



Work-family conflict: issues & effects

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Work-family conflict can be defined as a type of inter-role conflict wherein some responsibilities from the work and family domains are not compatible and have a negative influence on an employee's work situation (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The term "work-family conflict" includes the tensions, challenges, and struggles individuals may perceive or feel related to their expectations, duties or requirements, and behaviours in, for, and between each role (work and family). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three major types of work-family conflicts. The first is time-based. Time spent on role performance in one domain often precludes time spent in the other domain. Time expended on role performance may deplete energy or generate strain. The second work family conflict, strain-based conflict, arises when strain in one role affects one's performance in another role. The last type is behavior-based conflict, which refers to incompatibility between the behaviour patterns that are desirable in the two domains.

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Introduction

India is a developing country, in which there is clear and distinct lack of focus on work and family research. The reason behind this can be gender inequality culture and the low status given to women and also the low status accorded to women issues in the country. Traditionally the sex ratio has always been biased against women. According to the latest government report of the Census Survey of India of 2001, there are 935 women for every 1000 men in the country, which means that the female population is about 48 percent of the

total population. The working population constitutes around 36 per cent of the total population and women constitute about 32 per cent of the working population. The majority of the working women are working in unorganised sector. According to the country Report presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 only 4 per cent of all women working are employed in the organised sector, which gives a clear view that only 0.005 percent of the India's working women are working in organised sector. These statistics explain absence of research in the work-family area, but they also build a case for it, especially since redistribution of work and family roles is critical for empowerment of women.

Work-family conflict can be divided into two different dimensions: work interfering with family and family interfering with work. Employees who have a high level of personal demands are more likely to experience family to work conflict and at the same time employees who are having high level of demands at work are more likely to face work to family conflict. Both work-family conflict and family-work conflict basically a situation of an individual who is trying to meet an overabundance of conflicting demands from the different domains in which he! she is operating.

These days because of lot of pressure from both family as well as professional life, individuals are facing lot of stress and tension. Balancing the often-competing demands of work and family can create significant time and energy pressures and lead to psychological distress. Studies have shown that work-family conflict is related to lower workplace productivity, increased tardiness and absenteeism, higher levels of turnover, and greater job dissatisfaction

Employees can perform better only if they are free from other tensions like family, children's education etc. Now days it has been seen that there is lot of work pressure in the

organisations as every organisation wants to excel. It is generally recognized that extensive pressures arising from the work environment and from the family environment can produce high levels of work-family conflict for many employees. In this scenario work demands more, this confronts with family life of the employees. work/family conflicts are a serious issue; employees, particularly female employees, find themselves performing a balancing act in order to fulfil the expectations attached to both family and professional roles. The stress which the employees are facing regularly or occasionally affects the sleep, physical health, mental health, and family well-being of the majority of the employees.

Commonly cited sources of work-to-family conflict include long work hours, inflexible work schedules, low job autonomy, physically and cognitively demanding work, and working under time pressure, whereas sources of family-to-work conflict include children living at home, spouse's poor health, time spent on family work (e.g., care giving), and poor spousal relations.

Both male and female Executives face Work-Family Conflict. However, women's careers generally suffer because of mobility, since decisions to move are generally made with husband's career in mind. Also, organisations do not ask women to relocate due to sex role stereotyping, with the implicit assumption that relocation will disrupt their family, while such assumptions are not made for males.

Greenhaus and Beutell defined work/family conflict as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" According to their model, work/family conflict is both bi-directional and multi-dimensional. The bi-directionality comes from the concept that work can interfere with family, and that family can interfere with work. In addition, the multi-dimensional nature of work/family conflict occurs in each direction. Specifically, both family interference with

work and work interference with family are composed of three dimensions: time-, strain-, and behaviour-based conflict. Time-based work/family conflict arises when the time demands from one role make it physically impossible to meet the requirements of another role, and when preoccupation with one role's requirements occurs, even when physically involved in meeting the requirements of another role. Work-related sources of conflict include hours worked and commuted per week, amount and frequency of overtime, irregularity of shift work, and inflexibility in the work schedule. Family-related sources include number of children, younger children, and family size (including older relatives).

Conflicts that result from the work and family interface can be further differentiated into objective or psychological conflict. In reality, individuals who attempt to balance work and home life experience objective conflict (e.g. a breakfast meeting is scheduled at the same time as the children have to be taken to school; an elderly parent calls with an emergency). In addition, individuals feel psychological conflict (e.g. the decision to spend weekend time at work rather than with family or friends) (Greenhaus, 1988). Rice, Frone, and McFarlin (1992, p. 156) state that the manner in which individuals perceive their work and family experiences reflects the 'goodness of fit between work and non-work life'. As a result, individuals inevitably feel increased levels of both objective and psychological conflict when there is a lack of fit between their work and family lives.

There is also evidence that gender atypical behaviours are associated with work-family conflict for both men and women. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) find that work involvement is related to work-family conflict for women, while family involvement is related to work-family conflict for men. Men may experience greater work-family conflict when highly involved in family life due to the expectations placed on them in the workplace (e.g. they may be seen as less committed by colleagues and superiors as a result of their commitment to

their families). Research further suggests that, while women are able to relatively easily adopt the role of wage earner, they struggle when constrained to limit the role of wife and mother. For example, even when employed outside the home, women retain primary responsibility for household labor and childcare .It appears that time women spend at work and time men spend in the home may, as a result of their gender-atypicality, generate more conflict than time spent in gender- typical domains (Gutek et al., 1991).

