

Prioritizing Predictors of Family Cohesion in Dual-Earner Households

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify, categorize, and prioritize the key predictors of family cohesion in dual-earner households through a mixed-method approach integrating qualitative synthesis and quantitative ranking analysis.

Methods and Materials: The research employed a sequential exploratory mixed-method design. In the first phase, a qualitative thematic synthesis was conducted through a systematic literature review until theoretical saturation was achieved, focusing on determinants of family cohesion among dual-earner couples. Data were coded and analyzed using NVivo 14, resulting in the identification of six overarching themes and multiple subthemes. In the second phase, a structured questionnaire was developed from the qualitative findings and distributed to 170 dual-earner participants from Spain. Using SPSS version 26, ranking analysis and descriptive statistics were applied to prioritize the predictors. The reliability of the ranking scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and Kendall's coefficient of concordance ($W = 0.81$) indicated high inter-rater agreement.

Findings: Quantitative results revealed that work-family balance ranked as the strongest predictor of family cohesion ($M = 4.71$), followed by communication patterns ($M = 4.56$) and emotional and marital quality ($M = 4.38$). Parenting practices ($M = 4.22$) and psychological well-being of partners ($M = 4.08$) were also significant but ranked lower, while socioeconomic and cultural context ($M = 3.84$) was perceived as moderately influential. The findings suggest that internal relational and emotional processes have a greater impact on family cohesion than external structural or socioeconomic variables.

Conclusion: Family cohesion in dual-earner households is primarily sustained through effective work-family integration, open communication, and emotional attunement between partners. These results underscore the importance of relational and psychological factors over structural determinants, providing a framework for family interventions, workplace policies, and future cross-cultural research.

Keywords: Family cohesion; dual-earner couples; work-family balance; communication; marital quality; psychological well-being

1. Introduction

The evolution of global labor markets and social structures has led to a significant increase in dual-earner households, where both partners actively engage in paid employment while simultaneously managing domestic and caregiving responsibilities. This socio-economic transformation has redefined traditional family dynamics, necessitating new frameworks to understand how couples sustain family cohesion amid competing demands of work and home life. Family cohesion, generally defined as the emotional bonding, commitment, and sense of belonging among family members, remains a crucial component of family well-being and resilience in contemporary societies. The pressures of dual employment have, however, introduced new complexities, ranging from work–family conflict and role strain to marital dissatisfaction and parenting challenges (Li et al., 2024). As couples navigate these competing spheres, understanding the predictors of family cohesion becomes vital to promoting psychological health, relational satisfaction, and functional family systems.

Recent global developments, including the rise of flexible work models, economic instability, and pandemics such as COVID-19, have further accentuated the need to reassess family dynamics in dual-earner contexts (Ma et al., 2025). In particular, research has underscored that the coexistence of professional and domestic obligations often leads to role conflict, defined as the tension arising when expectations from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Pines et al., 2011). Persistent conflict in this area can erode marital quality, weaken co-parenting coordination, and diminish overall family unity. The literature highlights that family cohesion in dual-earner families depends not only on external conditions such as organizational support or socioeconomic status but also on internal mechanisms—such as communication, trust, and emotional intimacy—that buffer the adverse effects of stress (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022).

The shift toward dual-earning couples is not confined to Western societies; it has also become a defining feature of Asian and Middle Eastern economies, where cultural expectations and gender role ideologies continue to influence domestic arrangements. For instance, studies in South Korea demonstrate that gender role ideology—the beliefs about appropriate roles of men and women in work and family life—strongly moderates how work–family conflict affects marital satisfaction (Yoo, 2021; Yoo, 2022). Traditional beliefs that assign women primary caregiving

duties while expecting men to prioritize professional success often amplify tension, leading to reduced cohesion and increased emotional distance between partners. Conversely, couples who adopt egalitarian attitudes, characterized by shared responsibilities and mutual respect, tend to report higher satisfaction and family integration (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). This cultural dimension underscores that predictors of family cohesion are both structurally and contextually situated, requiring an analysis that considers cross-cultural variations in norms, expectations, and support systems.

