Family Supportive Work Variables, Work-Family Conflict And Satisfaction

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of family supportive work variables (family friendly benefits, supervisory support, family supportive organization perceptions) on work family conflict and satisfaction with work family. Data were collected from 202 married working couples with a structured questionnaire. Significant positive correlations were found between marital and work satisfaction, family friendly benefits and marital satisfaction, supervisory support and work satisfaction, and family supportive organization perceptions and supervisory support. A significant negative correlation was found between work family conflict and work satisfaction. A significant main effect of family friendly benefits and supervisory support on work satisfaction was found. However, there were no significant interaction effects.

Keywords: work family conflict, satisfaction, supervisor support, organization support

Introduction

The last two decades have been characterized by economic and social changes across the world. One of the most striking change is in the world of work and composition of families. The move towards global competition has increased pressure on organizations and employees to be more flexible and responsive to change. In developed countries, there has been an increase in the proportion of employees working long hours (Kodz, Davis, Sheppard, Rick, Strebler, Bates, Cummings, Meager, Anxo, Gineste & Trinezek, 2002), which is often attributed to increased workload, job insecurity, and long hours culture resulting in high levels of stress and related illness. These changes have introduced new challenges for most families (Davidson & Burke, 2004) as both males and female employees have substantial household responsibilities in addition to their work responsibilities (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998). Dual-earner couples have become the norm rather than the exception. Rosin (1990) defines dual-career status as a household where both spouses hold jobs that are personally salient, have a developmental sequence and require a high degree of commitment. One consequence of trying to juggle work and family obligations and responsibility is the experience of work family conflict. Role theory is one of the most popular theoretical framework used by researchers to explain work family conflict. Role theory predicts that multiple life roles result in inter-role conflict as individuals experience difficulty performing each role successfully because of incompatible role pressures from work and family ((Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964,). The direction of the conflict-between work and family is inherently bidirectional (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991) that is work may conflict with family domain and family may conflict with work domain.

Research on the consequences of work-family conflict suggest that high levels of such conflict are related to dysfunctional outcomes for individuals and organizations. At the individual level, high work-family conflict levels are related to lower level of job satisfaction, life, marital and family satisfaction and increased distress (Allen, Hurst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Boles, Johnston & Hair, 1997; Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997; Higgins, Duxbury & Irving, 1992; Kirinunen & Mauno, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). At the organizational level, high levels of work-family conflict is found to be related to absenteeism (Barling, MacEwen, Kelloway, & Higginbottom, 1994; Goff et al., 1990; Hepburn & Barling, 1996; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Thomas & Gansters), intentions to leave work (Aryee, 1992), low organizational commitment and job performance (Allen, et al., 2000), and burnout (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). From a systems perspective, recent work by Westham (2001)
shows that work family conflict can produce “crossover effects” of stress and strain across members of a couple.