Netemeyer et al. (1996) indicate that both work-family conflict and family-work conflict are related to workplace consequences such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to leave the organization. They found that family-work conflict was more strongly related to non-work attitudes and behaviours such as life satisfaction and agreement about the relationship. Other research also tends to support the view that family-work conflict is related to workplace consequences as well as non-work attitudes and behaviours.

Burton (1997) while studying the problem of Work Family balance among women managers observed that men continue to believe that family-work balance could adversely affect women. It was also revealed that (1) only 3% women managers surveyed regarding family responsibility as the most serious obstacle in their business career; (2) only 7% of female managers surveyed reported leaving organisations for family reasons, whereas 73% reported leaving the organisation because they saw limited opportunities for them in organisation and (3) women were more likely to be found in staff and support position because over-riding commitment and continuity were seen to be less important to these roles rather than to the core management function.

Results from previous research indicate that work-family conflict is related to a number of negative job attitudes and consequences including lower overall job satisfaction and greater propensity to leave a position.

Thompson et al. (1999) defined work-family culture as 'the shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding to the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives'.

According to the Greenhaus, examples of factors in the environment that produce extensive work-family conflict are Pressures in the work environment: extensive, irregular, or inflexible work hours; extensive travel; work overload and other forms of job stress; interpersonal conflict at work; career transitions; unsupportive supervisor or organization and Pressures in the family environment: presence of young children; primary responsibility for children; elder care responsibilities; interpersonal conflict within the family unit; unsupportive family members.

Singh (2002) attempted to investigate the pressures the women were subjected to at the work place. He also explored the problems encountered after marriage with their spouses and their role as parents. Data were collected from a sample of 100 women employees through Questionnaire and personal interview. The findings revealed that women from financially sound families joined the corporate world in a great number and they faced a problem of relationship with subordinates. It was further revealed that married women were conditioned by parents and society to accept their roles as subordinates to 'husband', 'home', and 'children' as their share of responsibility. Unmarried women had fewer problems as compared to married working women.

Researchers have documented many ways work and family life differ for men and women but two findings are particularly important for this analysis. First, women typically do a greater share of the household labor than men (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004), and that additional work at home partially restricts the time women can spend in paid work. Second, inequalities in the workplace tend to lower women's organizational commitment, reduce the importance

they place on promotion, and make them less likely than men to identify work as their central priority. In short, social structures are gendered, and the system of domesticity that relies on male breadwinners and female caretakers is still largely intact.

Research on work and family in India has followed two separate paths

–Women’s studies: Focus on how structures of patriarchy contribute to subordination of underprivileged women in rural settings at work and at home.

–Psychosocial research: Focus on working women in urban settings from a role theory perspective.

According to Ritu Mehta, “Women perceive Gender Role attitude as an important factor which decides Work Family Conflict, followed by Spillover between Work-Family, Harmony in home and Office, Organisation Support, Family expectations and finally Parenting effect and professional prospects

Acc to Karen Korabik, Ph.D. University of Guelph, ON, Canada :

1. Challenges Due to W-F Conflict

- a) Women around the globe experiencing increasing W-F conflict
- b) Organizational culture: work long hours and do more with less.
- c) Stereotypes of women as secondary wage earners; primarily family oriented.

2. Consequences of W-F Conflict

- a) Personal costs-distress and dissatisfaction at home & work, mental & physical health problems.
- b) Organizational costs-absenteeism, turnover, recruitment costs, lost productivity.

There are several important personal outcomes of work and family conflict that have been identified in research. Work and family conflict and role strain have led to psychological symptoms such as higher stress, increased depression (Googins, 1991), physical ailments

(Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1997), increased somatic complaints (Burke, 1988), lower life satisfaction (Adams *et al.*, 1996), lower quality of family life (Higgins *et al.*, 1992) and lower energy levels (Googins, 1991). Furthermore, the presence of children was related to increase feelings of pressure in marriage and contributed to stress and lower life satisfaction (Brett, Stroh, and Reilly, 1992). Frone *et al.* (1997) recently found that family affecting work conflict longitudinally predicted depression, poor physical health, and incidence of hypertension.

The last few decade's scholars studying work-family conflict have accumulated ample evidence that work-family conflict is an important and pervasive phenomenon, with unfavourable consequences, such as stress, job dissatisfaction, lowered performance and commitment, and turnover. Those with higher levels of work-family conflict might experience poorer health, greater absenteeism, and/or poorer work performance, which, over time might eventually result in their being placed in lower quality jobs characterized by greater demands and fewer resources. In this situation where both work and family responsibilities have to be combined, female executives may be expected to experience high level of stress as compared to male executives. There is some evidence that female managers, in order to be successful, need to make sacrifices in their private and family life. Authors have reported lower rates of marriage and parenthood, more divorces, and failure or dissatisfaction in private life. As a consequence, prevention of work-family conflict is becoming an increasingly pressing problem for companies. In an era of fierce competition for scarce resources in the labor market, companies are increasingly adoption family-supportive programs. According to Osterman (1995), organizations adopt these programs in an effort to build a committed workforce-an effort that will undoubtedly facilitate the retention of valuable professionals and managers.

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