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ARE ORGANIZATIONS SHOOTING THEMSELVES IN THE FOOT?

WORKPLACE CONTRIBUTORS TO FAMILY-TO-WORK CONFLICT

T. ALEXANDRA BEAUREGARD

London School of Economics

Abstract

Purpose - To examine 1) the direct effects of work domain variables on family-to-work conflict (FWC), beyond their indirect effects via the mediating variable of work-to-family conflict (WFC), and 2) sex differences in the effects of work role expectations and supervisor support on FWC.

Methodology/Approach - A survey was conducted among 208 UK public sector employees. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis tested main and moderating effects of work domain variables and sex on FWC. To test for mediation, the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used.

Findings - Work domain variables had a significant effect on FWC above and beyond the effects of family domain variables, and independent of WFC. The relationship between work role expectations and FWC was found to be significantly stronger for men than for women.

Research limitations/implications - The cross-sectional design of the study does not permit firm conclusions regarding causality, and the results may be influenced by common method bias.

Practical implications - In the face of evidence that organizations are causing the very phenomenon that hurts them, the responsibility to assist employees with reducing FWC is enhanced. Particularly for men, management of organizational expectations to work long hours and prioritize work over family is an area in which employers can and should play a key role if gender equity with regard to organizational work-family climate is to be established.

Originality/Value - This study indicates that organizational work demands may have more influence over the degree to which employees' family lives interfere with their work than has previously been assumed, especially for men.

Article type: Research paper

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With the increase in dual-income families and employed single parents, conflict between work and family has reached a crisis. Most research on work-family conflict has investigated the extent to which work interferes with family life (Thompson & Beauvais, 2000). Organizations, however, may be more interested in the extent to which family interferes with work, and how this process occurs. It has become increasingly clear that each direction of conflict (work-to-family and family-to-work) may be predicted by different variables (Fu & Shaffer, 2001) and may also result in dissimilar outcomes (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2001). The formulation of workplace policies to address effects of family-to-work conflict such as absenteeism, intention to turnover, and job satisfaction (see Eby et al., 2005 for a review) may be more effective if the antecedents of such conflict are better understood.

This study has two objectives. First, it seeks to explore the possibility that work role pressures increase employees' perceptions that family role pressures are interfering with their work – a perspective that has not yet been researched. Secondly, it aims to identify any sex differences in the hypothesized relationship between work role pressures and family-to-work conflict. As family-to-work conflict can be a major problem for organizations (Daycare Trust, 2002), it is important to know if organizations are helping to create the problem themselves – if they are contributing directly to the extent to which their employees' personal lives are interfering with the performance of their jobs. This knowledge may also have implications for how employees experiencing family-to-work conflict are perceived by others in the organization. Work-family options offered by organizations to assist those whose personal lives are interfering with their work are often construed by management as favours (Lewis, Kagan, & Heaton, 2000), granted to employees whose lifestyle choices impinge upon their productivity. As such, these options are widely viewed by both employers and employees as a cost to the organization (Lewis, 1997), and their use is often associated with job penalties

such as lower performance appraisals and career limitations (Raabe, 1996). The knowledge that organizations are contributing directly to the extent to which their employees' personal lives interfere with the performance of their jobs could force a change in attitudes toward work-family options and those who use them; responsibility for causing a problem implies responsibility for solving it, and organizational work-family options may come to be seen as entitlements for employees whose family-to-work conflict is at least partially attributable to their employers.

Previous empirical results suggest that there are a number of differences in the predictors of work-family conflict for men and women. For example, a 1998 study by Kinnunen and Mauno in which men and women were studied separately showed that levels of job insecurity and supervisor support were predictive of work-to-family conflict for women, but not for men. In order to investigate sex differences more thoroughly, it has been recommended that men and women be studied separately (Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Reilly, 1995), but most research to date neglects to differentiate between the sexes. Knowledge of sex differences in antecedents to work-family conflict has obvious implications for efforts to prevent or reduce conflict. If there are different causes of men's and women's work-family conflict, then different approaches to resolving that conflict may be necessary in order for individual coping techniques or organizational family-friendly policies to be effective.

Antecedents of Family-to-Work Conflict

Work-family conflict research is predicated upon the notion of spillover, in which attitudes, behaviours, or emotions from one domain diffuse to the other (Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980), and upon role theory, which suggests that conflict, or psychological tension, occurs when individuals engage in multiple roles that are incompatible (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Hence, family-to-work conflict is said to arise when responsibilities associated with the family role

hinder an individual's performance at work. For example, worrying about a sick child may distract a parent on the job and reduce his or her efficiency (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994).