Another consequence of changes in the nature of work and family is individuals satisfaction with their work and family. The global environment in which organizations operate today (completion, long hours, downsizing) have important repercussions for employee satisfaction which in turn affects commitment, turnover intentions, motivation, performance and health. According to Sparrow (2000), employees now work in an environment characterized by a permanent flux. They face fear of job loss and unemployment, low wages, long hours, demanding work loads and a diminishing sense on control over work (Grosswald, Ragland, & Fisher, 2001). Although work and family satisfaction can be determined by a multitude of factors, it is chosen as an outcome variable because of its relationship with work family conflict. Given the impact of work-family conflict on an individual’s functioning, empirical research testing models of the work-family interface have proliferated in recent years. One common feature of these models is the inclusion of aspects of satisfaction of work and family (Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; Coverman, 1989; Frone et al., 1992; Gvelzow, Bird & Koball, 1991; Higgins et al, 1992; Kopelman, Greenhans & Connolly, 1983; Rice et al, 1992; Saxena, Ansari, & Shankar 1995). In the context of work and family, satisfaction as a variable has received maximal consideration. Saxena et al (1995) define satisfaction as “a subjective experience toward some aspect of life that is manifested in the individual’s attitudes and behaviour” (p 39). It is an attitude which an individual builds after evaluating the situation around his/her expectations. While Mottaz (1986) and Vroom (1964) support the global nature of satisfaction, others talk of various facets in one’s life, the sum total of which gives an overall satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Near, Smith, Rice, & Hunt, 1983). Past research indicates a negative relationship between work-family conflict and satisfaction with either work or family (Bedeian et al, 1988; Coverman, 1989; Jones and Butler, 1980; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Rice et al, 1992; Pleck, Staines & Lang 1980; Saxena et al, 1995; Staines & O’Conner, 1980). Tiedje et al (1990) found that women who are low on such conflict, experience greater satisfaction from their respective work and family roles. The impact of work family conflict and satisfaction on aspects of organizational functioning have been well documented. Organizations strive to avoid the negative outcomes of both work family conflict and satisfaction and have consequently implemented programs and policies designed to help accommodate the needs of today’s workforce (Lobel & Kossek, 1996). These policies are commonly referred to as “family friendly benefits and include interventions such as flexible work schedules, child care facilities, leaves of absences (Allen, 2001). These benefits are aimed at helping both the individual and the organization. At the individual level, these benefits facilitate the ability of the employees to fulfill their family responsibility. At the organizational level, they help organizations maintain their competitive advantage by having a motivated, committed and performing workforce. In line with this, the first aim of this study is to examine the effect of family friendly benefits on employees experience of work family conflict and work and family satisfaction. Bourg and Segal (1999) noted that family friendly benefits can serve as a way for organizations to inform employees and family members that the family is not viewed as competition. Despite the obvious advantages of family friendly benefits such as increased competition, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005), their availability alone does not address fundamental aspects of the organization that can inhibit employees from balancing work and family. Research suggests that family friendly benefits do not affect norms and values that discourage employees from using benefits such as lack of informal support from supervisors (Kofodimos, 1995; Shellenbarger, 1992). Additionally, employees using these benefits may be perceived as less committed to the organization (Allen & Russel, 1999; Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). Poelmans (2001) postulates that limited studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of family friendly benefits in reducing work family conflict and the apparent problem seems to be with the transfer of scientific findings, therefore raising the question as to whether the problem lies in the mentality and perceptions of the practitioner. We argue that, Family friendly benefits will have the desired positive effect only if supervisors are perceived to be supportive. The role of supportive supervisors/managers in positive outcomes for family friendly benefits was confirmed by Thompson and Prottas (2006). Following this, the second
aim of this study was to examine the relationship of supportive supervisors and work family conflict and satisfaction. According to Allen (2001), availability of family friendly benefits alone does not address fundamental aspects important aspects of organizational functioning. Lobel and Kossek (1996) aver that offering family friendly benefits does not go far enough to address employee concerns unless they are accompanied by a change in organizational norms and values regarding the interaction between work and family life. Additionally, according to McPherson 92006), manager attitude is a key factor determining whether work family policies can be implemented. This finding supports the fact that the ability to benefit from family friendly benefits may relate to the relationship one has with an immediate manager or supervisor. Anecdotally evidence suggests that the use of family friendly benefits is not encouraged by line management and that employees worry that taking advantage of these benefits will jeopardize their career (Fierman, 1994; Maitland, 1998; Morris, 1997). Thus the availability of family friendly benefits and supportive supervisor may not have the desired effect if employees do not perceive the organization to be supportive to their efforts to successfully balance their work and family lives. The third aim of this study was to examine the relationship between family supportive organization perceptions and work family conflict and satisfaction with work and family. Thomas and Ganster (1995) posed that family supportive work environments were composed of two components: family supportive policies and family supportive supervisors. Thompson, Beavais and Lyness (1999) developed a measure designed to assess work family culture- identified by three factors. However, in line with Allen (2001), in this study we look at perceptions of supervisor support as separate from perceptions of organization support. An employee may perceive his supervisor as family supportive despite perceiving the organization as low on such support and vice versa. In addition to the role theory, Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) suggested that the conservation of resources model as a theoretical framework to understanding the work family literature. As suggested by Allen (2001), “it seems reasonable to view a family supportive work environment as a coping resource for individuals to deal with balancing work and non-work roles. Family supportive benefits, supervisors, and the overall work environment should serve as employees resources” (p. 417).

Method
Participants
Participants consisted of 101 dual-earner married couples living together at the time of data collection. The average age of the sample was 35 years. More than two third had a two children family with the youngest child having a mean age of 7.98 years. The couples had, on an average, 11.9 years of service.

Measures
A self-administered questionnaire in English consisting of various scales and measures was used in this study.

Work-family conflict
The 10 - item scale developed by Netmeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996) was used to measure work-family conflict and family work conflict. Sample items include “The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life” and “Family related strain interferes with my ability to perform related duties”. The response scale was a 5 – point, Likert scale from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). Alpha value for the scale was .85.

Work and Martial Satisfaction
Work satisfaction was measured with a 5 – item scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990). Sample item includes” I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career”. Alpha value for the scale was .82. Family satisfaction was assessed with a 5 – item Satisfaction with Life scale of Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). Sample item includes” I am satisfied with my marital life”. One item was dropped from the analysis to enhance reliability value. Alpha value for the scale was .85. For both scales, responses were assessed on a 5 – point scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree).
Supervisory Support
Supervisory support was measured with the 8 items scale of Eisenberger et al (2002). Sample items include, “my supervisor cares about my opinion” and “my supervisor is willing to help when I need a special favor”. Responses were made on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated more favorable perceptions. Alpha value for the scale was .62.