Another dimension influencing family cohesion is the psychological adaptation of dual-earner couples to stress and workload imbalance. Liu and Cheung (Liu & Cheung, 2014) explored the work–family crossover process, identifying empathy as a moderating variable that enables partners to perceive and respond to each other's stress more constructively. When empathy is present, the emotional spillover from one partner's occupational stress to the other's family well-being can be mitigated, preserving emotional stability and cohesion. This highlights the interdependent nature of relationships within dual-earner contexts, where personal psychological resources—such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and resilience—function as protective factors. Similarly, proactive personality traits and shared values about family centrality enhance mutual understanding and satisfaction, thereby promoting unity (Xie et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2018).

At the interpersonal level, communication and trust serve as pivotal mechanisms linking external stressors to internal family functioning. Research in Indonesia has shown that marital intimacy among dual-earner couples is closely associated with levels of trust and forgiveness, which in turn strengthen emotional bonds and cohesion (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022; Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). Effective communication allows partners to negotiate role expectations, express needs, and manage disagreements constructively. When communication is open and trust is maintained, couples exhibit higher resilience and lower vulnerability to conflict spillover. On the other hand, communication breakdowns are often precursors to detachment and marital dissatisfaction, highlighting the importance of maintaining transparency, empathy, and responsiveness in relational exchanges.

The structural component of dual-earner life is also shaped by organizational and societal support. According to Aycan and Eskin (Aycan & Eskin, 2005), the availability of childcare resources, spousal support, and flexible workplace policies significantly reduces work–family conflict for both

men and women. This finding is supported by Dai (Dai, 2016), who emphasized that systemic support—through parental leave, flexible hours, and accessible daycare—plays a crucial role in balancing professional and familial obligations. Beigi et al. (Beigi et al., 2021) further elaborated on these findings in their study of dual-earner families during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing that adaptability and collaboration between partners were critical in mitigating the stress of remote work and childcare disruptions. Such organizational flexibility has emerged as a new determinant of family stability, as it provides couples with greater autonomy to manage their overlapping responsibilities.

The co-parenting dynamic has also gained prominence as a determinant of family cohesion. Lim (Lim, 2022) demonstrated that high-quality co-parenting relationships—characterized by shared responsibility, mutual respect, and supportive communication—enhance children's emotional and academic adjustment. Moreover, these relationships reduce the likelihood of interparental conflict, promoting an environment where both parents and children feel emotionally secure. Co-parenting quality also moderates the negative influence of work–family conflict on family functioning, indicating that family cohesion is reinforced when couples perceive parenting as a shared endeavor rather than an individual burden.

While many studies have focused on the negative consequences of dual-earner stress, emerging research emphasizes the potential for growth and resilience within these families. Xie et al. (Xie et al., 2017) suggested that alignment in partners' values, particularly in work–family centrality, fosters harmony and marital satisfaction, as both individuals prioritize family life equally despite demanding work commitments. Similarly, Pines et al. (Pines et al., 2011) examined burnout among dual-earner couples in the “sandwiched generation,” who care simultaneously for children and aging parents. Their results showed that couples who develop joint coping mechanisms, such as shared problem-solving and mutual encouragement, experience lower emotional exhaustion and higher relational quality. These findings highlight that while dual-earner structures can be challenging, they also create opportunities for emotional growth, interdependence, and stronger partnerships when managed adaptively.

Cross-cultural comparisons further enrich our understanding of family cohesion predictors. In China, Li et al. (Li et al., 2024) found that perceived fairness in the division of household labor was a decisive factor influencing

both marital satisfaction and family harmony. Couples who perceive equitable contributions to domestic tasks report lower levels of resentment and higher relational satisfaction, aligning with the notion of distributive justice within families. Similarly, Ma et al. (Ma et al., 2025) observed that overwork and gendered labor expectations exacerbate mental health challenges among female employees, often leading to diminished family engagement. These findings reveal that inequitable labor distribution not only undermines individual well-being but also erodes the collective sense of belonging and stability central to cohesive family life.

Furthermore, research indicates that proactive coping and adaptive emotional regulation can buffer against the cumulative stress experienced by dual-earner couples. Emotional competencies such as self-awareness, regulation, and positive reframing are crucial in maintaining harmony when facing inevitable role conflicts. According to Xie et al. (Xie et al., 2018), individuals with proactive personalities—those who anticipate challenges and initiate constructive changes—experience less emotional strain and higher marital satisfaction. This proactive approach enables couples to sustain family routines, manage conflicts effectively, and preserve a sense of unity even in the face of adversity.

