of two adults worked NSWS. However, work schedule information concerning the remaining 19.9% of the families was not available. The parents responded on 81 boys and 65 girls ($N = 146$), who were aged 1–7 years ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.38$).

Measures

The following measures from the parental survey were included in the present study.

Dependent variables

Children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC was assessed using two separate measures. A mean score was not used because the mutual correlation of the measures was relatively low for both genders (see Table 1); therefore, reliability for the score would have been low. The first measure, *Child's enjoyment in and adjustment to care settings* was a modified subscale consisting of selected items from the Leiden Inventory for the Child's Wellbeing in Day Care (LICW-D; De Schipper et al., 2004; cf. Partnerships in early childhood program, 2010) and Barclay and Benelli (1996). The subscale included six items (e.g., 'My child enjoys attending preschool/ECEC centre'), of which a mean score was computed (McDonald's ω 0.78). The response scale ranged from 1 = 'this is never the case' to 6 = 'this is always the case'.

The second measure, *Fulfilment of the child's basic needs*, consisted of five items created by the research team. The parents were asked to rate how well various aspects of their child's social, emotional, physiological and cognitive needs are met in care (e.g., amount of sleep, child's behaviour, development and/or learning, child's health) using a 5-point scale from 1 = 'I am dissatisfied' to 5 = 'I am satisfied'. A mean score of these items was computed (McDonald's ω 0.68).

Independent variables

Three family- and work-related risk factors were focused on: parenting stress, work-to-family conflict, and risk of inconvenient childcare arrangements.

Parenting stress was a mean score of four items drawn from the 'Aggravation' in parenting measure (Gibson-Davis, 2008). Agreement with the statements (e.g., 'Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be') was assessed on a five-point scale (1 = not at all true, 5 = completely true; McDonald's ω 0.80).

Work-to-family conflict was divided into two dimensions, both of which included three items (taken from Carlson et al., 2000; see also Tammelin et al., 2017): *time-based conflict* (e.g., 'My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like'; McDonald's ω 0.77) and *strain-based conflict* (e.g., 'Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home, I'm too stressed to do the things I enjoy'). Participants responded to all items using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A mean score for both dimensions were computed, and their reliabilities were both McDonald's ω 0.84.

Inconvenient childcare arrangements, ICCA, was measured with a cumulative risk index formed by a sum score

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the studied variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Boys M (SD)
1 Enjoyment in and adjustment to care	-	0.29*	-0.21 [#]	-0.08	-0.36**	-0.12	0.40***	0.05	0.10	0.17	3.89 (0.44)
2 Fulfilment of basic needs in care	0.52***	-	-0.31**	-0.25*	-0.30**	-0.04	0.35**	-0.17	0.28*	0.11	4.21 (0.58)
3 Parenting stress	-0.42***	-0.47**	-	0.14	0.45***	0.19 [#]	-0.27*	-0.03	-0.26*	-0.02	2.63 (0.90)
4 Time-based work-to-family conflict	-0.08	-0.02	0.16	-	0.50***	0.05	-0.12	0.21 [#]	-0.18	0.29*	3.11 (0.90)
5 Strain-based work-to-family conflict	-0.25 [#]	-0.31*	0.29*	0.31*	-	0.10	-0.08	0.07	-0.29*	-0.02	2.99 (1.09)
6 Risk index ICCA	-0.10	0.02	0.03	-0.00	0.31*	-	0.06	-0.16	-0.26*	-0.32**	0.97 (1.04)
7 Parent-educator cooperation	0.45***	0.33**	-0.26*	-0.08	-0.23 [#]	-0.28*	-	-0.10	0.03	0.05	4.11 (0.51)
8 Child's age	0.06	0.21	-0.27*	0.21	0.27*	-0.03	0.15	-	0.11	0.15	3.63 (1.36)
9 Financial situation	0.20	0.15	-0.07	-0.13	-0.01	0.02	0.11	-0.09	-	0.26*	4.96 (2.12)
10 Family structure (0 = no partner, 1 = partner)	0.25*	0.25*	0.17	0.02	-0.08	-0.25*	0.17	-0.11	0.33**	-	32.01/67.09
Girls M (SD)	4.07 (0.54)	4.23 (0.58)	2.59 (0.79)	2.86 (0.84)	2.90 (0.91)	1.03 (1.12)	4.18 (1.12)	3.69 (1.42)	5.29 (1.95)	47.13/52.87	

Note: Boys (*n* = 79–81) above and girls (*n* = 62–65) below the diagonal. Spearman's correlation was computed for family structure and Pearson correlation was computed for other variables.