A number of demographic and situational characteristics have been investigated over the years as possible determinants of family-to-work conflict. Established antecedents are caregiving responsibilities, whether for dependent children (Burke & Greenglass, 1999) or elderly relatives (Gignac, Kelloway, & Gottlieb, 1996); the number of hours devoted to household work (Fu & Shaffer, 2001); and family-related stressors such as parental workload and the misbehaviour of one's children (Vinokur, Pierce, & Buck, 1999). Greater psychological involvement in the family role has also been found to predict higher levels of family-to-work conflict (Adams, King, & King, 1996), as have lower levels of spousal support (Burke & Greenglass, 1999).

The work-family literature has traditionally assumed that variables associated with the family domain (e.g., childcare, household work) predict family-to-work conflict, and that work domain variables (e.g., hours worked weekly, job autonomy) predict work-to-family conflict. When both types of conflict are measured, these are the hypotheses that are usually tested (e.g., Williams & Alliger, 1994; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Much of the existing research on both work and family domain variables, however, has used composite, non-directional measures of work-family conflict. These non-directional measures have incorporated items measuring both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict in one scale. Studies using these measures cannot determine, therefore, whether antecedent variables are predicting work-to-family conflict, or family-to-work conflict.

Any influence of work domain variables on family-to-work conflict has been assumed to occur through the mediating effects of work-to-family conflict. If work-related problems begin to interfere with the completion of personal or family-related obligations, these

unfulfilled home obligations will begin to interfere with day-to-day functioning at work, and vice versa (Frone et al., 1992).

An alternative potential relationship is that work role pressures may increase employees' perception of family role pressures interfering with their performance at work. If stressors originating in one domain create or increase the salience of stressors in another domain, a perspective accounted for by spillover theory and role theory, work domain variables may contribute directly to family-to-work conflict.

This opposite-domain perspective has been under-researched. A small number of studies have found direct links between elements of the work domain and family-to-work conflict, indicating that mediation via work-to-family conflict is not the only way in which work variables contribute to employees' family-to-work conflict. For example, research by Fox and Dwyer (1999) has shown that two work domain variables, job involvement and time spent on work activities, can moderate the relationship between family domain variables and family-to-work conflict. This suggests that work domain variables may play a greater role in contributing to family-to-work conflict than has previously been supposed, and invites further research.

Work Domain Variables

Many features of the work environment have been positively linked to work-to-family conflict, or to non-directional measures of work-family conflict. Five of these with the unique potential to also predict family-to-work conflict were chosen for investigation in this study. These are hours worked, work role expectations, control over work hours, work stressors, and supervisor support regarding work-family issues.

Hours Worked

The number of hours spent weekly in work activities has been shown to have a positive relationship with work-to-family conflict (Fu & Shaffer, 2001). It is plain to see that

more time spent in the work domain inevitably results in less time available at home, rendering more difficult the completion of responsibilities associated with the family role. However, increased time spent at work also has the potential for increased family-to-work conflict. The more time an individual spends in the work domain, the more opportunities are created for family responsibilities to intrude. Family demands can manifest at any time of day or night. An employee who works 35 hours a week and therefore spends more time in the family domain is less likely to have to deal with family obligations during working hours, thus experiencing family-to-work conflict, than is an employee working 60-hour weeks.

Work Role Expectations

Expectations held by superiors and co-workers for an employee to prioritize the work role by assuming increased job-related responsibilities and extending performance of the work role beyond normal working hours have also been shown to contribute to work-to-family conflict (Major, Klein, & Ehrhart, 2002). The presence of heightened work role expectations may also play a direct role in contributing to family-to-work conflict. Pressure from colleagues and superiors to assign primacy to the work role may render any intrusions from the home domain more salient; the more an employee perceives that his or her manager expects him or her to give precedence to his or her job, the more aware he or she might be of and the more significance he or she may ascribe to any family-related conflict with work, such as preoccupation with the academic performance of a child, or the task of arranging emergency eldercare provision for a parent. Furthermore, expectations of an employee to extend the hours spent in the work domain provides increased opportunities for family responsibilities to encroach upon working time, as discussed earlier.

Work Stressors

Work role stressors such as overload and conflict are known to create strain in the work domain that spills over into the family domain (Fu & Shaffer, 2001). This process

appears to operate straightforwardly in one direction; however, it has been suggested that exposure to strain may result in an increased vulnerability to additional stressors (Ursano, Grieger, & McCarroll, 1996), and it is therefore possible that increased strain in one domain (e.g., work) may increase the salience of interference arising from another domain (e.g., family-to-work conflict). Research by Hughes, Galinsky and Morris (1992) supports this proposition by finding that work pressures and work-related insecurity predicted employees' tendency to attribute to their job any difficulties they were experiencing in fulfilling their family role.