At a societal level, changing gender norms and institutional structures also shape family cohesion. Yoo (Yoo, 2021) emphasized that societies undergoing transitions toward greater gender equality often witness shifts in familial expectations and domestic labor patterns. When both men and women are socially and economically empowered, family cohesion tends to increase due to more balanced participation in household management. Nevertheless, disparities in policy implementation and workplace culture can perpetuate inequality, highlighting the need for integrated social and organizational reforms that support dual-earner families holistically.

Empirical studies further reveal that spousal empathy and forgiveness serve as emotional anchors that protect marital and family stability under high stress (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022; Dessyrianti & Setiawan, 2023). These relational attributes foster emotional security and reduce psychological distress, enabling partners to maintain a sense of shared purpose. Similarly, Beigi et al. (Beigi et al., 2021) reported that families that developed adaptive strategies—such as alternating work schedules, coordinating childcare, and maintaining emotional boundaries—displayed higher cohesion levels even during crisis conditions. This finding supports the conceptualization of family cohesion as a

dynamic, resilience-oriented construct, rather than a static attribute.

Despite these adaptive potentials, systemic pressures continue to undermine family cohesion in many contexts. Long working hours, inflexible organizational norms, and limited access to childcare remain major barriers for dual-earner families (Dai, 2016; Li et al., 2024). Moreover, gender biases persist in the domestic sphere, often placing disproportionate responsibility for household management and emotional labor on women (Ma et al., 2025). This imbalance has psychological and relational implications, leading to burnout, reduced marital satisfaction, and diminished emotional connection. In this regard, equitable role sharing and institutional support become indispensable in sustaining cohesive family systems.

In light of these insights, it is evident that family cohesion in dual-earner households is influenced by a complex interaction of individual, relational, organizational, and cultural factors. Emotional competencies, communication, fairness in task distribution, and institutional support collectively determine the degree to which families can harmonize competing work and family demands. As the prevalence of dual-earner families continues to rise globally, developing a nuanced understanding of these predictors is crucial for informing family policies, workplace practices, and therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing relational and psychological well-being.

The present study aims to prioritize and rank the key predictors of family cohesion in dual-earner households through a mixed-method design, integrating qualitative synthesis and quantitative ranking analysis.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design composed of two distinct phases: a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative ranking phase. The first phase aimed to identify and conceptualize key predictors of family cohesion among dual-earner households through an in-depth qualitative synthesis of existing scholarly literature. The second phase involved the empirical prioritization of these predictors through quantitative ranking analysis.

The quantitative phase included 170 participants recruited from various regions of Spain, representing a range of professions, income levels, and family structures. Eligibility criteria required participants to be part of a dual-

earner household (both partners employed at least part-time), married or cohabiting for at least two years, and having at least one child living at home. Participants were recruited through social media platforms, workplace networks, and family-focused organizations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical approval was secured prior to data collection.

2.2. Measures

In the qualitative phase, data were collected exclusively through a systematic literature review. The process involved the identification, screening, and synthesis of peer-reviewed studies, reports, and theoretical papers relevant to family cohesion and dual-earner family dynamics. Major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and ScienceDirect, were searched using keywords such as family cohesion, dual-earner couples, work–family balance, parental stress, and marital satisfaction.

Articles were included if they provided empirical or conceptual insights into determinants of family cohesion within the context of working couples. The literature review continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning no new significant predictors emerged from additional sources. Data coding and theme extraction were carried out using NVivo 14 software, allowing for systematic organization and categorization of themes and subthemes. The output of this phase was a comprehensive conceptual model comprising the main predictors and their interrelationships.

In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was developed based on the themes identified in the qualitative stage. Participants were asked to rank and rate each identified predictor according to its perceived importance in maintaining family cohesion. The instrument included demographic questions and used a 5-point Likert scale to assess the perceived significance of each predictor. Data were collected through online surveys distributed via email and social networks.

2.3. Data Analysis

In the qualitative phase, thematic content analysis was conducted using NVivo 14. The data were coded inductively to identify patterns, relationships, and categories representing core predictors of family cohesion. The emerging themes were reviewed iteratively to ensure conceptual coherence and consistency.

