

Work Family Conflict And Work Family Enrichment Among Professional Women: A Malaysian Case

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Abstract

Participation of women in the workplace can be seen as a basis of excellence of future global competitiveness. Mainly because in Malaysia, women comprise 50% of the work force, whereby 70% of them are married working women. Such trend of married working women in Malaysia will become a common scenario in Malaysia. Hence, bringing more women into the workplace is not a choice but a necessity for both economic and global competition. Further Malaysia has a long way to go since female participant rate is much less compare with developed countries where the figures are more than 70%. However, the recent comments by CUEPACS, an organization that responsible for the welfare of public sector workers in Malaysia regarding their concern over the excess of women administrators in the public sector has created unrest among many dual work women. CUEPACS is worried about the commitment of women administrator at the workplace due their family responsibilities. Such concern on the negative implication of women's involvement at work place on their family has been also been significantly emphasized by studies in the West and East. Thus the objective of the paper is to explore the relationship of work family conflict towards work family enrichment. The following study was conducted among professional women working in the public sector in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. Both WFC and WFE used the nine-item work to family direction of the conflict and also the nine item work to family direction of the enrichment scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000) and Carlson et al. (2006). This study using sequential explanatory design involved survey and interview. The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to the respondent at their respective workplace, followed by in depth interview. Survey results indicated that there are significant relationship between work family conflict and work family enrichment, whereby lower WFC has positive implication towards work and their family. Managing role transition effectively and support from family has been identified as important factors in enhancing women's productive participation in the labor force as well to create a balance between the work and family.

Keywords: work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, professional working women, public sector.

1.0 Introduction

Currently, both developed and developing countries are witnessing constant advent in demographical trends that influence the composition of workforce. In Malaysia, the increase of women in the workforce is common phenomena when it appears 53% of women are the major contributors to the workforce and out of these 61% are women who are in managerial and professional group (PSD, 2010). Of this total, about 70% of working women are married or having families of their own and also contributes to the increasing number of families with dual-works (Jamilah,et al,2006).

As married couples, the wisdom to balance between the roles at home and at work is important to ensure the well being of the family (Sabitha, 2009). According to Noor (2006), despite being employed, working women continue to be predominantly responsible for household matters and issues of parenthood (Cousins and Tang, 2004). Inarguably, difficulties in balancing the roles between work and family may cause problem or stress (Kahn et al, 1964), whilst in another view, dual roles of work and family can be beneficial for mental health, physical health and performance (Greenhaus and Beutell, 2006). Therefore effort to balance the roles between work and family responsibilities is becoming more challenging in our day among working women because dual roles can conflict with one another in some respects and enrich each other in other ways.

2.0 Work-Family Conflict

Work and family conflict (WFC) certainly has been under careful attention ever since to help deal with the pressures of work and family roles. WFC is typically defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressure from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”. (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

The concept of WFC has been enlightened by Kahn et al (1964) using the role theory framework and has been applied to WFC research since the 1970s. Kahn et al (1964) used role theory to describe the tensions between work and family roles as “inter-role conflict”. It draws that the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressure such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult. Thus, WFC occurs when one’s family role expectations are perceived to be incompatible with the role demands of one’s job, or vice versa (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al, 1964).

In particular, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), has conceptualized work family conflict into three source of conflict, namely time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflicts. Within the time based such as long hours in paid work will reduce the amount of time available for family activities, thereby making it difficult for employees to perform family duties and maintain family relationships (Voydanoff, 2004). Whilst, strain-based such as job demands are expected to increase employees’ negative emotions, stress, fatigue (Voydanoff, 2004) and it is positively related to work to family conflict (Frone et al, 1997; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000).

Most researchers acknowledge WFC resulting in a wide variety of outcomes for individuals and organization. In the aspect of work life, WFC is related to job dissatisfaction and organizational commitment (Hill et al, 2001; Lambert et al, 2006). WFC can also result in negative outcomes for organization such as lower instances of organizational performance, lower morale and higher turnover rates (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998). In the aspect of personal life, WFC is associated to poor health outcomes (Frone et al, 1992), psychological distress (Major et al, 2002) and positively related to anxiety disorders, mood disorders and substance disorders (Frone et al, 1997).

