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An Overview of Work Family Conflict and Employee Wellbeing: Role of Support and Family Friendly Policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine work family conflict and its impacts on employee wellbeing. Because of a recent change in workforce demographics that show increasing female participation, work family conflict and work performance has become the issue of concern in South-East Asian countries. Indeed, previous studies highlighted the evidence of multiple roles creating conflicts that have a severe impact on employee wellbeing (Alpert & Culbertson, 1987; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Wellbeing is a multidimensional construct and this paper will discuss both subjective and psychological wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing comprises of life satisfaction and a balance of positive and negative affects, whereas, psychological wellbeing is derived from Ryff and Keyes (1995) that focus on six dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life and Self Acceptance. Most significantly, work family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict which occurs when an individual has to face incompatible role pressures from work and family. Goode's (1960) scarcity theory which has been used extensively in work and family research also will be explained. Review of articles in this area including demographic pattern of work family conflict which mostly focuses on working mothers. Since the strategy to minimize work family conflict can be regarded as the management policy on employee welfare, several recommendations for both employees and organizations are also discussed.

Introduction

During the Eight Malaysia Plan period, women contributed towards the social and development of the nation by attaining higher educational levels, through increased participation in the workforce and by becoming involved in various business activities (Malaysia, 2006). Sparks, Faragher and Cooper (2001) also discussed the diversity of the 21st century workforce which indicates the increased participation of women and dual earners. Similarly, Malaysian organizations portray the changing composition of the workplace in terms of increased labour force participation as shown in Table 1.

It is estimated that the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for males will be 87.4 per cent and females will be 46.3 percent in 2010, whereas, the labour force is estimated to increase to 12.4 million (Malaysia, 2006). The estimation trend appears to be significantly increased in 2010.

As people spend at least one third of their time working (HU & Lanese R., 1998), the increased participation of employees in the workforce, especially married women, inevitably raises the issue of work family conflict. In addition, the evidence has shown that the participation of Southeast Asian women in the workforce, especially among professionals, creates role conflict which has already been experienced by western society (Aryee, 1992; Wong, 1979). The changing nature of the traditional role of housewives who now are becoming working mothers has increased the likelihood of both household and working responsibilities. Thus, the involvement of women in employment caused the experience of work family conflict among them (Ahmad, 1996; Aryee, 1992).

Table 1

Total number and distribution of labour force by sex, Malaysia 1997-2007

Year	Total Number of Labour Force (in million)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1997	8,784.0	65.88	34.12
1998	8,883.6	66.46	33.54
1999	9,151.5	66.26	33.74
2000	9,556.1	64.42	35.58
2001	9,699.4	64.63	35.37
2002	9,886.2	64.25	35.75
2003	10,239.6	64.06	35.94
2004	10,346.2	63.94	36.06
2005	10,413.4	64.35	35.65
2006	10,628.9	64.39	35.61
2007	10,889.5	63.95	36.05

Source: Labour Force Survey, Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2008)

2. Definition of work family conflict

Work family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict which occurs when an individual has to face incompatible role pressures from work and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There are three forms of work family conflict: time, strain and behaviour-based conflicts. Time-based conflict refers to overlapping schedules and tasks. Strain-based conflicts indicate mental and emotional strain demands related to the roles, and behaviour-based conflict shows the conflicts of accepting individuals' behavioural patterns (Rantanen, Pulkkinen, & Kinnunen, 2005).

Examples of time based conflict in previous studies are working hours (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), work schedule and shift work (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) as well as the responsibility for young children (Hill, 2005), whereas, strain based conflict arises from lack of a supportive work group and organizational culture (Hill, 2005), and low spouse support (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time based and strain based conflicts were reliable indicators of work family conflict (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Furthermore, behavior based conflict was not directly measured in empirical research (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). It occurred when there would be an apposite behavioral expectation within individuals that create tension. For example the individual might need to be aggressive, ambitious and task orientated at work which is different from what is expected when he/she is at home: that is, to be loving, supportive and relationship orientated (Gudmundson, 2003).

3. Dimensions of wellbeing

Wellbeing is a multidimensional construct. This paper confines the discussion to subjective wellbeing (SWB) and psychological wellbeing (PWB).