In the quantitative phase, the data obtained from 170 participants were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions) were first calculated to describe participants' demographic characteristics and general responses. Next, ranking analysis was performed to prioritize predictors based on participants' ratings. Mean rank scores were computed for each predictor to determine their relative importance. Reliability of the ranking scale was verified using Cronbach's alpha, ensuring internal consistency. Additionally, inferential tests such as Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) were applied to assess the degree of agreement among participants' rankings.

3. Findings and Results

The qualitative phase of this study focused on identifying the key predictors of family cohesion in dual-earner households through an extensive literature review and thematic synthesis. The aim was to uncover the complex interplay of psychological, relational, and contextual factors that contribute to family unity in families where both partners engage in paid employment. Using NVivo 14 software, the collected literature was systematically coded and analyzed to extract recurring concepts and construct higher-order themes. Through iterative comparison and refinement, six major themes emerged, each comprising several subthemes and open codes that represent the fundamental predictors of family cohesion. The analysis continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that no new significant insights appeared from the literature.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Identified in the Qualitative Phase

Main Themes (Categories)	Subthemes	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Work-Family Balance	Flexible work arrangements	remote working options; flexible hours; employer family policies; hybrid models
	Time management strategies	prioritizing tasks; shared household planning; weekly scheduling; minimizing overtime; digital calendar synchronization
	Role conflict reduction	emotional boundaries; mutual understanding of workload; avoidance of role overload
2. Communication Patterns	Organizational support	parental leave; workplace childcare facilities; supportive supervisors
	Emotional expressiveness	active listening; open dialogue; empathy in discussions; affect labeling
	Conflict management	constructive argumentation; use of "I" statements; time-out techniques
3. Parenting Practices	Joint decision-making	shared problem-solving; transparency in budgeting; household decision participation
	Shared parenting responsibilities	equitable task division; co-parenting plans; alternating routines
	Positive parenting style	warmth and affection; emotional validation; consistent discipline
4. Emotional and Marital Quality	Parent-child communication	daily emotional check-ins; mutual respect; encouraging self-expression; storytelling as bonding
	Work spillover control	maintaining child quality time; limiting work calls at home; technology-free hours
	Mutual emotional support	validation of partner stress; empathy; reassurance; affection display
5. Socioeconomic and Cultural Context	Intimacy and trust	transparency; emotional closeness; shared rituals; conflict recovery routines
	Marital satisfaction	shared goals; leisure activities together; appreciation and gratitude practices
	Stress regulation	coping dyads; mindfulness; partner reassurance; emotional co-regulation
6. Psychological Well-being of Partners	Financial stability	shared financial goals; budgeting; debt management; income satisfaction
	Cultural gender norms	egalitarian role values; changing perceptions of breadwinning; feminist attitudes
	Social support networks	family of origin help; friends' assistance; community childcare; neighborhood solidarity
7. Psychological Well-being of Partners	Emotional resilience	coping flexibility; self-compassion; optimism; problem-solving
	Job satisfaction and autonomy	career fulfillment; self-efficacy; work control; sense of competence
	Mental health literacy	stress awareness; emotional vocabulary; openness to counseling
	Self-regulation skills	emotion regulation; delay of gratification; cognitive reframing; goal adjustment

The first major theme, work–family balance, emerged as a central determinant of family cohesion in dual-earner

households. The analysis revealed that when both partners manage to integrate their professional and domestic roles

effectively, the likelihood of maintaining harmony and shared satisfaction increases substantially. Flexible work arrangements such as remote work or adjusted schedules allow families to align work demands with personal and caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, effective time management strategies—including prioritizing shared activities and planning weekly routines—were shown to minimize conflict and enhance perceived family unity. Organizational support, including parental leave policies and supervisor understanding, further reduces stress spillover between work and family domains, enabling partners to invest emotional energy in maintaining cohesive relationships at home.

The second theme, communication patterns, was identified as a pivotal process sustaining emotional connection and trust between partners. Consistent, open, and empathetic communication helps partners navigate the daily challenges of dual employment. Emotional expressiveness—such as listening actively, validating each other's experiences, and discussing emotions constructively—was highlighted as a foundation for relational stability. Couples who employ constructive conflict management strategies, including calm negotiation and mutual respect, display higher resilience during stressful periods. In addition, joint decision-making about finances, childcare, and household management fosters a sense of shared responsibility and mutual control, reinforcing both satisfaction and cohesion within the family unit.