Hypothesis 1: Hours worked weekly, work role expectations, and work stressors will be positively and directly related to family-to-work conflict.

Control over Work Hours

Control over the scheduling of one's work hours has been linked to lower perceptions of non-directional work-family conflict (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). It is safe to assume that autonomy over work hours can contribute directly to perceptions of work-to-family conflict; an employee who can take two hours off work one afternoon to drive an elderly relative to a dental appointment is bound to perceive less conflict from work with his or her family responsibilities than would an employee with a fixed work schedule.

However, Adams and Jex (2002) found that perceived control over time predicts lower levels of family-to-work conflict. This suggests that autonomy over work hours may also directly affect an employee's perceptions of family-to-work conflict, by enabling an individual to schedule his or her tasks in such a way as to accommodate personal or family obligations without work-related repercussions. For example, an employee who can choose to take a few hours off work and make them up later in the day or week would not experience the same degree of conflict from family to work as would an employee not similarly empowered should they both be called upon to accompany an elderly parent to a medical

appointment during working hours. The first employee could return to work, stay late, and accomplish work tasks as usual, while the second might be forced to take holiday or sick leave, fall behind on his or her duties, and possibly acquire a reputation for unreliability amongst his or her coworkers.

Supervisor Support

The presence of supervisors who are supportive of an employee's work-family issues has been associated with lower levels of work-to-family conflict (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002). Supervisor support can be both emotional, involving the provision of sympathy and reassurance, and instrumental, involving practical assistance such as changing work or leave schedules to accommodate an employee's family demands. Such support undoubtedly has the potential to reduce work-to-family conflict, but may also directly influence employees' perceptions of family life interfering with work. An employee who cannot find emergency childcare would be forced to stay home with that child and miss a day of work in the absence of a supportive supervisor permitting him or her to bring the child to the workplace, or to work from home that day. Another potential explanation for the relationship is that offering sympathy or encouragement to employees with family responsibilities may lessen emotional strain and thereby diminish the experience of family-to-work conflict.

Hypothesis 2: Control over work hours and supervisor support will be negatively and directly related to family-to-work conflict.

Sex Interactions

The roles of sex and gender in work-family conflict are not well established, despite a number of studies incorporating sex as either a direct or a moderating influence on the experience of conflict between work and family. The rational model of work-family conflict predicts that men should experience more work-to-family conflict than women, because men

tend to spend more time in work activities than women (Jacobs & Gerson, 2000). By the same token, women are likely to experience more family-to-work conflict than men, because women take primary responsibility for the family and thus spend more time in family activities (Scott, 2001).

Empirical findings have not been altogether supportive of this model. In the majority of studies examining sex, women have been shown to experience higher levels of both work-to-family conflict (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991) and family-to-work conflict (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). This may be due to the fact that women have been found to spend more total hours engaged in work and family activities than do men (Duxbury et al., 1994), creating more opportunities for work and family activities to overlap.

A handful of studies have shown sex to moderate the links between various work and family variables and non-directional measures of work-family conflict. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) found that work involvement and family conflict were stronger predictors of work-family conflict for women than for men, and that family involvement and work expectations were stronger predictors of work-family conflict for men than for women. Having responsibility for childcare (Buffardi, Smith, O'Brien, & Erdwins, 1999) and eldercare (Neal, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Starrels, 1997) were also found to predict work-family conflict more strongly for women than for men. Because these studies used non-directional measures of work-family conflict, however, knowledge of how sex affects specifically family-to-work conflict is constrained.

Traditional gender role expectations and norms regarding employment and help-seeking behaviour have resulted in the association of social support with women, and the association of work role expectations with men. These gender associations, explored in the following section, suggest that the predictive power of each antecedent for family-to-work conflict may vary between the sexes.

Sex x Work Role Expectations

Due to the normative nature of gender roles, an individual whose behaviour is inconsistent with others' gender role expectations is often subject to negative judgments from others (Mueller & Yoder, 1997). Conflict between work and family is held to be strongest when there are penalties, such as negative judgments, for non-compliance with role expectations in either domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Because men are subject to social expectations that they take on a "breadwinner" role that involves paid employment but little participation in family life, they have traditionally experienced stronger penalties than women for their efforts to accommodate family responsibilities, and for their failure to comply with work-role demands.

Men are often reluctant to use organization-sponsored work-family programs because they are "afraid of retribution from their employers if they deviate from the traditional male norm" (Powell, 1997: 172). Research by Allen and Russell (1999) found that men who took parental leave of absence were less likely to be recommended for organizational rewards than were men who did not take leave. Work role expectations may therefore wield greater influence over family-to-work conflict for men than for women.

> Hypothesis 3: Sex will moderate the relationship between work role expectations and family-to-work conflict in such a way that the relationship will be stronger for men than for women.

