Religiosity as a moderator of work-family demands and employees’ well-being

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The current study was conducted to examine: (1) the relation of work-family demands, that is, long working hours, inflexible work schedule, office work overload, household work, issues related to children and husbands with employees’ well-being, and (2) the role of religiosity as a moderator of work-family demands and employees’ well-being. The following hypotheses were proposed: (a) work-family demands would be negatively related with employees’ well-being; (b) religiosity would moderate the relation of work-family demands with employees’ well-being. The researchers used 135 Muslim women of academic staff as respondents, working in the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 years. The findings of the present study proved that, the hypothesis work-family demands was found to be negatively correlated with employees well being but another hypothesis was not proved as the religiosity was not moderating the relation of hypothesis work-family demands and well being. Hence, religiosity may not be effective to manage work family demands.

Key words: Work-family conflict, well-being, religiosity, coping strategies, work-family demands.

INTRODUCTION

The human resource managers are entrusted to offer and propose solutions to many problems that are faced by workers such as job dissatisfaction, lower job performance, lesser employee commitment, as well as create a balance between work demands and family responsibilities. Recently, women’s labor force participation in Malaysia has increased rapidly to reach about 11.4 million (Eighth Malaysia Plan, 2000). The work-family balance debate seems to focus on a number of assumptions and perceptions that work is experienced negatively, working hours in Malaysia are from eight to five, long hours of work as a problem that affects employees’ commitment to family institutions which makes combining work and family difficult in Malaysian families. If this issue is inadequately attended by employers and organizations, long-term employees unwavering performance cannot be assured. To some employers, better work-life balance means better business. This makes for the case that, work-life balance is a serious and a growing concept for employers, business owners and even human resource experts who have to find ways to help workers have a life and a job that will reap real rewards in terms of employee recruitment, retention, morale, performance and productivity.

Some studies have been done on work-family conflict and found its negative impacts on employees well being have been explored extensively in Western industrialized countries (Allen et al., 2000). Despite strong indications that work and family issues are increasingly important phenomena in Asian countries, studies of work-family conflict in Asia are rare (Luk, 2001; Yang et al., 2000; Spector et al., 2004). However, those few researchers who have considered the problem believe that Asian people view work and family differently because of cultural differences. Some research results between Western and Asian countries suggest that, more research is needed to investigate work-family conflict and its impact on different groups and settings, because work
and family issues are strongly related to cultural beliefs, values and norms (Lobel, 1991).

Women's roles in society have begun to change, especially with the emergence of the women's movement. Despite those changes, barriers that prevent women from working still exist. Not only men see parenting as fundamentally female, they also see the pursuing of career as a fundamentally male prerogative (Lawlor, 1994; Schwartz, 1989).

Working women, while facing the same stressors as working men, often have additional ones not experienced by working men. While the stress usually faced by those whose work comes from administrative strategies and policies, organizational design and structure, working conditions, and organizational processes, women face additional and different exclusive stressors (Robbins, 1998; Luthans, 1992). These stressors include stereotyping, work/home conflict, social isolation and discrimination (Long, 1995; Evetts, 1994; Marshall, 1995). In most western countries, teaching is considered a female profession, particularly at the elementary level (Ruijs, 1993). However, university teaching and administration are mostly domains reserved for males (Ruijs, 1993; p535). In developed countries also, studies related to women holding managerial and non managerial positions are abundant (Marshall, 1995; Tanton, 1994; Moen, 1992; Evetts, 1994).

In the case of Malaysia, some empirical studies investigating the phenomenon of work-family conflict have been reported (Ahmad, 1996; Noor, 2002; Komarraju, 2006). Nevertheless, these studies focus on the consequences of work-family conflict instead of their antecedents. As such, it remains unclear whether the findings on the antecedents of work-family conflict abroad are applicable to Malaysia. A study on the associations among work-family conflict, job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction among married professional Malaysian women found that work-family conflict is vital to the firms where these women work, as well as to the women themselves.

The positive influence of religiosity on well-being and it lessen the work-family conflict among Muslim working women have been concerned, that is individuals with a strong religious faith reported higher levels of life satisfaction and fewer negative psychosocial consequences of traumatic life events (Ellison, 1991) as well as lower level of distress (Ross, 1990). Religious activities especially prayers are usually regarded as positive coping devices directed toward both the problem and personal growth (Folkman et al., 1986).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some researchers have shown the conflict between work demands and family responsibilities as expecting well-being (Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998). Many researchers also have examined work-family conflict as a mediator of relationships between stress of work and family roles and individual well-being (e.g., Frone et al., 1992; Frone et al., 1997).