3.1 Subjective wellbeing (SWB)

SWB contains both the affective and cognitive components. The affective component comprises positive and negative affects, whereas, the cognitive aspect deals with an individual's evaluation of his/her overall life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener & Suh, 1999).Individuals with SWB reported high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect and high satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive, judgmental process (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). It is important to measure the perception of quality of life based on their global judgment but not on a specific domain (Diener, 1984).

3.2 Psychological wellbeing (PWB)

Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2001) argued that the tradition of PWB was influenced by formulations of human development and existential challenges of life. In contrast with SWB, there were six core dimensions of PWB: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life and Self Acceptance which have been highlighted by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Individuals who receive high scores in each item of PWB will portray contrasting attributes as shown in Table 2.

2

Table 2
Dimensions of Psychological Wellbeing

No	Dimensions of PWB	Attributes
1.	Self -Acceptance	High scorer: possess a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life Low scorer: feel dissatisfied with self, is disappointed with what has occurred in past life, is troubled about certain personal qualities, wishes to be different than what he or she is.
No	Dimensions of PWB	Attributes
2.	Positive Relations with Others	High scorer: has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take human relationships. Low scorer: has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.
3.	Autonomy	High scorer: is self-determining and independent, able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways, regulates behaviour from within, evaluates self by personal standards. Low scorer: is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others, relies on judgments of others to make important decisions, conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.
4.	Environmental Mastery	High scorer: has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment, controls complex array of external activities, makes effective use of surrounding opportunities, able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values. Low scorer: has difficulty managing everyday affairs, feel unable to change or improve surrounding context, is unaware of surrounding opportunities, lack sense of control over external world.
5.	Purpose in Life	High scorer: has goals in life and a sense of directedness, feels there is meaning to present and past life, holds beliefs that give life purpose, has aims and objectives for living. Low scorer: lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose in past life; has no outlooks or beliefs that give life meaning.
6.	Personal Growth	High scorer: has a feeling development, sees self as growing and expanding, is open to new experiences, has sense of realizing his or her potential, sees improvement in self and behaviour over time, is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness. Low scorer: has a sense of personal stagnation, lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time, feels bored and uninterested with life, feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviours.

Source: Ryff and Keyes (1995) p. 727

4. Theory related work family conflict

Goode (1960) proposed the scarcity model to explain the effect of engaging in multiple roles by which individuals who gave commitment and conformity to one role would reduce the time and energy to perform another role. Moreover, individuals with multiple roles who attempt to meet all responsibilities will most likely to experience role strain and conflict. For instance, being a very dedicated and committed employee, a married woman with children might experience conflicts of roles and overload.

Grant-Vallone and Donaldson (2001) stated that role theory was a useful theoretical framework to understand the balance of multiple roles played by men and women in their daily life. The scarcity model hypothesis, which suggested that each individual has a fixed amount of time and energy, has been used extensively in work and family research (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Indeed, previous studies highlighted the evidence of multiple roles creating conflicts that have a severe impact on employee wellbeing (Alpert & Culbertson, 1987; Frone, et al., 1992).

5. An overview of work family conflict

Sauter, Murphy, and Hurrell's study (as cited in Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999) stated that work family conflict has been recognized as one of the most important workplace stressors by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Canada. Moreover, other international studies (Siu, Spector, L.Cooper, & Lu, 2005; Spector, et al., 2004) found that work family stressors have a relationship with job satisfaction and wellbeing, and unbalanced work family relationships were a severe work stressor that needed more attention by modern societies.

Increasing concern about work family conflict is not limited to western researchers. The changing in demographic patterns showed that more non Western women joined the workforce, thus, investigating work family conflict was an essential issue and gained increased attention (Ahmad, 1996; Noor, 2004).

Bardoel, Cieri, and Santos (2008), in their review of work life studies in Australia and New Zealand, found that the majority of the studies focus on women. It was due to historical conceptualization that the work life balance was a women's issue. However, Noor (2002) suggested that it was necessary to study both genders, since work family conflict was an issue concerning both men and women. It also affects all types of employees regardless of gender, ethnicity, marital and parental status (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

Hill (2005) stated that the experience of work family conflict by working fathers has rarely been investigated by work family researchers. Although several studies found that women have more work family conflict compared to men (Frone, et al., 1992; Williams & Alliger, 1994), there was a surprising finding of higher work family conflict for men compared to women reported by Parasuraman and Simmers (2001).On the other hand, Duxbury and Higgins (1991) found that work family conflict similarly affected both men and women. Kinnunen and Mauno's (1998) study also reported no significant differences of gender experiencing work family conflict among Finnish employees.