Sex x Supervisor Support

The ability of supervisor support to influence family-to-work conflict may depend on the employee's ability to both seek out and accept such support. Employees who are disinclined to ask for support from their superiors, or who are not comfortable receiving support, may experience less subsequent reduction in family-to-work conflict. These employees may be more likely to be men.

The traditional male gender role emphasizes independence and invulnerability; help-seeking behaviour can sometimes be construed as admitting weakness (Helgeson, 2005). Men may therefore be reluctant to seek support from others (Butler, Giordano, & Neren, 1985). Supervisors may also perceive that men have less need for work-family related support than do women. Work-family conflict is commonly perceived as a women's issue (Powell, 1997), and research has found that both men and women tend to assume that men do not want or need social support (Barbee et al., 1993). In a study conducted across five European countries, men had a much lower sense of entitlement than women to make use of organizational supports for balancing work and family responsibilities (Lewis & Smithson, 2001). This diminished sense of entitlement may hinder the effects of supervisor support in reducing conflict for men. In contrast, women have been found to enjoy larger support networks and a greater number of individual sources of support than men, and both the quantity and quality of social support have been found to exert a greater impact on the well-being of women compared to men (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987).

Hypothesis 4: Sex will moderate the relationship between supervisor support and family-to-work conflict in such a way that the relationship will be stronger for women than for men.

Method

Sample

Participants in this study were employees of a local authority in the south of England. Surveys were distributed to 1,000 employees composing a representative sample of job grade classifications in the organization. Six hundred and fifty-four surveys were returned, for a response rate of 65%. Of these, 244 respondents were parents of children under age 17 (with an average of nearly 2 children each). These 244 respondents formed the participant base for this study, as this sub-sample is uniquely affected by the variables under investigation. Thirty-

six surveys were excluded from the final analyses due to missing responses, yielding an effective sample size of 208.

The majority of respondents (56%) were women. Average age was just over 41 years, and 85% of respondents were either married or living with a partner. Just over 14% of respondents had caregiving responsibilities for elderly adult dependants in addition to those for their children.

Measures

Family-to-work conflict was measured using four items developed by Burley (1989, cited in Gutek et al., 1991) and one item developed by Bohen and Viveros-Long (1981). Items assessed the extent to which respondents experienced conflict from the family to the work domain (e.g., "My personal life takes up time that I'd like to spend at work"; "I'm often tired at work because of the things I have to do at home"). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with such statements on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Sex was assessed by means of a dummy variable, coded 0 for male and 1 for female.

Family role expectations were measured using a four-item scale developed by Cooke and Rousseau (1984). Items assessed the degree to which respondents agreed that their friends and families expected them to prioritize family over work. The same five-point response scale as that used for the dependent variable was employed. Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Parental strain was measured using two items developed by Pearlin and Schooler (1978). Items assessed the degree to which children's behaviour was a source of concern to respondents. The same five-point Likert response scale was used. The reliability alpha was .67.

Control over childcare was measured using a six-item scale developed by Thomas and Ganster (1995), assessing the degree of choice respondents had in relation to the quality, cost

and scheduling of childcare arrangements. Participants were asked to indicate the amount of choice available to them in relation to each item using a five-point scale ranging from “hardly any” = 1 to “a lot” = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

Work role expectations were measured using a four-item scale developed by Cooke and Rousseau (1984). Items assessed the degree to which respondents agreed that their colleagues and supervisors expected them to prioritize work over family. Respondents answered each item using a five-point response scale ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

Supervisor support was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Shinn, Wong, Simko, & Ortiz-Torres, (1989). The scale items assess the degree to which respondents’ supervisors had displayed emotional and practical expressions of support. The same five-point Likert response scale was used. Reliability alphas were .73 for emotional support and .86 for instrumental support.

Work stressors were measured with three items assessing role overload (i.e., having too much to do in a given amount of time) developed by Beehr, Walsh and Taber (1976) and Rizzo, House and Lirtzman’s (1970) five-item scale assessing role conflict. The same five-point Likert response scale was used. Cronbach’s alpha was .67.

Work-to-family conflict was measured using four items developed by Kopelman , Greenhaus, & Connolly (1983), and two items developed by Bohen and Viveros-Long (1981). Items assessed the extent to which respondents experienced conflict from the work to the family domain (e.g., “My work takes up time that I’d like to spend with family/friends”; “After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I’d like to do”). The same five-point response scale was used. Cronbach’s alpha was .85.

Control over work hours was measured using an eight-item scale developed by Thomas and Ganster (1995), assessing the degree of choice respondents had in relation to the

scheduling of work activities. Participants were asked to indicate the amount of choice available to them in relation to each item using a five-point scale ranging from "hardly any" = 1 to "a lot" = 5. Cronbach's alpha was .79.

Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the impact of the independent variables (work domain variables, work-to-family conflict, and sex) in predicting the dependent variable (family-to-work conflict). To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, home domain variables were entered in step 1 of the equation, followed by work domain variables in step 2. Entering the work domain variables in this subsequent step enabled examination of the incremental effects of the work domain predictors beyond the effects of the home domain predictors on variance in family-to-work conflict. In the third step, work-to-family conflict was entered.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, the interaction terms (sex x work role expectations, and sex x supervisor support) were entered in the final fourth step, permitting the significance of the interactions to be determined after controlling for the main effects of the independent variables. The predictor variables were centred before forming interaction terms, in order to reduce the multicollinearity often associated with regression equations containing interaction terms (Aiken and West, 1991). Changes in R^2 were used to evaluate the ability of the interaction terms to explain variance beyond that accounted for by the main effects in the equation.

Significant interactions were probed using procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). The regression equation was restructured to represent the regression of family-to-work conflict on the independent variables (work role expectations, and supervisor support) for the two different sexes. Two separate regression equations were calculated, one

for men and one for women. T-tests were then performed on simple slopes of the equations to determine if they differed from zero.

One of the aims of this study was to investigate whether opposite-domain predictors have a direct effect on family-to-work conflict, or whether the effect is mediated through work-to-family conflict. To test for mediation, the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used. In this procedure, three regression models are investigated. First, the mediator (work-to-family conflict) is regressed on the independent variables (work domain variables); second, the dependent variable (family-to-work conflict) is regressed on the independent variables (work domain variables); and third, the dependent variable (family-to-work conflict) is regressed simultaneously on the independent (work domain variables) and mediator (work-to-family conflict) variables.

Mediation is present if the following conditions hold true: the independent variable affects the mediator in the first equation; the independent variable affects the dependent variable in the second equation; and the mediator affects the dependent variable in the third equation. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation than in the second. Full mediation occurs if the independent variable has no significant effect when the mediator is in the equation, and partial mediation occurs if the effect of the independent variable is smaller but significant when the mediator is in the equation.

Results

Factor Analysis

The factoring method used for all scales was principal axis. Ford, MacCallum, and Tait (1986) recommend this common factoring method in place of the principal components method of analysis, which mixes common, specific, and random error variances. Varimax orthogonal rotation was used for all scales in accordance with Hinkin's (1998)

recommendation, as the intent was to develop scales that were reasonably independent of one another.

Two items were dropped from the family role expectations scale following principal axis analysis, as one loaded highly on more than one factor, and the other loaded onto the same factor as the parental strain items. Two items from the control over work hours scale loaded on different factors from the remainder of the items, and were therefore dropped.

Items from the supervisor support scale dealing predominantly with work-family related emotional support (e.g., "My supervisor has shown resentment of my needs as a working parent") loaded onto a separate factor from items concerning instrumental demonstrations of support (e.g., "My supervisor has juggled tasks or duties to accommodate my responsibilities at home"). The three attitudinally-based items were therefore combined to create an "Emotional support" subscale, while the remaining six items formed the "Instrumental support" subscale.

Descriptive Statistics

INSERT TABLE I HERE

The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability alphas for each of the study variables are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows that there are sex differences in family and work domain variables; specifically, men reported working an average of nearly 41 hours per week, while women worked just over 31 hours ($t = 8.56$, $p < .001$), and men experienced significantly higher levels of work role expectations than did women ($t = 3.09$, $p < .01$).

Surprisingly, men also reported significantly higher levels of family role expectations than did the women in this study ($t = 2.56$, $p < .05$). One explanation could lie in changing patterns and societal expectations of men's family involvement. While women generally remain the primary caregivers for children, men are increasingly taking responsibility for care

and becoming more involved (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997), especially as their wives or partners enter the workforce in ever-greater numbers. Being unaccustomed to this increased level of participation in family roles, perhaps men are apt to perceive family role expectations as more salient than do women, who have borne the responsibility longer.

There were no significant differences between men and women's average levels of family-to-work conflict or work-to-family conflict.

INSERT TABLE II HERE

Main and Moderating Effects

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses are presented in Table 3. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported, with work domain variables failing to predict family-to-work conflict at a significant level once the interaction terms were entered into the equation.

INSERT TABLE III HERE

The interaction between sex and work role expectations was a significant predictor of family-to-work conflict (β = -.18, $p < .05$), providing support for Hypothesis 3. Simple slopes and t-tests for this interaction are featured in Table 4. Contrary to Hypothesis 4, no significant interaction was found between sex and supervisor support in predicting family-to-work conflict.

