Community and Religion in Work-Family Interface in Malaysia
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Introduction

This study aims to examine the socio-cultural influences (time orientation, individualism / collectivism, gender role ideology) and family-friendly policies on work and life outcomes. Specifically it highlights the pathways of resources and demands from work, family and community as well as work-family conflict (WFC) and enrichment (WFE). A survey was conducted twice within 3 months from 506 executives and non-executives in the public and private sector in Sarawak, Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were also held with nine respondents representing the surveyed participants.

This study adapted the integrative model of work-family conflict by Korabik et.al.,(2003). This comprehensive model of the work-family interface accounts for antecedents (socio-cultural aspects, work and family resources and demands) and outcomes of work-family interaction. This study considers both macro (socio-cultural and social policy) and micro (organization and individual) aspects to give a more holistic understanding of work-family interface.

This research extends Korabik’s model by recognizing community domain and religion as additional factors affecting performance in the Malaysian workplace. Community is viewed from a relational perspective, that is, interaction with relatives, friends, neighbours and neighbourhood and its relation to work-family conflict and enrichment. The inclusion of community resources and demands is important because Malaysia is predominantly a collectivist society. Moreover, Sarawak, has the highest percentage (28%) of extended family living together in Malaysia. As religion is embedded in the Malaysian community (Abdullah, 1996), its influential role in work-life balance also needs to be investigated.
Findings

Over half of the respondents were male (56%). The majority were non-executives (74%), had permanent posts (82%), and in the age group of 35 to 55 (63%), married (78%) for an average of 15 years with 1 to 9 children (74%), and had a working spouse (50%). About 32% had 11 years of formal education and 20% had a bachelor degree. A total of 44% are Malay ethnic group, 50% are Muslim, with 89% reporting religion as important in their life and 72% perceived themselves as religious.

The preliminary findings show that community resources and demands contributed to conflict and enrichment more than work and family resources and demands. Community resources and demands operate similarly to work and family resources and demands. However, community resources are more strongly related to work to family (WFE) and family to work (FWE) enrichment and community demands are more strongly related to work to family (WFC) and family to work (FWC) conflict. Both WFE and FWE were related positively to: resources from relatives, friends, neighbours, neighbourhood and assistance received from extended families; and demands in terms of assistance given to extended families and involvement in religious and voluntary organisations. This finding reflects the collectivist characteristics of the society, where in-group relationship and religion are important.

Conflict (WFC and FWC) was positively related to demands from relatives, friends and neighbourhood, and was negatively related to resources from neighbours and neighbourhood. In this sample, neighbours and neighbourhood were two important elements in community domain that influence work-family conflict and enrichment. This finding may be because approximately 50% of the respondents have been living in the same area for more than 15 years.

In a scale of 1 to 5, about 89% reported religion as important in their life and 72% perceived themselves as religious (scored 4 and 5). The importance of religion and the perception of religiousness were related to three variables: enrichment, satisfaction and
conflict. They were positively related to enrichment (WFE and FWE) and satisfaction towards family, community and life, and negatively related to conflict (WFC and FWC). In summary, community resources and demands as well as religion play an important role in influencing work-family balance in Malaysia.

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