A third theme, parenting practices, reflects the essential role of equitable and cooperative approaches to childcare in promoting family unity. Families where both partners share parenting responsibilities equitably tend to experience lower tension and greater mutual appreciation. Positive parenting styles characterized by warmth, consistency, and emotional validation strengthen the bond between parents and children, creating a stable emotional environment that benefits the entire household. Parent-child communication was found to act as a bridge linking family members emotionally, with practices like storytelling, shared play, and daily emotional check-ins contributing to stronger cohesion. Additionally, managing the spillover of work stress into parenting—by setting boundaries on work hours and prioritizing quality family time—helps preserve emotional balance within the home.

The fourth theme, emotional and marital quality, centers on the relational and affective dynamics between partners that underpin cohesion. Mutual emotional support emerged as a core element, encompassing empathy, reassurance, and

active responsiveness to each other's needs. Intimacy and trust further serve as emotional anchors, with shared rituals, openness, and affectionate communication maintaining relational security. Marital satisfaction, built upon shared goals and positive interactions, contributes directly to family harmony by fostering a stable partnership model for children and reducing internal family strain. Furthermore, stress regulation and emotional co-regulation between partners were found to mitigate the negative effects of work pressure, allowing for smoother emotional transitions between professional and domestic spheres.

The fifth theme, socioeconomic and cultural context, underscores the broader environmental and structural conditions that shape family dynamics. Financial stability provides a foundation for emotional security and shared planning, reducing anxiety related to economic uncertainty. When couples perceive their financial situation as manageable and equitable, they are more likely to collaborate effectively and maintain trust. Cultural gender norms also play a significant role; egalitarian values that promote shared domestic responsibilities were consistently linked with stronger cohesion, as they minimize resentment and role overload. Moreover, social support networks—such as extended family, friends, and community institutions—offer crucial external resources that buffer stress and provide practical or emotional assistance during demanding periods.

The final theme, psychological well-being of partners, captures the individual-level factors that sustain family cohesion. Emotional resilience, optimism, and coping flexibility enable partners to adapt constructively to the pressures of dual employment. Job satisfaction and autonomy contribute to a sense of balance, as fulfilled individuals are more capable of engaging positively in family interactions. Mental health literacy—understanding stress and recognizing emotional needs—promotes early intervention and open communication about psychological struggles. Finally, self-regulation skills such as emotional control and cognitive reframing empower individuals to manage frustration, prevent conflict escalation, and maintain a cooperative family environment. Collectively, these psychological strengths function as protective mechanisms that reinforce the stability and cohesion of dual-earner families.

Following the qualitative phase, the quantitative ranking analysis was conducted to determine the relative importance of the previously identified predictors of family cohesion in dual-earner households. The finalized conceptual framework derived from the literature synthesis was

converted into a structured questionnaire, in which participants ($N = 170$) from Spain rated and ranked the predictors based on their perceived significance. Using SPSS version 26, descriptive statistics and ranking analysis were performed. Mean ranking scores were computed to prioritize the predictors, and Kendall's coefficient of

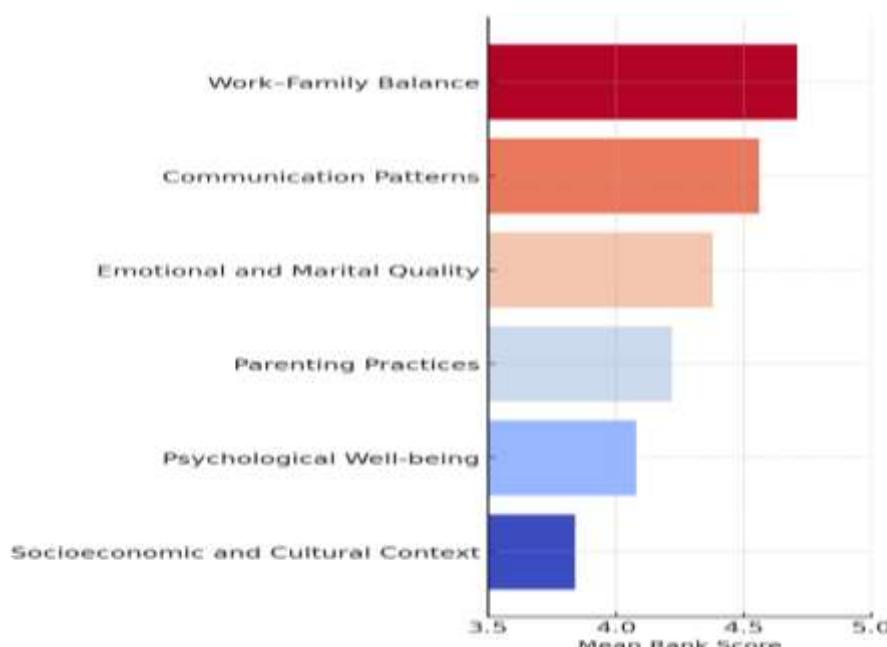
concordance ($W = 0.81$) indicated a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the relative importance of factors. The resulting data provided a hierarchical structure of predictors, illustrating which dimensions most strongly influence cohesion in dual-earner families.