[#] *p* < 0.10.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

of four binary indices. A risk point was received on the following occasions: (1) The child's continuous care time exceeded 10 h at least once a week, (2) the child's monthly care time exceeded 170 h, (3) there were one or more overnight stays in ECEC centres per month, and (4) there were six or more late evening stays in ECEC centres per month. The score ranged from 0 to 4, and its McDonald's ω was 0.60.

Parent-educator cooperation was assessed with a modified subscale based on the Parent-Teacher Relationships Scale (Vickers & Minke, 1995), of which we used five items concerning mutual educational support and respect (e.g., 'I respect the educators'), and on the Family-Focused Relationships subscale of Summers et al. (2005), of which we used two items concerning communication (e.g., 'I tell the educators when I am concerned or worried about my child'). Respondents assessed their agreement with the statements on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The sixth category, *I do not know*, was treated as a missing value. A mean score of the items was computed and its McDonald's ω was 0.86.

Background variables

Four background variables were utilised in the present study. The child-related variables included *child's gender* (0 = boy, 1 = girl) and *child's age*. SES of the family was measured with *financial situation of the family*, assessed by the parent with the following 11-point scale: 0 = the worst possible–10 = the best possible. Only the endpoints of the scale were labelled. Finally, *family structure* was measured with a dummy variable: 0 = the parent was a single caretaker, 1 = there were two caretakers—married or cohabiting—in the household.

Data analyses

For descriptive purposes, means and standard deviations for the studied variables and their correlation coefficients were computed separately for girls and boys.

The associations of family- and work-related risk factors with social-emotional well-being of children (RQ1) were examined via path analysis with observed variables. The dependent variables were the two variables assessing children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings. The model also included four independent variables: parenting stress, time-based work-to-family conflict, strain-based work-to-family conflict, and risk index ICCA. Additionally, we controlled for child's gender, child's age, financial situation of the family, and family structure.

The buffering role of parent-educator cooperation in the associations of family- and work-related risk factors with children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings (RQ2), and the moderating role of child's gender in these linkages (RQ3) were examined via multigroup path analysis. The analytical model of RQ1 was extended by including parent-educator cooperation in the model as a main effect. In addition, we included four interaction terms (i.e., interaction of parent-educator cooperation with each of the other four independent variables) in the model. Before computing the interaction terms and the estimation of the model, all variables were standardised. Finally, gender differences in the specified path model were examined using multigroup analysis by comparing the fit of the freely estimated model (i.e., parameters of the model were freely estimated for both genders) to that of the constrained model (i.e., all parameters were constrained to be equal across the genders), using the Satorra-Bentler χ^2 difference test (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). A statistically significant χ^2 difference test ($p < 0.05$) denotes that the freely estimated model fits better with the data than the constrained one, thus indicating the moderation effect of gender.

All of the analyses were performed using the Mplus statistical package and the standard missing-at-random approach (supposing that data were missing at random; version 8.6; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). The parameters of the models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood estimation with standard errors that were robust to non-normality of the variables (MLR estimator). This method uses all observations in a data set when estimating the parameters in the model without imputing missing values.

The goodness-of-fit of the estimated model was evaluated using the following indices: a χ^2 -test, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990), a comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; Hu & Bentler, 1999). A non-significant p -value associated with a χ^2 -value indicated a good fit for the estimated model. CFI and TLI values above 0.95 indicated a good fit of the model, while RMSEA (Steiger, 1990) values below 0.05 denoted good fit, and values from 0.06 to 0.08 indicated reasonable fit.

RESULTS

Effects of family- and work-related risk factors on social-emotional wellbeing of children in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings

Our RQ1 targeted how the risk factors related to parenting stress, work-to-family conflict, and inconvenient childcare arrangements (ICCA) were associated with

TABLE 2 The relationship of family- and work-related risk factors with child's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC ($N = 139$)

Predictor variables	Enjoyment in and adjustment to care settings	Fulfilment of basic needs in care
	$R^2 = 23.3\%$ β	$R^2 = 22.6\%$ β
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Parenting stress ^a	-0.25**	-0.30***
Time-based conflict ^b	-0.00	-0.07
Strain-based conflict ^b	-0.18*	-0.16
Risk index ICCA ^c	0.02	0.13 [#]
<i>Control variables</i>		
Child's gender ^d	0.20*	0.00
Child's age	0.04	0.01
Financial situation	0.01	0.08
Family structure ^e	0.25**	0.23**

[#] $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

^a1 = not at all true-5 = completely true.