Compared with many Western countries, work-family issues has gain attention in Malaysia since the increased of married women into employment (Aminah, 2005). Six studies conducted by research institutions in Malaysia that comprises professional women, secretaries, nurses, medical doctors, bank clerks and factory workers resulted married women are experiencing WFC at different levels in meeting the needs of work and family (Aminah, 2005). This study also revealed that the higher level of WFC contribute to higher level of emotional exhaustion, thus reduce job satisfaction and job performance. Apart from having the WFC, employed women, especially those holding management positions are at the risk of having high work stress than men (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003; Sabitha and Norma, 2007). This shows the conflict of work and family and workplace pressure are present among working women and it is consistent with the findings in western countries by Frone(1992).

3.0 Work Family Enrichment

Although many studies have shown that the overlap between work and family roles lead to conflict (Aminah, 1995; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al, 1964), there is also evidence that the benefits or advantages derived from the relationship of work and family (Carlson et al, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rohany & Fatimah, 2006). Positive spillover (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), work-family facilitation (Grzywacz and Butler, 2005), work family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006) and work-family synergy (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008) are terms used to describe the positive effect that work can have on family and the positive effect that family can have on work. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define work family enrichment (WFE) as “the extent to which experience in one role improves the quality of life namely performance or affect, in the other role”. It focuses on the positive effects of work on family life (work-to-family enrichment) and family on the work life (family-to-work-enrichment).

Carlson et al (2006) has categorized WFE into three dimension namely work-family capital, work-family affect and work-family development. Work-family capital defined as when involvement in work promotes

levels of psychosocial resources such as sense of security, confidence, accomplishment or self-fulfillment that helps the individual to be a better family member. The second dimension, work-family affect occurs when involvement in work results in a positive emotional state or attitude, which helps individual to be a better family member. Finally, work-family development is defined as when involvement in work leads to the acquisition or refinement of skills, knowledge, behavior or ways of viewing things that helps an individual be a better family member. Thus, the entire dimension measured is consistent with the broad meaning of WFE that occurs through instrumental and affective path as highlighted by Greenhaus and Powell (2006).

Unlike WFC, research in the area of WFE is in its formative years of development. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) identified only 19 studies to date that have used self-report scales to measure WFE. Research has explored the antecedents of WFE include personal characteristics such as education, income, gender, race and various stressors such as job stressors, family stressors and psychological involvement at work and home (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Washington, 2006).

From a small number of preliminary findings, work-family and family-work positive spillover has been positively related to a number of outcomes for individuals, family and organization. Both WFE and FEW had been found to be positively related to individual's mental health (Allis and O'Driscoll, 2008; Grzywacz and Bass, 2003), family functioning (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Haar and Bardoel, 2008) and job outcomes such as job satisfaction (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008) and organizational commitment (Wayne et al, 2006). It is reported that married couples will experience more WFE than unmarried individuals (Grzywacz et al., 2002). In addition, Grzywacz (2000) found that higher WFE and FWE were positively associated to better mental physical health and well-being and negatively associated with chronic health problems. Furthermore, employed women suffer less from depression and have a positive impact on their psychological well-being (Baruch & Barnett, 1996; Rohany&Fatimah,2006).

In Malaysia, a more general term is used to describe the positive spillover between work and family. Studies on job satisfaction, family satisfaction and marriage satisfaction have been explored in a connection to work and family (Emilda, 2002; Erneza, 1996; Safidah & Rozumah; 2001; Tam, 2008; Uma, 2007). Safidah and Rozumah (2001) reported that married professional women are satisfied with their job and experienced a good quality relationship with their employer. In another study among professional Malay women revealed that almost 90% of them are satisfied with their job (Erneza, 1996).