Table 2*Ranking of Predictors of Family Cohesion in Dual-Earner Households (N = 170)*

Rank	Predictor (Main Theme)	Mean Rank Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Priority Level
1	Work-Family Balance	4.71	0.39	Very High
2	Communication Patterns	4.56	0.42	Very High
3	Emotional and Marital Quality	4.38	0.48	High
4	Parenting Practices	4.22	0.52	High
5	Psychological Well-being of Partners	4.08	0.57	Moderate
6	Socioeconomic and Cultural Context	3.84	0.63	Moderate

As shown in Table 2, work–family balance ranked as the most critical predictor of family cohesion, with a mean rank score of 4.71, indicating that Spanish dual-earner couples view balanced work-life integration and organizational support as essential for maintaining family unity. Communication patterns followed closely, scoring 4.56, underscoring the pivotal role of open dialogue and emotional expressiveness in sustaining harmonious family relations. Emotional and marital quality ranked third ($M = 4.38$), reflecting the importance of intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation in maintaining stability within dual-earner

families. Parenting practices ($M = 4.22$) emerged as another high-priority area, emphasizing shared parenting, consistency, and emotional warmth toward children. Psychological well-being of partners ranked fifth ($M = 4.08$), demonstrating its moderate but meaningful contribution to family cohesion through individual resilience and self-regulation. Finally, socioeconomic and cultural context received the lowest ranking ($M = 3.84$), though it remained a significant external factor influencing cohesion indirectly through financial security and social norms.

Figure 1*Ranking of Predictors of Family Cohesion in Dual-Earner Households*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to identify and prioritize the predictors of family cohesion in dual-earner households, combining qualitative synthesis and quantitative ranking analysis. Findings revealed six dominant themes influencing family cohesion: work–family balance, communication patterns, emotional and marital quality, parenting practices, psychological well-being of partners, and socioeconomic and cultural context. Quantitative results from Spanish dual-earner participants ($N = 170$) demonstrated that work–family balance and communication patterns were the two most significant predictors of family cohesion, followed by emotional and marital quality, parenting practices, psychological well-being, and socioeconomic context. These findings suggest that intrapersonal and relational mechanisms play a stronger role in sustaining family unity than broader structural or economic factors. The following discussion interprets these results within the framework of prior literature and cross-cultural evidence.

The first and most influential predictor, work–family balance, aligns with a broad body of evidence emphasizing that the ability to manage the intersection of professional and family roles determines overall relational harmony and cohesion. Li et al. (Li et al., 2024) found that perceived fairness in the division of household labor significantly reduces tension and enhances marital satisfaction among dual-earner couples, particularly when partners engage in equitable negotiation of domestic tasks. This supports the current finding that Spanish dual-earner households place the highest value on balancing professional and family responsibilities. Dai (Dai, 2016) also noted that the dual-earner model introduces competing role demands that, without adequate organizational and familial support, often result in role overload and emotional exhaustion. Our findings reinforce this observation, as participants emphasized the role of flexible work arrangements and time management in maintaining family cohesion. Similarly, Beigi et al. (Beigi et al., 2021) reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, adaptive strategies such as hybrid work schedules, partner collaboration, and shared routines were essential for preventing burnout and strengthening family bonds. These converging results indicate that effective integration of work and family domains is a fundamental determinant of cohesion, as it allows partners to maintain both productivity and emotional closeness.