^b1 = strongly disagree-5 = strongly agree.

^cRange: 0-4 points.

^d0 = boy, 1 = girl.

^e0 = a single caretaker, 1 = two caretakers.

children's social-emotional well-being in the flexibly scheduled ECEC settings. Descriptive statistics and correlations between all the studied variables are shown in Table 1 and the results of the path analyses in Table 2. Parenting stress was negatively and statistically significantly associated with both measures of social-emotional well-being. The higher the level of parenting stress was, the less a child enjoyed in and adjusted to care, and the worse a child's basic needs were fulfilled in care. Moreover, strain-based work-to-family conflict was negatively and statistically significantly associated with enjoyment in and adjustment to care, indicating that the more the parents perceived that their work demands interfered with their family responsibilities, the less they reported their child enjoying and adjusting to flexibly scheduled ECEC settings. It should be noted, however, that although the corresponding negative association between strain-based work-to-family conflict and fulfilment of basic needs in flexibly scheduled ECEC setting did not reach statistical significance, the standardised regression coefficient of this and the aforementioned association differed only marginally from each other, suggesting that these associations were fairly similar. Finally, ICCA was negatively, but only marginally significantly associated with fulfilment of the child's basic needs. The higher the

risk of ICCAs, the less parents perceived that their child's basic needs were fulfilled in flexibly scheduled ECEC setting. Corresponding association was not found for enjoyment in and adjustment to care. Moreover, time-based work-to-family conflict was not associated with either of the children's social-emotional well-being measures.

Negative effects of family- and work-related risk factors on a child's social-emotional wellbeing in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings: Effects of satisfactory parent-educator cooperation and Child's gender

In the last two research questions we examined the buffering role of parent-educator cooperation (RQ2) in the associations of family- and work-related risk factors with children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC setting, and how these linkages may differ by the child's gender (RQ3). The χ^2 difference test supported the assumption about gender differences in these associations [$\Delta\chi^2(25) = 48.43, p = 0.003$]. Furthermore, the fit of the gender-equal model was poor ($CFI = 0.81, TLI = 0.62, RMSEA = 0.12$). Consequently, in the final model, all paths were estimated separately for boys and girls. This freely estimated model was a saturated model, ($\chi^2(0) = 0, p = 0, CFI = 1, TLI = 1, RMSEA = 0$).

As shown in Table 3, the effects of parenting stress, strain-based work-to-family conflict, and ICCA on social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC setting differed by parent-educator cooperation, and the gender of the child played a role in most of these linkages. Most of these interactions were seen only with regard to enjoyment in and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC setting. In the following subsections, these interaction effects are inspected in more detail.

The interaction effects of parenting stress and parent-educator cooperation on girls' and boys' well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC

The effect of parent-educator cooperation on the associations between parenting stress and the child's social-emotional well-being in care functioned differently depending on the child's gender and the outcome measure of well-being (Table 3). For *enjoyment in and adjustment to care*, our results for the girls showed that if parents' reported level of stress regarding parenting was low, girls' enjoyment in and adjustment to care were good independent of parents' satisfaction with parent-educator cooperation (see Figure 1). Conversely, if parents perceived high levels of stress on their parenting,

TABLE 3 The relationships of family- and work-related risk factors with child's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC: The effects of parent-educator cooperation and child's gender ($N = 139$)

Variables	Enjoyment in and adjustment to care settings		Fulfilment of basic needs	
	β_{boys} $R^2 = 47.9\%$	β_{girls} $R^2 = 51.3\%$	β_{boys} $R^2 = 33.7\%$	β_{girls} $R^2 = 51.8\%$
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Parenting stress ^a	0.05	-0.42***	-0.18 [#]	-0.42***
Time-based conflict ^b	0.24*	0.04	-0.12	0.07
Strain-based conflict ^b	-0.37***	-0.02	-0.09	-0.24
Risk index ICCA ^c	-0.18*	-0.02	0.05	0.20*
Cooperation	0.47***	0.31**	0.11	0.22*
Interaction of cooperation with				
Parenting stress	-0.25*	0.35***	-0.11	0.24*
Time-based conflict	0.11	0.02	0.31	0.08
Strain-based conflict	0.25*	-0.13	0.01	-0.06
Risk index ICCA	-0.12	-0.19*	0.06	-0.04
<i>Control variables</i>				
Child's age	0.08	-0.01	-0.08	0.16
Financial situation	-0.09	0.03	0.14	-0.07
Family structure ^d	0.10	0.23*	0.15	0.35**

[#] $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

^a1 = not at all true-5 = completely true.