INSERT TABLE IV HERE

As shown in Table 3, when work domain variables were entered in a subsequent step to the family domain variables and work-to-family conflict, the incremental variance explained in family-to-work conflict was significantly increased ($\triangle R^2$ = .07, $p < .05$). This suggests that work domain variables are capable of predicting family-to-work conflict directly, rather than only indirectly via work-to-family conflict. Surprisingly, the relationship between hours worked weekly and family-to-work conflict, and that between instrumental

supervisor support and family-to-work conflict, were in the opposite directions to those expected.

Mediating Effects

The results of the mediation analyses are presented in Table 3. The first condition of Baron and Kenny's (1986) test for mediation was met; the independent variables (work domain variables) were significantly related to the proposed mediator, work-to-family conflict (β = .25, p < .001 for hours worked weekly, β = .24, p < .001 for work role expectations, β = -.18, p < .01 for control over work hours, β = .13, p < .05, and β = .11, p < .001 for work stressors.

The second condition requires that the independent variables (work domain variables) be significantly related to the dependent variable (family-to-work conflict). As Table 3 shows, one work domain variable – instrumental supervisor support – was significantly related to family-to-work conflict (β = .23, p < .05).

The third condition stipulates that the proposed mediator (work-to-family conflict) must be related to the dependent variable (family-to-work conflict), and when work-to-family conflict and work domain variables are entered together in the equation, the effect of the work domain variables on family-to-work conflict must be less when work-to-family conflict is in the equation than when it is not. The results indicate that no mediation effects exist in the relationship between work domain variables and family-to-work conflict.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first objective was to investigate the effects of work domain variables on family-to-work conflict. The second goal was to examine hitherto unexplored differences between men and women in the predictors of family-to-work conflict.

Work Domain Antecedents of Family-to-Work Conflict

As can be seen in Table III, same-domain predictors, i.e., variables originating in the family domain, explained the preponderance of variance in family-to-work conflict. The degree of parental strain respondents experienced emerged as a significant predictor of family-to-work conflict. Dependant care responsibilities have long been established as contributors to family-to-work conflict (e.g., Williams & Alliger, 1994), providing as they do increased opportunities for family responsibilities to spill over from home to work. Augmenting those responsibilities, through the misbehaviour of children demanding extra attention and involvement, serves to intensify the amount to which family is perceived to interfere with work.

Nevertheless, the findings do indicate that opposite-domain predictors play an important part in contributing to family-to-work conflict. Work domain variables explained significant additional variance in family-to-work conflict beyond the effects of family domain variables, and were not mediated by work-to-family conflict as is generally assumed in the literature. These results suggest that work demands made by organizations may have more influence over the degree to which their employees' personal or family lives interfere with their work than has previously been assumed. In combination with the fact that work-family research consistently finds employees reporting more work-to-family conflict than family-to-work conflict (e.g., Burke & Greenglass, 1999; Gutek et al., 1991), the results of the present study indicate that much of the conflict between work and family experienced by employees - and the stress, lost productivity, and other negative repercussions of such conflict - is attributable to organizational factors. In particular, expectations for employees to work long hours and prioritize the work role over the family role appears to increase the extent to which employees find their family lives interfering with the performance of their jobs. This raises implications for organizations with regard to their responsibility in providing assistance with

work-family conflict. In the face of evidence that organizations are causing the very phenomenon that hurts them, the responsibility to modify their demands on employees and reduce levels of conflict is enhanced.

Of the work domain variables under investigation, hours worked weekly and supervisor support emerged as the strongest contributors to family-to-work conflict. As predicted, sympathy and encouragement offered by supervisors was related to lower levels of family-to-work conflict, presumably by diminishing emotional strain. The relationship between instrumental support and family-to-work conflict, however, was in the opposite direction from that predicted. The more instrumental work-family support provided by respondents' supervisors, the more family-to-work conflict those respondents reported. While this finding seems counter-intuitive, the rationale behind it may be rooted in direction of causality. Employees experiencing high levels of family-to-work conflict may simply elicit more supportive behaviours from their supervisors than do employees without discernible concerns regarding the conflict with work of family or personal responsibilities.

An alternative explanation may be that a "reverse" buffering effect is taking place. Some researchers (e.g., Fenlason & Beehr, 1994) have found instances in which greater levels of social support resulted in decreased individual well-being, and suggested that this effect may be due to negative communications received from those offering the social support. For example, if an employee facing family-to-work conflict requires the assistance of a manager to change his or her work schedule in order to accommodate family responsibilities, and the manager reiterates how difficult it is to raise a family and pursue a career simultaneously, the employee may exit the situation feeling worse than before having received the instrumental support. The message conveyed by the supervisor in this instance may reinforce the employee's psychological tension derived from competing role demands, and result in increased levels of family-to-work conflict.