Family Supportive Organization Perceptions
The 14-item version of Allen’s (2001) measure was used to determine participant’s perceptions of their organization. Sample items include “Employees are given ample opportunity to perform both their job and their personal responsibilities well” and “Expressing involvement and interest in non-work matters is viewed as healthy”. Responses were made on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated more favorable perceptions. Alpha value for the scale was .65.

Family-Friendly Benefits
Family-supportive benefits were measured by giving participants a list of 9 benefits commonly offered by organizations. These include: flexible work time, flexibility in terms of place of work, compressed work week, telecommuting, part time work arrangements, on site child care, paid maternity leave, paid paternity leave, elderly care). Participants were asked to tick benefits offered by their organization. Benefits available were coded as 1 and those not available were coded as 0. A total benefit score was computed by summing the number of benefits ticked by the participants. A higher score indicated greater number of benefits.

Results
Independent samples T-test showed significant gender differences in only experience of work family conflict with males reporting more work family conflict: $t (df=200)= -1.20; p.04$). To investigate the relationship between the study variables a correlation analysis was performed. Results are presented in Table 1. Supervisory support was significantly and positively correlated with work satisfaction and negatively correlated with work family conflict. Work and family satisfaction were positively correlated. Family friendly benefits were positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Family supportive organization perceptions were also positively correlated with supervisory support.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Family Friendly benefits</td>
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<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisory support</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family supportive organization perceptions</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.17*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>17.7</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>3.16</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>2.26</td>
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N= 202,   *p<.05 (2 tailed) **p<.01(2 tailed).

Since correlations only indicate the existence and strength of relationships between variables, regression analysis was performed, after checking for collinearity to investigate the causal relationship between
work related variables and work family conflict and satisfaction. A significant main effect of family friendly benefits and supportive supervisor on work satisfaction was found. The predictors explained .07% of variance: R=.26; R Square=.07; Adjusted R Square=.04 (F 2,195 = 2.97 , p<.01). Interaction effects between predictors variables and outcomes were not significant.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Predictors</th>
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<th>Work Satisfaction t</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Supervisor Support</td>
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Discussions

The aim of this study was to look at the effects of work related work variable on work family conflict and satisfaction with work and family. The work variables were family friendly variable, supervisor support and family supportive organization perceptions. Supervisory support was significantly and negatively correlated with work family conflict. Most research gives strong evidence for a negative relationship between supervisor support and work family support (Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Thompson & Prottas, 2005; Thompson, Brough & Schmidt, 2006). This can be explained using the conservation of resources model which posits that individuals tend to seek and maintain useful resources. When such resources are available, the degree of stress experienced is reduced thereby reducing work family conflict. The theory postulates that subordinates who receive adequate support are more prone to reach a balance between their work and family obligations and therefore experience less work family conflict (Jansen, Kant, Kristen & Nijhuis, 2003). Supportive supervisors are in this sense a resource which individuals use to reduce their experience of work family conflict. Supervisor support also correlated positively with work satisfaction and was also a predictor of the same. Employees who do not receive proper support to deal with work family issues are more susceptible to job stress, family distress, low job performance and turnover intentions (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Supportive supervisors mitigate the negative work outcomes and facilitate job satisfaction and commitment. Besides being part of the work setting, supervisors also facilitate the development of their staff’s social network, which in turn provide them with positive experiences, feelings of self worth and sense of stability and recognition (Cohen & Wills, 1985). As expected work and marital/family satisfaction were positively correlated. The spillover hypothesis (Staines, 1980; Sumer & Knoght, 2001) can account for this relationship as it posits that work flows into family and vice versa, hence feelings in one sphere will permeate into the other sphere (Arthur & Cook, 2003).

Family friendly benefits were positively related to marital/family satisfaction but were a predictor of only work satisfaction. The reason for this could be instrumental in nature. Although employees may not use the benefits, by knowing these benefits are available they know that if they do need to use these services they can. The mere act of providing family friendly benefits is beneficial to employees. Lastly, family supportive organization perceptions were positively related to supervisor support. It is possible that respondents do not disentangle supervisor support from organizational support.

In conclusion, this study suggests that work related variables such as, family friendly benefits and supervisory support influence individuals marital and work satisfaction. Contrary to expectations, family supportive organization perceptions related only to supervisory support. It is possible that supervisor support was confounded with global organization perceptions. Future research should focus on specific family friendly benefits and their effect on work family conflict and aspects of satisfaction.
References

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