^b1 = strongly disagree-5 = strongly agree.

^cRange: 0-4 points.

^d0 = a single caretaker, 1 = two caretakers.

girls' enjoyment in and adjustment to care varied according to the level of parent-educator cooperation. When the cooperation was evaluated as being at a high level, girls' enjoyment in and adjustment to care were also high, and vice versa; when the level of cooperation was low, the enjoyment in and adjustment to care were also low.

For boys (Figure 2), the effect of parent-educator cooperation on the association between parenting stress and enjoyment in and adjustment to care was different from that of the girls. When parents perceived high levels of stress regarding parenting, parent-educator cooperation had only minor effects on boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care. On the contrary, when parents reported low stress levels regarding their parenting, the boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care varied according to the level of parent-educator cooperation. When parent-educator cooperation was low, so were boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care, and vice versa. When cooperation was reported as high, so were boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care.

The interaction effect of parenting stress and parent-educator cooperation on *fulfilment of basic needs in care*

was similar to the other well-being measure for girls (Figure 3). When parents' stress levels were low, girls' fulfilment of basic needs was independent of the level of parents' satisfaction with parent-educator cooperation. However, when parents perceived high levels of parenting-related stress, fulfilment of girls' basic needs varied according to the level of parent-educator cooperation. A low level of cooperation combined with high parenting stress was associated with a low fulfilment of basic needs. In contrast, a high level of cooperation between parents and educators combined with high parenting stress was associated with similar level fulfilment of basic needs as the other levels of parenting stress. In other words, high cooperation seemed to compensate for the negative effects of high parenting stress. For boys, parent-educator cooperation did not show any effect on the relationship between parenting stress and *fulfilment of basic needs in care* (Table 3). Thus, irrespective of the level of satisfaction of parents with the parent-educator cooperation, higher levels of parenting stress were associated with worse fulfilment of basic needs in flexibly scheduled ECEC for boys, but the result was only marginally significant.

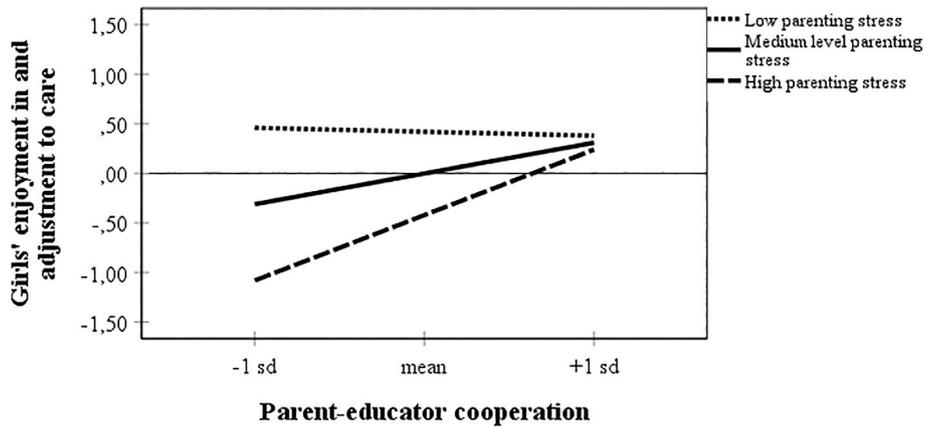


FIGURE 1 Parenting stress in relation to girls' enjoyment in and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC setting by the levels of parent-educator cooperation.