6. Exploratory studies on work family conflict and its outcomes

6.1. Individual outcomes

Various studies were consistent that individuals reported higher levels of work family conflict (WFC) compared to family work conflict (FWC) (O'Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2004). In addition, the combination of work and non work life is essential to accurately evaluate work related psychological wellbeing and has received increasing attention (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; O'Driscoll, et al., 2004). Indeed, work family conflict was found to be a longitudinal predictor of employee wellbeing and negative predictor of psychological wellbeing (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001) and significantly associated with higher rates of personal burnout, behavioural and cognitive stress symptoms (Fuß, Nübling, Hasselhorn, Schwappach, & A.Rieger, 2008).

Aryee (1992) examined the outcome of work family conflict among 354 professional women in Singapore. Three types of work family conflict: job-spouse, job-parent and job-homemaker were discussed. Although it was a moderate level for each type of conflict, the result supported the negative correlation between job-spouse and job-parent conflicts and life satisfaction. Aryee, Fields, and Luk (1999) also conducted a study among married Hong Kong employees. Their finding showed that the life satisfaction of the respondents is influenced by work family conflict. Job-parent conflict also negatively predicts the work quality of the respondents.

A study among 4228 women and 1043 men in Finland also reported that work family conflict was strongly related to problem drinking among respondents. Moreover, the results revealed that work family conflict was associated with heavy drinking among women (Ross, Lahelma, & Rahkonen, 2006).

In contrast with most of the work family conflict studies that focus on women (Ahmad, 1996; Aryee, 1992; Noor, 2002, 2004), Kinnunen, Vermulst, Gerris and Makikangas (2003) investigated full time employed fathers. They reported that, the Big Five personality types, especially emotionally stability and agreeableness, moderate the relationship between work family conflict and wellbeing (job exhaustion, marital satisfaction, quality of family climate and depression).

6.2. Organizational outcomes

Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, and Neal (1994) discussed the effects of occupying multiple roles among 9,573 employees in Portland, Oregon. The finding showed that employees, especially women with multiples responsibilities at home are associated with increased absenteeism and stress. They are likely to arrive late at the workplace, leave earlier and are frequently disrupted by family matters. Frone et al. (1997) supported the negative outcomes of work family conflict whereby family work conflict was negatively related with work performance.

Haar (2004) and Fuß, Nübling, Hasselhorn, Schwappach, and A.Rieger (2008) revealed that work family conflict was significantly correlated with the intention to leave among employees. In hierarchical regression analysis, both work family conflict and family work conflict were significantly associated with turnover intention, accounting for 22% and 8% of turnover intention variance respectively (Haar, 2004).

Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, Kutcher, Indoviro, and Rosner (2005) investigated work family conflict, work family culture and organizational citizenship behaviour among 203 teachers. The finding showed parents had greater work family conflict compared to non parent respondents and work family conflict predicted organizational citizenship behaviour among respondents.

4

7. Work family conflict studies in Malaysia

With the increased participation of women into the Malaysian workforce and also the growing number of dual career couples, research in the domain of work family conflict is of considerable importance.

Ahmad (1996) conducted the correlational study where the finding concluded that work family conflict was significantly related to the job satisfaction and life satisfaction of 82 married female researchers. However, it was not correlated with family satisfaction. The study also investigated the path analytic associations among work family conflict, job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction. Results revealed that work family conflict contributed 8% of the variance in job satisfaction but not in family satisfaction.

Other prominent work family conflict and wellbeing studies in Malaysia have been conducted by Noor (1999, 2002, 2006). In 1999, Noor investigated women's roles (work and family) and wellbeing (happiness and symptoms of distress): three hundred eighty staff from universities and organizations participated in the study. In her qualitative analysis a number of respondents reported as happy individuals with supportive spouses and children. However, some complained about not attaining support from husbands, such as with child care and house hold tasks. In her quantitative study, after controlling for demographic and personality variables, job autonomy predicted symptoms of distress, and both job autonomy and spouse support predicted happiness. Furthermore, happiness (26.4%) rather than distress (17.1%) accounted for well being measures.