Work-family conflict in university life

Higher-learning institutions have been experiencing major changes with a significant impact on the role and working practices of the academics (Barry et al., 2001). In the context of the "increasingly economist and managerial nation, which environment university life," (Currie et al., 2000, p. 269), academicians jobs have become more challenging in terms of effort, as well as time. With growing institutional demands, accountability and work intensification of 50 to 60 h per week, workload has become the norm in many universities (Jacobs and Winslow, 2004). Research on work-family conflict has found that, such conflict is higher among those who work longer hours or have greater work demands, and report higher job involvement and greater autonomy (Eby et al., 2005), thus rendering the academic context particularly sensitive to work-family issues. The fact that total commitment might be self-imposed by social and career expectations does not change the main argument in this paper: as long hour culture becomes ‘the norm’ in university settings, academics are increasingly likely to feel the tensions between work and family life, and the work-family culture that prevails in academia is unlikely to make things easier for faculty members, particularly women, trying to balance job requirements with the demands of family life.

Universities have traditionally organized academic careers based on the male life patterns making it more difficult for women to advance their careers while building a family (Armenti, 2004; Moen and Sweet, 2004). However, the intensified organizational demands and the current expectations that academics will devote unlimited time to their work, have raised new gender issues worth addressing. The gendered division of household labor, and the gendered expectations of family obligations and responsible parenting that remain in Western societies (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Jacobs and Winslow, 2004) also play a significant part in the tensions between work and family, particularly for mothers of young children.

Work-family conflict in Malaysian Institutions

In Malaysia, the problem of balancing work and family obligations is a critical issue to address. According to the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006 to 2010, the female labor force participation rate has risen from 44.7% in 2000 to 45.7% in 2005 (The Economic Planning Unit, 2006). According to Noor (2003) who proposes and tests an exploratory
model, using demographic variables, personality and roles as predictors of well-being, with work-family conflict acting as a mediator or an intervening variable between these sets of predictors and well-being. Besides that, her study is most important because it incorporates personality variables as predictors of women's well-being. Although previous researchers (Amatea and Fong, 1991) have shown that, the personal resources that women bring with them into their roles are important, Noor's (2003) study is one of the few that have directly tested personality variables within their frameworks. Noor's (2003) results show that although work-related variables explain the most variance in the prediction of work-interfering-with-family (WIF) conflict and job satisfaction, personality variables account for the most variance in the prediction of family-interfering-with-work (FIW) conflict.

Aminah et al. (2009) conduct a study on work-family conflict among single mother employees and their antecedents including dispositional (locus of control and perfectionism), job (role overload, role conflict and job flexibility) and organizational (supervisor support) factors. This study was applied on 159 Malaysian single mother employees using self-administered questionnaires. The findings of the study indicated that, 66% of the single mother employees experienced moderate to high levels of work-family conflict. The ability to balance work and family roles is a challenge for women and men in the 21st century workforce (Eby et al., 2005). During the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in the conflicting demands of work and family roles, and the effect of that conflict on both organizations and employees (Allen et al., 2000; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

Nowadays, in many developed and developing countries, working men and women experience problems balancing their work and family domains (Joplin et al., 2003). However, the impact of multiple roles at work and in family lives may be culture-bound in different countries. As the modern world begins the third millennium, the significance of work and family is clearly visible in the daily challenges faced by employed parents who are combining work and family roles (Fallon, 1997; Zedeck and Mosier, 1990).

In fact, some commentators have declared that effectively balancing work and family responsibilities is, or will become, the central challenge in the lives of most people in modern society (Milkie and Peltola, 1999). Given the centrality of work and family, it is thus necessary for research efforts to be directed towards understanding the relationship between these two primary life domains, especially for those individuals who are simultaneously occupying roles in both domains.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we develop a comprehensive understanding of how employed parents combine and achieve a balance between their work and family roles, taking into consideration the rewards and benefits which may be afforded to them as well as the challenges and stresses which they may encounter. Coping strategies are the ways an individual, group or organization use to minimize the effects of stress (Belal et al., 2009). Coping strategy is also defined as "any activity, in thought or deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity" (Breakwell, 1986, p. 78). Coping strategy is defined as something we do to overcome an obstacle. In every person’s life, it is natural that there will be problems and things that go wrong. Coping strategies can be either positive or negative (Felton et al., 1984). Two common types of coping strategies can be distinguished: problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies (Folkman et al., 1979; Leventhal and Nerenz, 1982). Problem-focused coping strategies are used to tackle the problem directly and emotion-focused coping strategies are used to handle feelings of distress, rather than the actual problem.