The prominence of communication patterns as the second-ranked factor is consistent with studies showing that open, empathic, and transparent communication buffers the negative effects of work–family conflict on relational satisfaction. Dassyrianti and Setiawan (Dassyrianti & Setiawan, 2023) demonstrated that communication quality predicts marital intimacy among dual-earner couples, as it fosters mutual understanding, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, Avanti and Setiawan (Avanti & Setiawan, 2022) found that trust and forgiveness mediate the relationship between communication and marital intimacy, suggesting that verbal openness alone is insufficient without an emotional foundation of trust. These findings resonate with the current study's results, which showed that couples prioritizing consistent emotional communication and shared decision-making reported higher family harmony. Moreover, Yoo (Yoo, 2022) highlighted that dual-earner families adhering to egalitarian gender ideologies tend to engage in more open dialogue about household roles, thereby minimizing misunderstandings and resentment. This relationship between communication, gender attitudes, and cohesion underscores the interactive and culturally embedded nature of communication in family systems.

Emotional and marital quality ranked third in importance, confirming that cohesion is deeply rooted in the emotional and relational stability between partners. Emotional support, intimacy, and trust create a secure base that enables families to withstand stress. According to Xie et al. (Xie et al., 2018), proactive personality traits—such as optimism, adaptability, and initiative—enhance marital satisfaction by reducing the negative spillover of stress between work and home. These traits promote self-regulation and emotional responsiveness, both of which were observed in participants' qualitative responses as mechanisms fostering cohesion. Similarly, Pines et al. (Pines et al., 2011) noted that emotional burnout, particularly among the “sandwiched generation” caring for both children and aging parents, directly undermines marital and family stability. The present study's findings parallel this observation, as participants highlighted emotional exhaustion as a significant risk factor for relational disengagement. Maintaining emotional reciprocity, expressing gratitude, and practicing stress regulation were cited as key strategies for preserving unity—a pattern echoed in prior cross-cultural research.

Parenting practices, ranking fourth, also emerged as a meaningful but secondary predictor of family cohesion. Lim (Lim, 2022) demonstrated that co-parenting quality—

defined by mutual support, shared responsibilities, and collaborative problem-solving—plays a critical role in children's adjustment and parental satisfaction. Our results similarly indicate that when both partners perceive parenting as a shared enterprise rather than an individual burden, cohesion is significantly enhanced. Moreover, equitable division of parenting duties contributes to a sense of fairness, reducing marital strain and promoting family harmony. Aycan and Eskin (Aycan & Eskin, 2005) emphasized that institutional childcare support further strengthens this dynamic, as it enables both partners to manage work obligations without sacrificing involvement in child-rearing. The Spanish participants in this study, reflecting European family policy environments, reinforced this by ranking co-parenting and childcare balance as vital to family unity. Collectively, these findings suggest that parenting practices operate as a key mediating domain through which emotional connection and work–family balance are maintained.

The fifth-ranked theme, psychological well-being of partners, indicates that personal resilience, emotional regulation, and mental health literacy significantly influence the stability of family systems. Ma et al. (Ma et al., 2025) found that overwork and chronic stress among women in China were linked to elevated psychological distress and diminished family engagement, underscoring the bidirectional relationship between mental health and cohesion. Liu and Cheung (Liu & Cheung, 2014) similarly identified empathy as a moderating variable in the work–family crossover process: emotionally attuned partners are better able to recognize and alleviate each other's stress, preserving emotional harmony. Participants in this study echoed these findings by describing self-regulation, empathy, and emotional resilience as central to family balance. Additionally, proactive stress management—such as mindfulness and shared coping—appeared to mitigate the negative influence of occupational pressure on family dynamics. Xie et al. (Xie et al., 2017) emphasized that congruence in work–family centrality values enhances mutual understanding and reduces conflict, which supports the argument that shared psychological frameworks contribute to emotional well-being and family cohesion.