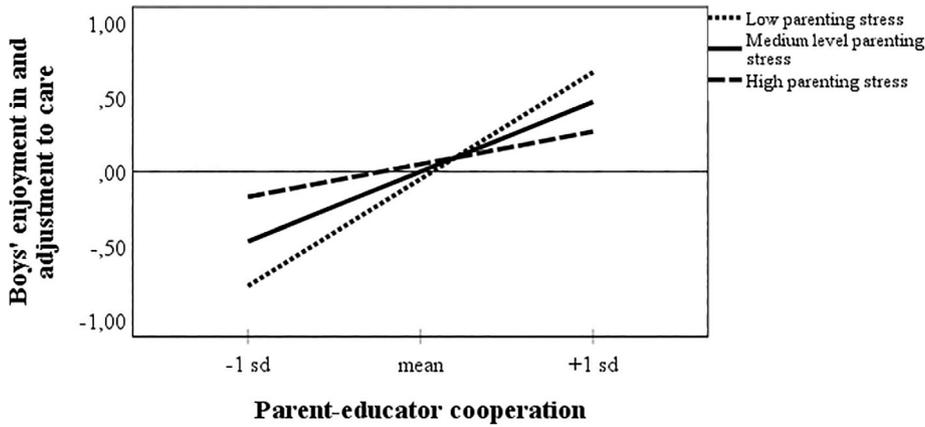


FIGURE 2 Parenting stress in relation to boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC setting by the levels of parent-educator cooperation.

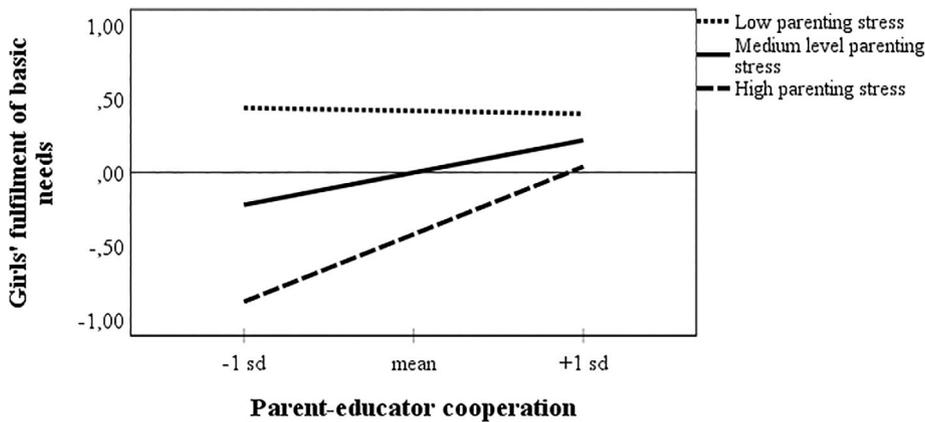


FIGURE 3 Parenting stress in relation to girls' fulfillment of basic needs in flexibly scheduled ECEC setting by the levels of parent-educator cooperation.

Consequently, satisfactory parent-educator cooperation was positively linked to the well-being of girls when parents perceived increased levels of parental stress. In contrast,

boys whose parents perceived low levels of stress seemed to benefit from good parent-educator cooperation only in the area of their enjoyment in and adjustment to care.

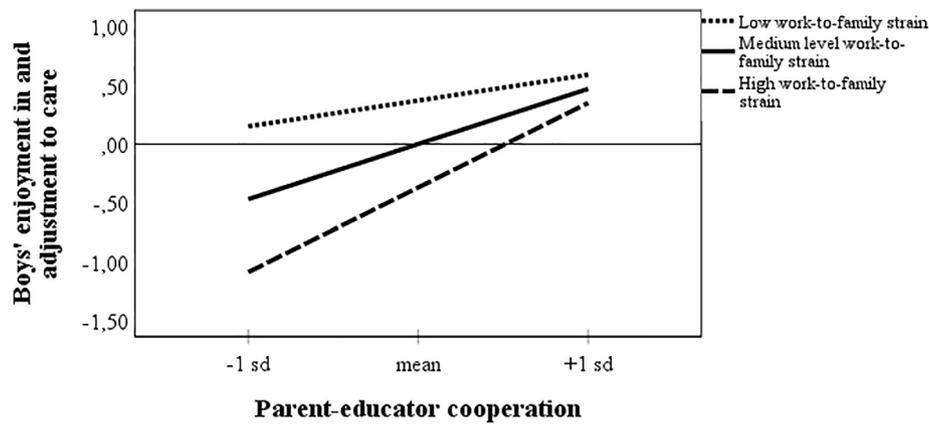


FIGURE 4 Strain-based work-to-family conflict in relation to boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC setting by the levels of parent-educator cooperation.