Noor (2002) tested the direct effect of work family conflict on wellbeing, the moderating and mediating effects of locus of control on work family conflict and the wellbeing nexus. Three hundreds and ten women from universities, organizations, schools and business have participated in the study. The finding revealed that work family conflict was a significant predictor of wellbeing, i.e. negatively associated with job satisfaction and positively related with distress symptoms. The study also supported the direct, moderator and mediator variable of locus of control that has influenced the work family conflict and wellbeing relationship.

Noor (2006) proposed the determinants of women's wellbeing (symptoms of psychological distress, physical health and life satisfaction). Respondents in the study consisted of the Employees Providence Fund (EPF) and university staff, which made up a total of 389 employed women within the Klang Valley. The result showed that the determinants of wellbeing differed according to age groups. Among three groups, for women in the Group 1 i.e. 20-29 years old, the result showed that roles, conflict and personality (negative affectivity) were health predictors. For 30-39 year old women from Group 2, both roles and negative affectivity had direct effect on wellbeing and conflict, whereas, in Group 3 (40 years old and above) roles predicted conflict and health, and negative affectivity had direct effect on health only.

8. Measurement of work family conflict

There are several instruments that assess work family conflict (WFC) and family work conflict (FWC).

Netemeyer et al.'s (1996) measure tested both WFC and FWC in three separate samples (sample 1: 182 teachers and administrators; sample 2: 162 small business owners; sample 3: real estate sales person). Examples of WFC items were: "The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life" and "Due to work related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities", while, FWC items included, "I have to put off things at work because of demands on my time at home" and "My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime.

The scales showed adequate levels of internal consistency, dimensionality, and discriminant validity across three samples. Cronbach's alphas indicated internal consistency as .88 for 5 items of WFC and .86 for 5 items of FWC. Compared with previous studies, Netemeyer et al.'s (1996) scale showed to be stronger in the correlations with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job tension and life satisfaction that supported its potential predictive validity. Netemeyer et al. (1996) highlighted that there was a lack of sound measures pertaining to work family conflict: items were too lengthy; the measures ignored the distinctive concepts of work family conflict (WFC) and family work conflict (FWC), and items focused on the outcomes rather than the domain of WFC and FWC.

Gutek et al. (1991) viewed work family conflict as a component of work interferes with family (WIF) and family interferes with work (FIW). The measure has been conducted among 534 psychologists in the United States. Again replication of study has been applied among 209 senior managers. There were 4 items for each domain and examples of WIF items were, "After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do" and "My family/friends dislike how often I am preoccupied with my work while I am at home". FIW items consisted of the items such as "My personal demands are so great that it takes away from my work" and "My personal life takes up time that I'd like to spend at work".

Another instrument of work family conflict was The Work Family Conflict Scale which is derived from Kelloway et al. (1999). This scale contains 11 items for each domain of WIF and FIW. The scale distinguished items further into strain and time based conflicts. Two hundred thirty six respondents were involved in both time 1 and time 2 studies. Examples of WIF and FIW items were: "I do not listen to what people at home are saying because I am thinking about work"; "To meet the demands of my job, I have to limit the number of things I do with family members"; "Family demands make it difficult for me to have the work schedule I want", and "Events at home make me tense and irritable on the job".

9. Sources of support in work family relationship

9.1. Social Support

Brough and O'Driscoll (2005) found that the social support element receives increasing attention in work family conflict research. Previous studies show the direct effect of social support on work family conflict study: social support from family members, especially spouses, could lessen the detrimental outcomes of work family conflict (Voydanoff, 2002);family and colleagues support is an essential resource for alleviating interrole conflict.

Other studies found the moderating effects of social support on work family conflict, such as Matsui, Ohsawa and Onglatco (1995), who found the moderating effect of husband support on the relationship between parental demands and work family conflict. Similarly, Noor (1999) found that employed women reported that their spouse support leads to higher levels of happiness among them. The support comprises both attitudes towards wives' employment and participation in housework. Salami's study (2007) also highlighted the importance of social support in moderating the multiple role strain and psychological wellbeing nexus of 480 working mothers in Nigeria. Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Granrose (1992) found differences, in the role that spouse support plays, between men and women. Even though both received a similar level of support, women reported that their spouse support contributed significantly to their family satisfaction compared to men.