The more hours respondents spent in work activities, the less family-to-work conflict they reported. This finding runs counter to the argument that more time in the work domain necessarily results in less time spent in the home domain, thus creating increased opportunities for family responsibilities to intrude upon the workplace. A possible explanation may lie in traditional gender role expectations. As can be seen in Table 2, there is a strong association between hours worked weekly and sex. The men participating in this study reported an average working week of nearly ten hours longer than that of the female respondents. If men's primary domain is traditionally seen to be that of work, and if their traditional role as "breadwinner" is seen as providing for the upkeep of the family unit, then those working the longest hours may also have partners fulfilling traditional gender roles by assuming primary responsibility for the home and ensuring family demands do not intrude upon the "breadwinner"'s work responsibilities. Post hoc analyses revealed a significant inverse correlation between respondents' work hours and their partners' incomes, suggesting that the partners of long-hours respondents either do not work outside the home, or are employed in low-level or reduced-hours jobs.

Sex Differences

As displayed in Table IV, the findings of this study indicate that there are sex-based differences in how some work domain variables relate to family-to-work conflict. Work role expectations interacted with sex to predict levels of family-to-work conflict, such that the relationship between these two variables was stronger for men than for women. This finding falls in line with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) reasoning that conflict between work and home domains is highest when negative sanctions exist for failure to comply with role expectations. Having traditionally experienced stronger sanctions than women for non-compliance with work role demands, the relationship between work role expectations and conflict would be expected to be stronger for men. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) obtained a

similar result using a non-directional measure of work-family conflict, but it has now become evident that work role expectations have a direct influence on family-to-work conflict. Interruptions from the home domain may assume more salience for the individual who perceives expectations from his co-workers and supervisors to prioritize the work role above all others. In this study, men experienced significantly higher levels of work role expectations than did women, which may also have played a part in strengthening the relationship between expectations and conflict; according to Duxbury and Higgins (1991), men may have difficulty balancing work and family demands due to greater organizational expectations that men will subordinate their family needs to the job.

Practical implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that family-to-work conflict increases when employees perceive that their co-workers, superiors, and the organization in general expect them to put in long hours and assign priority to work over home in order to progress in their careers. Particularly for men, management of such expectations is an area in which organizations can and should play a key role. Increasing awareness of unreasonable expectations among supervisors, role modelling behaviours such as leaving on time and valuing activities outside of work among upper management, improving access to work-family programs for male employees, and addressing the potentially negative consequences of using these programs could all contribute to a shift in workplace culture to acknowledge the importance of men's family roles.

In order to be effective, these types of initiative must be supported and encouraged by management. Previous research has shown that managerial sensitivity to work-family issues varies wildly and is often contingent upon the manager's own personal circumstances. For instance, female managers and those with greater parental responsibilities have been shown to be more flexible in helping employees meet their work-home needs than have male managers

and those with less parental responsibility (Parker & Allen, 2001), and female managers have also been found to grant more subordinate requests for flexible working arrangements than have male managers (Powell & Mainiero, 1999). Assessment of managers' work-family awareness and effectiveness in rendering assistance to affected employees could be incorporated into the performance appraisal process, as a means of strengthening management incentive to work with employees towards a solution to the problem of work-family conflict. Increased managerial support for work-family issues may then have a "top-down" effect on improving staff attitudes towards employees taking time off for personal or family reasons. This culture change is overdue and entirely necessary should organizations wish to reduce levels of work-family conflict amongst their employees.

Limitations

This study bears some limitations. Because the data were collected through the use of a single survey at a single point in time, the results may be influenced by common method bias. Most noticeably, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for firm conclusions regarding causality. When investigating the effects of variables such as the presence and number of adult dependants, determining direction of causality is not problematic, but longitudinal research is necessary to address issues of directionality with regard to other variables such as work role expectations.

Conclusions and Future Research

The aims of this study were to investigate the direct effects of work domain variables on family-to-work conflict, an approach unprecedented in the work-family literature, and to determine whether these work pressures similarly affect both men's and women's experience of family-to-work conflict. Testing this opposite-domain perspective reveals that work domain variables do exert a significant effect on family-to-work conflict above and beyond the effects of family domain variables, and independent of work-to-family conflict. This

indicates that organizational work demands and role pressures may have more influence over the degree to which employees' family lives interfere with their work than has previously been assumed, especially for men. The relationship between work role expectations and family-to-work conflict was found to be significantly stronger for men than for women. Current norms still appear to require men to leave their family obligations at home (Wiley, 1991) and assign priority to the work domain, rendering more salient any family interruptions with work.