Studies also found that work will provides working women with a form of motivation, self-improvement, control, autonomy and power, which benefited for both work and family (Noor, 2006; KPWKM,2003; Sabitha & Samihah,1998). Another study among women professional reported that the level of mothers' education and knowledge had a significant relationship with child academic performance (Rozumah, 1999). This studies are in line with studies done in the West whereas mothers' involvement in complex types of work was associated with providing an enriched home environment that promoted child development (Percel and Meneghan,1994).

4.0 Why Focus on Enrichment and Conflict?

It is important to note that, the vast majority of empirical studies addressing work and family role management either explore the relationship between negative impacts of balancing work and family roles (work / family conflict) or positive impacts of balancing work and family roles (work / family enrichment) but not on the both side (Greenhaus and Powell, 2007; Hennessy, 2007). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) identified 15 studies in which both WFE and WFC were measured. Only eight of the 21 correlations between WFE and WFC in these studies were statistically significant (three positives and five negatives), and their mean value was -0.02. Only 18 studies that explore both the negative and positive effects in managing personal and professional roles and the results showed that the relationship is small and negative. Hence, this study was conducted as an initiative step in finding out the relationship between WFE and WFC among the professional working women in Malaysian context. This included their perception towards WFE and WFC in everyday life.

5.0 Method

5.1 Participant

The study used a sequential explanatory approach whereby survey form was distributed to the respondents then followed by interview (Creswell, 2003). The survey part was carried out among 283 professional working women in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. The respondents are professional women officer working in the Sarawak public sector. The inclusion criteria for the study are chosen based on their marital status and must at least have one child. These criteria were outlined in order to ensure the samples have near similar work and family roles (Aminah, 1996). The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to each respondent at their respective workplace. The second part was interview, whereby 20 respondents are chosen from the survey list that comprised of two groups. The first group comprises 10 respondents that their youngest child must be below 6 years old and the second group for the youngest child in the secondary school or at the age between 13 and 17 years old. These criteria were outlined because these two groups of respondents facing more conflict compared to the other groups.

5.2 Materials

WFC used the nine-item work to family direction of the conflict scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000). An example item is "My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like". The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.846. While, WFE also used the nine item work to family direction of the enrichment scale developed by Carlson et al. (2006). An example item is "My involvement in my work helps me to acquire skills and this helps me to be a better family member". The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.940. Both instruments are scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

6.0 Findings

The sample consisted of 257 professional working women with 91 % returned rate for the questionnaire. The age range of the respondents was 27 – 54 years old with the mean age is 39.5 years old. Majority of the respondents had bachelors degree (72.5%) followed by master's degree (21.6%), Ph.D (1.2%) and other qualifications (4.7%). In terms of the number of children, most of the respondent had 1 – 2 children (49.8%); followed by 3 –4 children (41.1%) and only a small number had 5-7 children (9.1%). Among the women in this sample, 70.6 % did not have stay-in maids. The findings are similar with the research done in Peninsular Malaysia that showed more than 70% did not have stay-in maids (Noor, 2006; Sabitha, 2009).

6.1 The Relationship between WFE and WFC.

Pearson Correlation was used to test the relationship between WFE and WFC. Findings indicated that there is a negative relationship between WFE and WFC ($r=-0.338$, $p<0.01$). This result suggests that women with higher levels of WFE are more likely to report lower levels of WFC. This finding is similar to the research done in the West that indicates negative relationship between WFC and WFE (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Empirical evidence supports the notion that the absence of interference is not equivalent to the presence of enhancement, and that the absence of enhancement is not isomorphic with interference (Carlson et al, 2009). In addition, study conducted in the universities setting in the United States revealed that the relationship is negative (Hennessy, 2007; Washington, 2006). They experienced lower level of WFC if they had positive attitudes towards carrier and family.

Scholars have debated that the extent to which individuals experience enrichment between their work and family roles has no bearing on the level of conflict they experience between these two roles; i.e. WFE and WFC are independent constructs (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz and Bass, 2003; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). It is clear that by definition, WFC and WFE represent two different potential outcomes of simultaneously managing work and family roles. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined WFC as a form of friction in

which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects. Whilst, WFE is defined as the extent to which experience in one role improve the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The meaning of each definition suggests a negative relationship between WFC and WFE. In addition, based on the argument above, it is clearly showing that the higher score on satisfaction towards WFE reflect a lower score on satisfaction towards WFC. Hence the study concluded that the relationship between WFE and WFC is negatively related.