Matsui et al., (1995) investigated the buffering effects of husband support on work family conflict and stress nexus among Japanese women. Four descriptions measured in their study served as the index of husband support where higher scores indicated higher levels of support. For instance, respondents had to choose the response 1= not at all applicable, 5=highly applicable to the following items: "My husband agrees with me to work outside the home" and "My husband understands that I have to accomplish both work and family duties". Aryee et al., (1999) also measures the moderating influence of spousal support by asking the items such as "My spouse understands that I have to accomplish both work and family duties" and "If my job gets demanding, my spouse usually takes an extra household and/or childcare responsibilities".

On the other hand, there was no significance in the buffering effect of support on distress in a study (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1994). In this study, social support was not perceived as way to moderate the conflict and distress relationship. Evidence shows the significant relationship between family and colleagues supported and reduced strain, however, its role as a buffering effect was inconsistently and inconclusively demonstrated (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005).

9.2. Supervisor Support

Supervisor support is another form of support that plays a vital role in work family conflict besides the support from family members and colleagues. Among the supports that have been numerously discussed are emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental support (Nielson, Carlson, & Lankau, 2001). Furthermore, a supportive supervisor can easily understand unexpected employees family matters in the workplace such as a child or elderly parent becoming sick and cancellation of child care arrangement (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005). Giving the flexibility to the employees dealing with uncertain demands, leads to decreased conflict and strain (Kelloway, et al., 1999; Nielson, et al., 2001). Families and Work Institute (as cited in Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005) also found that friendly supportive technique is an important training for supervisors which is believed to increase employees' perception of organizational support and wellbeing.

10. Family friendly policy

Besides support from spouse and co workers, the introduction of family friendly policy in the workplace is a significant practice by the organization or employer. As the prominent employer, private sectors are encouraged to create a conducive working environment that considers the multiple roles and responsibilities of women (Malaysia, 2006). Among the recommended practices are flexible working arrangements like part time work, job sharing and teleworking. Rijswijk, Bekker, Rutte and Croon (2004) found that 160 part time workers in the Netherlands reported lower levels of work family interference. The result indicated that being part timers gave them more control over their work and decreased the likelihood of experiencing high levels of work family interference. Similarly, Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey, and Townsend (2007) claimed that the organizations which provided employees' with greater control, flexibilities, reasonable workload and supportive environment, employed good practices that promoted work life balance. Furthermore, the concept of the home office is another important effort that would encourage the participation of women in the workforce especially in small business (Malaysia, 2006).

The Employment Act 1955 which was amended in 1988, permitted women, especially housewives, to be employed in part time employment and at the same time, gave the flexibility for them to fulfil family responsibilities (Malaysia, 2001). In the public sector, effective from May 1998, women were given a maternity leave period which was up to 60 days and this benefit was allowed for a maximum of five children. Having the responsibility for young children (Hill, 2005) and at the same time needing to work created time conflict among the employees. Thus, the Malaysian Government offered tax deductions for employers who provided facilities, such as child care centres, near or at the workplace for their employees (Malaysia, 2001).

Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1986) also suggested that organizations could provide support services such as a childcare programme, problem solving and coping skills dealing with employees' stress. The results of Salami's study (2007) confirmed that an active problem solving coping strategy was one of the significant strategies that could be utilised by working mothers. Indeed, it moderated the multiple role strains and psychological wellbeing nexus.

11. Strengthening family institutions/Parenting@Work Programme

Malaysia (2006) has highlighted the importance and need to balance work and family responsibilities. One of the proposed programmes to be developed is the Parenting@Work Programme that aims to equip the employed parents in all government agencies with the skills to be resilient and able to work on the challenges in a competitive society.

It is meaningless to have the programme without the assessment of its effectiveness. More research on family related issues is important to be undertaken. Results of research activities will contribute to the formulation of policies or intervention that strengthens the family institution. Family development indicators also need to be created that are able to measure the effectiveness of the programme on family wellbeing (Malaysia, 2006).

12. Conclusion

Work family conflict is a salient issue that needs to be rectified due to its negative outcomes such as absenteeism, stress and job dissatisfaction that are detrimental to both employees and the organization. It is evident that as employees experience conflict, they need continuous support from their family and a supportive working culture which could use proactive measures to promote the work family balance across employees. In addition, the suggestion to explore the study from multiple perspectives such as partners, spouse and children (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001) was significant to better understand individuals' life comprising work and family. Recent policy implementation, in particular in Malaysia, reflects the increased interest and attention focused on family work conflict and its negative impact on work. Further research on this topic, especially in the context of fast changing employment conditions in the South East Asian Regions, would be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives.

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