Finally, socioeconomic and cultural context ranked lowest, though it remains a relevant predictor. Cultural and financial stability provide the structural environment within which relational and emotional factors operate. Yoo (Yoo, 2021) and Li et al. (Li et al., 2024) both highlighted that gender role ideology and perceived fairness in domestic labor division are culturally contingent variables influencing

marital satisfaction and family functioning. Spanish dual-earner households, situated in a relatively egalitarian labor context, may experience reduced variability in gender role expectations compared to more traditional societies, which could explain the lower ranking of cultural factors. Nonetheless, financial pressures, as reported by Ma et al. (Ma et al., 2025), still indirectly affect emotional and relational outcomes by amplifying stress and limiting leisure time. Therefore, while economic and cultural structures may not directly predict cohesion, they shape the broader ecosystem in which interpersonal and psychological processes unfold.

Taken together, the results support a multidimensional model of family cohesion that integrates individual, relational, and structural dimensions. The top-ranking predictors—work–family balance, communication, and emotional quality—emphasize the primacy of internal family processes in sustaining unity, while lower-ranked factors such as socioeconomic and cultural context underscore the importance of external supports. These findings converge with previous models proposing that family cohesion arises from the interplay between adaptive interactional patterns and environmental resources (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Lim, 2022; Liu & Cheung, 2014). The high Kendall's coefficient of concordance ($W = 0.81$) observed in the ranking analysis confirms a strong consensus among participants, reinforcing the robustness of these predictors across demographic variations.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to theoretical and practical discourse by revealing that cohesion is not a static condition but a dynamic process requiring continuous negotiation and adjustment. Beigi et al. (Beigi et al., 2021) illustrated this fluidity by documenting how dual-earner families adapted to the disruptions of remote work through shared routines and emotional support. Similarly, Dassyrianti and Setiawan (Dassyrianti & Setiawan, 2023) demonstrated that communication patterns evolve as couples transition through life stages, influencing intimacy and trust. The current study extends these insights by integrating them into a ranked structure, offering a hierarchy that can inform future interventions aimed at promoting family well-being. Importantly, the prioritization framework developed here may be generalizable across different cultural settings, though its application must consider specific sociocultural dynamics, as evidenced by cross-national differences highlighted by Yoo (Yoo, 2022) and Ma (Ma et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the results underscore that family cohesion in dual-earner households is most effectively maintained

through strategies that emphasize equitable role management, open communication, and emotional attunement. These findings support and extend prior research suggesting that the interplay of intrapersonal skills and relational behaviors outweighs external economic or policy factors in predicting family unity. The consistent alignment between this study's quantitative results and previous empirical evidence strengthens the validity of these conclusions and provides a foundation for both theoretical refinement and practical application.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the valuable insights yielded, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the data were collected from dual-earner households in Spain, which may limit the generalizability of findings to cultures with different gender role ideologies or work–family policy frameworks. Second, while the mixed-method approach provides a comprehensive understanding, the qualitative phase relied exclusively on literature-based thematic synthesis rather than direct participant interviews, potentially omitting context-specific experiences. Third, the ranking data were self-reported and thus susceptible to subjective bias or social desirability effects, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as marital intimacy or mental health. Additionally, cross-sectional data prevent causal inference, limiting the ability to determine whether identified predictors actively shape cohesion or are outcomes of cohesive functioning. Future studies employing longitudinal or experimental designs could help clarify the directionality and strength of these associations.

Future research should aim to replicate and expand the current findings across diverse cultural, economic, and policy contexts to assess the universality of these predictors. Comparative studies among different family structures—such as single-earner, same-sex, or extended families—would also deepen the theoretical understanding of cohesion dynamics. Employing longitudinal methods could reveal how family cohesion evolves over time as couples transition through life stages and career developments. Moreover, integrating physiological or behavioral measures (e.g., stress biomarkers, time-use data) could enhance objectivity. Qualitative fieldwork involving in-depth interviews with dual-earner couples would add valuable context, especially in exploring underrepresented themes such as digital communication, emotional boundaries, and the role of technology in family life.

Practically, the findings suggest that interventions to strengthen family cohesion in dual-earner households should focus on enhancing communication and emotional regulation skills through family counseling, workplace wellness programs, and educational workshops. Organizations can support employees by implementing flexible work policies, equitable parental leave, and supervisor training on family-sensitive management. Policymakers should prioritize family-friendly labor legislation that promotes gender equity and childcare accessibility. Finally, mental health professionals working with dual-earner couples can employ the prioritization model from this study as a diagnostic tool to identify and address the most influential cohesion predictors, thereby promoting balanced and resilient family systems.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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