On average, working women in this sample worked on an average of 43 hours a week, meanwhile the average working hours in Peninsular Malaysia is 44 hours a week (Noor, 2006). Research done by Galinsky et al (2005) has proved that more than 20% workers worked more than 49 hours a week. Meanwhile, the management and professional group are reported to work more than 50 hours a week (Daly, 2001). Numerous studies have found that the number of weekly hours devoted to work is positively related to levels of work-to-family conflict (Frone et al, 1997, Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Barnett (1988) found that working long hours was associated with positive mental health. She argued that long working hours may not be directly related to WFC but may only be an antecedent under specific conditions (Washington, 2006).

6.2 Impact of WFE towards Work and Family

There are three dimension of WFE measured in this study, which are work-family capital, work-family affect and work-family development. Based on the descriptive result, data obtained from the respondent on WFE scale, work-family capital indicated high score. Finding shows that majority of the respondents agreed that their involvement in work provides them with a sense of success (96.6%) and a sense of accomplishment (95%) and feel personally fulfilled (96.7%) which help them to be a better family member. This is similar to past study that working women reported that their lives were satisfactory and that they enjoyed working because being employed to some extent gave them autonomy, control and empowerment (Noor, 2006). This was supported by the interview from the respondents:

Respondent 1: *I feel more developed, satisfied and a sense of high self-actualization whenever I can manage work and family successfully.*

Respondent 2: *The satisfaction comes when I can contribute something to the organization and society.*

Findings also revealed that item under the dimension of work-family affect indicate a moderately high score too, which bring positive implication towards the emotional state among the professional working women. The challenge of balancing work and family makes them feel happy (81.6%), cheerful (91.6%) and puts them in a good mood (78.4%), which influences their relationship with the family members and directly becoming a happy employee. Most studies has shown that a high quality of role participation can have beneficial effects on physical and psychological well-being (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) and increase an individual's happiness, life satisfaction and perceived quality life (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti & Crouter, 2000, Lu, 2007). The statement below expressed some of the comments from the respondents:

Respondent 1: *At this age, I'm satisfied with my career and more or less I have achieved what I have targeted in my life.*

Respondent 2: *Life will be more balance when we are working. I have a social life, can enhance my skills, knowledge, networking and feel happier than those housewives that only work at home.*

Finally, results show that being a working woman with multiple tasks and responsibilities are benefited in both directions. Items that represent work-family development score above 90%, which explain an agreement that participation on both roles bring positive outcome. Results indicated that involvement in work helps them to gain new knowledge (93.4%) and acquire skills (98.3%) which can be applied both when dealing with children or other family members at home. Furthermore, involvement at work helps them to understand different viewpoints (98.4%), which may assist them to be a better family member.

Work provides them with the opportunity to experience success and develop self-confidence or self-efficacy to perform various roles. In addition, work will extend the reference frame of the individual in terms of information, opinions and ideas from many different perspectives and experiences. Therefore, this exposes individuals with alternatives that can be possibly used in the work-family interaction process and to face the challenges of various roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Fatimah, 2006). This was supported by the interview from the respondents:

Respondent 1: *I always share with my children about the current issues or any information that relevant to them. Previously, when I worked with the department of economic, I always share with my children about the situation of our economy and anything that relate to economy.*

Respondent 2: *Even though my area is in information technology, but working in this department, has exposed me with new knowledge about water and minerals that I can share with my friends too.*

Overall, tasks performed by married or single women can improve their health and reduce psychological distress if they are looking positively towards the work (Noor, 2006). In addition, individuals who are successful in balancing their roles as employees and spouses will experience a feeling of satisfaction and success that will encourage individuals to continue to increase success in work and family (Milkie & Peltola, 1999 cited by Fatimah, 2006). In other words, strong work commitment can enforce family commitment and vice versa.