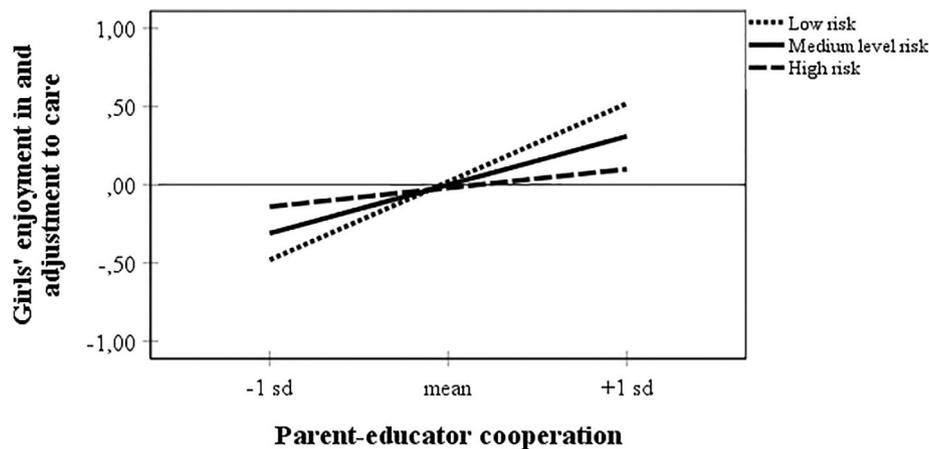


FIGURE 5 Risk for inconvenient childcare arrangements in relation to girls' enjoyment in and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC setting by the levels of parent-educator cooperation.

The interaction effects of strain-based conflict and parent-educator cooperation on girls' and boys' well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings

Parent-educator cooperation affected the relationship between strain-based work-to-family conflict and enjoyment in and adjustment to care only among the boys (Table 3). When the parents reported a low level of strain-based work-to-family conflict, boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care was good independent of parents' satisfaction with parent-educator cooperation (Figure 4). Instead, when parents' strain-based work-to-family conflict was high, boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care varied according to the level of parent-educator cooperation. When cooperation was reported to be at a high level, boys' enjoyment in and adjustment to care was also high, and vice versa. When the level of cooperation was low, the enjoyment in and adjustment to care was also low.

The interaction effects of inconvenient childcare arrangements and parent-educator cooperation on girls' and boys' well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC

Parent-educator cooperation modified also the association between risk index of ICCA and children's enjoyment in and adjustment to care (Table 3). However, a statistically significant effect was detected only for girls. In the case where the risk for ICCAs was low in girls, a satisfactory parent-educator cooperation increased their enjoyment in and adjustment to care (Figure 5). In contrast, when the risk for ICCAs was high, high satisfaction with parent-educator cooperation hardly affected to their enjoyment in and adjustment to care. It notable, however, that although the corresponding negative association did not reach statistical significance among the boys, the standardised regression coefficients among the gender groups differed only marginally from each other

(Table 3), suggesting that these associations were fairly similar.

To conclude, our results shed light on the importance of good parent-educator cooperation for social and emotional well-being of children in flexibly scheduled ECEC and the potential of this well-functioning cooperation to buffer against family- and care-related risk factors for both girls and boys.

DISCUSSION

This study explored young children's social-emotional well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC settings by examining the associations of the recognised risk factors, such as work-to-family conflict, parenting stress, and ICCA, with children's well-being, and sought to resolve whether satisfactory parent-educator cooperation can buffer against these negative effects. Furthermore, of interest was whether the risks and buffering mechanisms affect boys and girls differently.

First, we explored whether the risk factors relating to parenting stress, work-to-family conflict, and ICCAs are associated with the social-emotional well-being of children in flexibly scheduled ECEC. In line with our first hypothesis and previous research (De Schipper et al., 2004; Kaiser et al., 2019; Li et al., 2014), we discovered that most of these risk factors had negative associations with parents' estimation of the fulfilment of their children's basic needs in care and the children's enjoyment in and adjustment to care. Thus, the results add to the body of knowledge regarding the risk factors relating to reconciling work and family life and their associations with children's well-being in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC (Kaiser et al., 2019) and underline particularly the harmful effects of parenting stress (Lozano et al., 2016; Rönkä, Malinen, Sevón, et al., 2017) and strain-based work-to family conflict (Kim & Liu, 2021).

