



Gender Differences in Work-Family Balance Factors

Chai Sian Yi¹

Zaiton Hassan^{2*}

Abang Ekhsan Abang Othman³

^{1,2,3}Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Influx of women in the paid labor force had been identified as one of the important factors in raising awareness about work-family balance in organizations in developed countries in the west. The same phenomenon also occurs in Malaysia. Malaysia is considered as having traditional gender role ideology, whereby men and women have separate role in the workplace and in the family. Specifically, this study aims to identify whether there are differences in perception between men and women in public sector towards factors associated with work-life balance. Work-life balance factors examined in this study are work demands, supervisor support, organization's family-friendly policies, family demands, work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC). Sixty questionnaires were administered to employees in a government health training institution in Sarawak, Malaysia. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 17 and independent t-Test was employed in testing the hypotheses. The study found that men and women are significantly different in terms of supervisor support, work-family conflict and family demands. However, there was no significant difference between men and women employees with regard to work demands, family-work conflict and utilization of family-friendly policies. In line with previous Western findings, women experienced higher level of work to family conflict (WFC) than men employees. In addition, women also reported higher family demands than men. These findings strengthened the traditional gender role ideology ascribed by majority of Malaysians and lend support to the gender role theory. Therefore, the organization could provide relevant training, such as, time and stress management. Supervisors could be trained to be more aware of work-family balance issues faced by their employees and assist them accordingly.

ARTICLE INFO

E-mail address:
hzaiton@unimas.my (Zaiton Hassan)
*Corresponding author

ISSN: 2462-1153

© Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)

support to the gender role theory. Therefore, the organization could provide relevant training, such as, time and stress management. Supervisors could be trained to be more aware of work-family balance issues faced by their employees and assist them accordingly.

Keywords: work-family conflict; family-work conflict; gender

INTRODUCTION

Increasing number of women in paid jobs worldwide is just one of the changes that has indirectly forced organizations and countries to develop appropriate policies and initiatives to assist employees in juggling their role as workers (work domain) and as parents, and members of a family (family domain). Thus, the issue of work-family balance, which is rooted in the quality of work life framework, gained attention in the 1960s with the introduction of paid parental leave and child care service in Scandinavian countries (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997).

As Malaysia aspires to be a developed nation by 2020, employment trend in this country also mirrors development in the Western countries. For instance, women accounted for about half of the population in Malaysia. The female labor force participation rate has risen from 47.2% in 2000 to 47.9% in 2011 (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development & UNDP, 2014). Of this total, about 70% of working women are married or having families of their own and also contribute to the increasing number of families with dual-careers (Jamilah, Rahim, & Aminah, 2006). Therefore, work-life balance issues are also pertinent to Malaysians.

According to Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia in The Women's Summit 2009, women in the workforce are struggling to balance their family and career demands. For many women, when there is no work-life balance, work is perceived as a struggle and has caused them to suffer from stress, become unmotivated and less productive (Anne Hashim, 2010).

While globalization and other changes are taking place in the work organizations, gender roles ideology has not

changed much whether in the West or the East (Lewis, 2000). Generally, Malaysians hold traditional gender role ideology (Ministry of Women, Family and Community, 2008). Traditional gender role ideology believes in separate roles and responsibilities for men and women, whereby men's roles focus on work and women's roles concentrate on the home (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). Although more and more men are involved in household chores and child-care, women are still the primary managers for household responsibilities and child-care, regardless of whether they are in paid formal jobs or not (Dex, 2003; Noor, 1999). Moreover, studies demonstrate that pressures and conflicts experienced by employees are deeply gendered in nature. Therefore, most work-family balance research takes possible gender differences into account (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Research on dual-career men and women has revealed inconsistent findings in regard to gender differences in work and family experiences and outcomes. Gender has frequently been cited as an explanation for these incongruent findings (Byron, 2005; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). The main conclusion emerged from the review has presented that men and women are still sustained in a traditional model by a broad set of societal normative values. Thus, this study aims to investigate the differences between men and women in perceiving their level of work demands, organizational family-friendly policies, supervisors' support, family demands, work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

GENDER ROLE THEORY

Gender roles are "socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women" (Anselmi & Law, 1998, p. 195). Gender roles are not fixed but are rather