6.3 Impact of WFC towards Work and Family

The descriptive results on WFC scale show contrary results to WFE scale. There are three kinds of WFC measured in this study, which are time-based, strain-based and behavior-based. More than half of the respondents agreed with the item that time-based conflict is not a major barrier for them to perform family responsibilities. Item such as, even though they are employed, the time devoted to their job did not prevent them from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities (60%). It also indicated that work does not keep them from family activities (56%) and they did not miss work activities even though due to amount of time that is spent with family responsibilities (85%). The findings shows that the respondents tried to segregate work and family as role transition occurred once they enter with a new role. It supports the philosophy of boundary theory that describes role transitions as a boundary-crossing activity, where one exits and enters roles by surmounting boundaries (Ashforth et al, 2000, Schein, 1971). This was reflected by comments from the respondents:

Respondent 1: *My work is from 8 am to 5 pm and will ensure that I will entertain my family commitment after that (5 pm).*

Respondent 2 : *Working only at the office. I ensured that any encountered in the office will not be 'thought of' once I reached home. I concentrate on my family.*

Result related to strain-based conflict found that more than half of the respondents agreed that the strain at work did not affect much on their duty to carry out their responsibilities towards their family. Item such as when coming back from work, they still can participate in family activities because they do not feel fatigue (67%) and emotionally drained (60%). Nevertheless, due to the pressures at work, they feel too stressed to do the things they enjoy to do (70%). In this context, the respondent received a lot of support from their extended family due to the geographical reasons that majority of them still lives in a big community. This was reflected by comments from the respondents:

Respondent 1: *My parents are my back-bone that helps me a lot in managing my children. My mother look after my youngest child and my father help to fetch my children from school.*

Respondent 2: *I'm so blessed because my husband was so supportive and understanding. My*

husband helps me a lot in doing the house work. Apart of it, my children also help us because they know that my office is quite far from home. By the time I reached home, the dinner was ready for us.

Finally, behavior-based conflict reported problem-solving behaviors that they used in their job are effective in resolving problems at home (68%) and behavior that is effective and necessary for them at work would be counter-productive at home (75%). Nevertheless, 55% agreed that the behaviors that they perform at work do not help them to be a better parent and spouse. This was supported by the interview that positive transfer occurred from work to home.

Respondent 1: *When my office, start to implement the 5S in our department, I start it also at home. I found that implement 5S at home, makes me more manageable and less work because I keep the necessary things only.*

Respondent 2: *I delegate the work equally to my staff so that everybody feels well treated and fair. At home, I will make sure that my children have a fair distribution of house work too, I have 5 children, so everyone, will have an opportunity to cook, sweep, laundry, watering plants and cleaning the house.*

WFC is always being related to negative outcomes such as job satisfaction, leisure satisfaction, depression and higher stress (Allen et al, 2000; Aminah; 1996; Boles et al, 2001; Frone, 2000; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), however, some studies on WFC and job satisfaction have yield mixed results (Washington, 2006). Research done by Noor (2006) among employed women in Malaysia reported that even though they have to juggle with multiples roles, they still can continue working because they had been patient in facing the trials and tribulations of life, and believed in the wisdom behind these trials, which whatever happened to them came from God. This is support by one of the respondent reported, *“set mind – work=trustworthy (carried our duty because of God) and work sincerely.”* This statement response to the role of God in women’s lives and also showed the interdependency between work and family life. Results from the interview also showed that segregate work and family will ensured that working women able to manage both roles equally and in a focus manner. Moreover support from the family members especially from their parents has contributed to the less conflict among the working women.

7.0 Conclusion

The result of prior study of the relationship between WFE and WFC has led to the conclusion of this study that WFE and WFC are negatively related. This result suggests that women with higher levels of WFE are more likely to report lower levels of WFC. These findings suggest that managing role transition and support from family members has helps working women in managing work and family effectively and ensure that there is quality time for the family. Therefore, even though the conflict slightly occurred, but it is still manageable in reducing the tension in performing multiples roles and gains the benefit and the pleasure of working.

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