Findings for our second and third research questions gave a more detailed picture on the negative effects of family- and work-related risk factors on children's social-emotional well-being in care. First, we found that parent-educator cooperation is positively associated with children's well-being in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC, which is consistent with prior research on ECEC in typical care hours (DeMeo Cook et al., 2018; Lang et al., 2020; Vuorinen, 2020). Our results further showed that parent-educator cooperation jointly affected children's well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC in combination with various family- and work-related risk factors, and that the child's gender played a role in these linkages. What was not expected was that most of these effects were found in relation to children's enjoyment in

and adjustment to flexibly scheduled ECEC settings whereas contributions to the other outcome measure, fulfilment of a child's basic needs, turned out to be lesser. This is probably due to high basic level of Finnish ECEC, which is nationally regulated, thus guaranteeing good basic care for every child. Currently, quality of ECEC for children and their well-being is particularly emphasised (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, 540/2018; FNAE, 2018).

The main finding of this study showed that well-functioning parent-educator cooperation has the potential to buffer against threats to boys' and girls' well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC. The clearest buffering effect was found in relation to high level of parenting stress; when parent-educator cooperation was reported as satisfactory, both boys and girls were evaluated as enjoying care and adjusting well in it. This discovered buffering also affected the fulfilment of basic needs in girls and was also detected against strain-based work-to-family conflict in boys. Thus, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory on human development (2005) and shown by empirical evidence (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1995; Kaiser et al., 2019), intra- and extrafamilial resources and their interrelations influence children's development in important ways. Interestingly, parent-educator cooperation had no significant buffering effect on exceptionally frequent exposure to ICCAs. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that unstable and prolonged NSWS (Dunifon et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2018) can compromise children's emotional security and may affect children's well-being care in ways for which good cooperation perhaps cannot compensate. However, the present study did not measure the quality of the ECEC or the relationship between the educators and the children; these and their associations may be such important protective factors alongside parent-educator cooperation to call for further research in examining the effect of ICCAs and NSWSs on children's well-being in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC.

The discovered gender differences in children's reactions to the risk factors in our study are supported by some previous research (Claessens & Chen, 2013; Li et al., 2020; Morrisey, 2009). Scholars have emphasised a child's gender as an important moderating factor (Winer & Phillips, 2012) that ought to be considered when investigating children's well-being in the context of parental NSWS (Li et al., 2014). Thus, our study offers an important contribution to the literature. Our findings seem to imply that from the perspective of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) both girls and boys are vulnerable to emotional signals, such as signs of parental stress, but, girls seem to react more to risks in the proximal systems (i.e., home and ECEC), whereas

boys react to both proximal and more distant systems (i.e., parents' working life). Since the classic study by Hall (1978), evidence demonstrating female sensitivity and male insensitivity to emotionally loaded social cues has amassed. This may explain the reported stronger association between parental stress factors and girls' well-being in ECEC. However, previous research related to NSWs concerning boys' and girls' reactions to stressors has been contradictory (Claessens & Chen, 2013; Li et al., 2020; Morrisey, 2009; Rönkä, Malinen, Metsäpelto, et al., 2017), and as our interpretations of detected gendered differences in these reactions are at best tentative, more research is warranted to grasp the rationale behind these effects.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study are worth noting. First, owing to the relatively small sample size ($N = 139$), our study suffers from limited statistical power, resulting in an inability to identify some of interconnections between family stressors, childcare arrangements, and social-emotional well-being of children. Although the data were collected as a part of large, three country study, the results represent flexibly scheduled ECEC in the Finnish context, mirroring its cultural and economic features, which may decrease generalisability. Moreover, in the original study, the aim was to make cross-country comparisons and therefore, children with similar age distribution were recruited for the study. In Finland, only 33% of children aged under 3 years are enrolled in ECEC, which is less than in many European countries (Eurydice, 2019). In the present study, there were only a few participants under the age of three and this prevents us from capturing their situation. Previous studies, however, have suggested that the youngest children are the most at risk regarding their development and well-being in the context of NSWs (Li et al., 2014).