Further research investigating men's changing attitudes toward involvement in family life and orientation toward work roles may help to convince organizational policy makers of the need to adjust current norms to create a more supportive work-family climate for employees of both sexes. In order to ensure that men and women are equally able to balance the competing responsibilities of work and home, greater gender equity with regard to organizational work-family climate needs to be established. Understanding the rationale behind prevailing managerial attitudes toward men's involvement in work and family roles may help in developing strategies to enact such equity.

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Table I

Means, Standard Deviations, and T-tests

	Men (n=91)		Women (n=117)		
Scale	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t(206)
Family-to-work conflict	2.22	0.66	2.32	0.68	-1.13
Number of young children	2.13	1.02	1.69	0.71	3.65***
Number of adult dependents	0.23	0.58	0.20	0.53	0.44
Hours worked weekly	41.02	6.92	31.05	9.85	8.56***
Family role expectations	3.13	0.81	2.81	0.95	2.56*
Control over childcare	2.97	1.10	2.68	1.11	1.65
Parental strain	3.09	1.06	2.90	1.11	1.26
Work role expectations	2.96	0.92	2.55	0.97	3.09**
Control over work hours	3.45	0.96	3.42	0.97	0.24
Supervisor support – emotional	4.12	0.66	4.03	0.92	0.82
Supervisor support – instrumental	3.19	0.83	3.32	0.89	-1.12
Work stressors	3.16	0.61	2.90	0.59	3.45***
Work-to-family conflict	3.31	0.83	3.10	0.98	1.61

Note. $N = 208$.

$p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table II

Intercorrelations among Family-to-Work Conflict, Family Domain and Work Domain Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Family-to-work conflict	(.82)													
2. Sex	.08	-												
3. Number of adult dependants	.06	-.02	-											
4. Number of young children	-.02	-.20**	-.06	-										
5. Family role expectations	.29***	-.19**	.01	.05	(.82)									
6. Control over childcare	-.23**	-.13	-.09	.16*	-.13	(.90)								
7. Parental strain	.34***	-.09	.07	-.01	.32***	-.20**	(.67)							
8. Hours worked weekly	-.13*	-.50***	.07	.09	.02	.03	.15*	-						
9. Work role expectations	.19**	-.25***	.02	.03	.32***	-.20**	.22***	.26***	(.89)					
10. Control over work hours	-.24***	-.01	-.05	.08	-.25***	.42***	-.17*	-.06	-.34***	(.79)				
11. Supervisor support (emotional)	-.19**	.01	.03	-.04	-.23***	.16*	-.18**	-.01	-.42***	.45***	(.73)			
12. Supervisor support (instrumental)	.09	.11	-.05	-.04	-.05	.14	-.02	-.10	-.20**	.38***	.35***	(.86)		
13. Work stressors	.21***	-.22***	.00	.04	.33***	-.29***	.28***	.25***	.44***	-.42***	-.43***	-.37***	(.67)	
14. Work-to-family conflict	.34***	-.12	.07	.02	.28***	-.36***	.34***	.39***	.49***	-.39***	-.30***	-.14*	.53***	(.85)

Note. $N = 208$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.
The main diagonal contains Cronbach's internal consistency reliability estimates.

Table III

Hierarchical Regression Results Predicting Family-to-Work Conflict

	Work-to-family conflict	Family-to-work conflict			
Independent variable		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Sex	-	.12	.04	.01	.04
Number of young children	-	-.02	-.03	-.04	-.02
Number of adult dependants	-	.13	.13	.11	.12
Family role expectations	-	.18*	.13	.12	.12
Control over childcare	-	-.14†	-.12	-.10	-.11
Parental strain	-	.28***	.22**	.21*	.22**
Hours worked weekly	.25***		-.14†	-.20*	-.15
Work role expectations	.24***		.06	.02	-.04
Control over work hours	-.18**		.01	.04	.04
Supervisor support (emotional)	-.08		-.15	-.15	-.14
Supervisor support (instrumental)	.13*		.23*	.20*	.17†
Work stressors	.11***		.15	.11	.13
Work-to-family conflict	-			.19*	.19*
Sex x Work role expectations	-				-.15*
Sex x Supervisor support (instrumental)	-				-.14†
F	24.86***	6.86***	4.74***	4.77***	4.75***
$\triangle$F	-	6.86***	2.25*	3.96*	3.43*
$\triangle R^2$	.41***	.23***	.07*	.02*	.03*
Adjusted R^2	-	.19***	.24***	.25***	.28***

Note. N = 208.
† $p < .10$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

Table IV

Test of Simple Slopes of Regression for Interactions between Sex and Work Role Expectations in Predicting Family-to-Work Conflict

Sex	Simple Slope	SE	t(205)
Male	.26	.10	2.73**
Female	.21	.09	2.47*

Note. $N = 208$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.