Second, social-emotional well-being of children was measured concurrently as the independent variables measuring family stressors and childcare arrangements in a family. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the causality between child's social-emotional well-being, family stressors and childcare arrangements.

Third, this study was limited solely to parents' reports of their own situations and their child's well-being in childcare. Previous studies suggest, for example, a strong positive correlation between parents' perceived support from educators and parents' assessment of the quality of the parent-educator relationship (Pirchio et al., 2013). The limitation of the present study is that since we relied on parents' subjective reports, it is possible that their positive parent-educator relationship experiences may have

influenced their (more positive) assessments of the fulfilment of their child's basic needs and adjustment to care. Moreover, parent-reported and provider-reported ratings of children's behaviour may differ due to reporter biases or differences in children's behavioural functioning across different settings (Cai et al., 2004). Ideally, educators' measures of child's well-being and children's own experiences would also have been assessed. Further, the quality of parent-educator cooperation ought to be measured from the viewpoint of both partners and include more information about the features of this interaction and its challenges in flexibly scheduled ECEC where parent's and educators' work schedules are in asynchrony, and parent's may be in contact with many more professionals than in ordinary ECEC settings.

Fourth, children's well-being in care as the outcome measure needs further development to assess all relevant indicators. In this study, measures were formed on the conditions of a larger survey focused on several other issues related to family life in 24/7 economy. Therefore, the indicator of ICCAs was too general to capture all childcare arrangement challenges families may encounter, such as long-term stability, multiple arrangements, daily stability, and back-up care arrangements (c.f. Pilarz & Hill, 2014). Additionally, within this survey data, we were unable to measure childcare quality, even though ECEC quality is generally known to affect children's well-being. This is a future task. Considering these limitations, studies with larger samples, multiple stakeholder viewpoints and a longitudinal research design with well-formed measures are needed to confirm our results.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on children's social-emotional well-being in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC. Furthermore, the results highlight the significance of well-functioning parent-educator cooperation in increasing children's social-emotional well-being and buffering against the risk factors (Kaiser et al., 2019; Li et al., 2014) related to parents' NSWs. The results considered the moderating effect of gender on a child's well-being. Second, drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological systems theory of human development, novel insights were provided by including several developmental contexts (i.e., family, care setting and parent's working life) in the study and by examining how these contexts and their interrelations jointly contribute to children's well-being in flexibly scheduled ECEC. Consistent with the study by Claessens and Chen (2013), the results of this study confirm that there exist differences in girls and boys regarding the effects of risk factors for

child well-being, which also calls for further elaboration. Third, in line with previous research in typical hours care settings (DeMeo Cook et al., 2018), the results showed the significance and buffering effect that a well-functioning parent-educator cooperation has on promoting children's well-being and inhibiting the effects of several risk factors relating to reconciling working life in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC.

The results can help us better understand complex interrelations between well-being in girls and boys, different risk factors relating to parents' NSWS and the effect of protective factors, such as parent-educator cooperation, on child well-being. By exploring these interconnections in detail, we can better understand why and how these factors and conditions are associated with child well-being or possible adverse effects on their development. In the future, it is important to study the quality features of ECEC and good-quality parent-educator cooperation and how they separately, and together, can best support child well-being in the context parents' NSWS and flexibly scheduled ECEC.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The author elects to not share data. Research data are not shared as data sharing was not included in research permissions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study follows ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. Ethical questions have been carefully considered throughout the research process. Informed consents have been obtained from all participants and confidentiality and anonymity carefully considered.

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ENDNOTE

¹ The present study uses the term 'educator' to refer to professionals working with children in flexibly scheduled ECEC, that is, ECEC teachers and ECEC childcarers. In Finland, ECEC teachers

can have various educational backgrounds, including the Bachelor of Education—degree from a university, which is the current qualification necessitated by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), or Master of Education degree from a university. At the time of data collection, it was also possible to work as an ECEC teacher with a post-secondary education qualification or as a kindergarten teacher from a teacher college or with a bachelor's degree in Health Care and Social Services, including studies in early childhood education and care and social pedagogy from a university of applied sciences (polytechnic; Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals, 272/2005). ECEC childcarers have an upper secondary vocational qualification in social welfare and health care or an upper secondary vocational qualification in childcare, education and family welfare from The Church Training College or a corresponding training institution. The majority of educators working in ECEC are female (93.7%–99.9% depending on their occupational group; Onnismaa, 2017).

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