Religious coping strategies that consist of elements of the emotion-focused coping strategies and problem-focused coping strategies, also include social support as a strategy to cope with the pressures by including advice, assistance, subsidies, and emotional support and justifying the perceptions of the individual and his actions. The same thing is experienced with religious coping strategies, which include more practice of prayers and religious worship that focus on emotion. A religious coping strategy is more important and useful with stressful events that individual cannot control. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine: (1) the relation of work-family demands, that is, long working hours, inflexible work schedule, office work overload, household work, issues related to children and husbands with employees' well-being, and (2) the role of religiosity as a moderator of work-family demands and employees' well-being. The following hypotheses were proposed: (a) work-family demands would be negatively related with employees' well-being and religiosity; (b) religiosity would moderate the relation of work-family demands with employees' well-being.

METHODS

Participants and procedure

Data were collected from 135 Muslim women of academic staff in the University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 years. Rapport was established by explaining the importance and the relevance of the study. Participants were assured that, their responses would be kept confidential and utilized only for the research purpose. They were asked to complete the questionnaires by following the instructions written at the top of the questionnaire.

Measures

Work-family demands: Family demand was measured by 3-items developed by Yang’s (1993), and work demands were measured by 5-items from Spector’s (1975).
Table 1. The result of reliability is as tabulated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of item</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-family conflict</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family demands</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Correlation matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WFC (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing (2)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFD (3)</td>
<td>0.611**</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity (4)</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Well-being: In this research, the major components of well-being were considered: job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction. Family Satisfaction was measured using 3 items by Hackman and Oldham (1975). Job satisfaction was measured using 5 items by Hackman and Oldham (1975), and Life satisfaction was measured using 5 items developed by Diener et al. (1985).

Work-family conflict: Work-family conflict was measured using two subscales (5 items for WFC and 5 items for WFD) and included ten items developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). The Cronbach alpha reported 0.77.

Religiosity: Participants completed the questionnaires developed by researchers, a 12-item self-report measure of "Strength of Religious Faith". Sample items include "religion which is important because it helps me to cope with life events" (item-1) and "the primary purpose of prayer is to reduce stress" (item-12). The scale uses a 5-point Likert response format, ranging from (1) "Strongly Disagree" to (5) "Strongly Agree." Scores can range between 10 and 40, with higher aggregate scores reflecting stronger levels of "Strength of Religious Faith."

**RELIABILITY RESULTS**

The reliability test was conducted. Coefficient Cronbach's alpha is a measure of reliability or internal consistency. A value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.50 or above is consistent with the recommended minimum values stated by Nunnally (1967). Cronbach's alpha indicating reliability for each variable as seen in Table 1: work-family conflict: 0.911, work-family demands: 0.784, religiosity: 0.842, and well-being: 0.516. Therefore, as related by Nunnally (1978), the research results can be accepted.

**Correlation analysis**

Table 3 exhibits the correlation coefficients between all variables. Not all independent variables are correlated significantly well-being. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The criterion used for the level of significance was set a priori. The relationship must be at least significant at **P< 0.01. Table 2 shows that, there is a strong positive significant correlation between work-family demands and work-family conflict, (r=0.611, p=0.000<0.01). There is also negative correlation between work family conflict and religiosity but not significant (r= -0.088, p=0.308>0.05).

In the present study, a regression analysis was also used to test the hypotheses that religiosity moderates the relationship between positive work family demands and well-being. All variables were entered into the regression equation as recommended by Rose et al. (2004). In step 1, work family demands were entered, in step 2, we entered religiosity and in step 3 multiplications of religiosity and work family demands were entered and well-being was entered as a dependent variable. The results of the moderator analyses were presented in Table 2. Results revealed that, religiosity strengthens the relationship between work family demands and well-being; thus it is the religiosity plays an important role, as coping with work family demands and in developing well-being in Muslim women of academic staff.

**DISCUSSION**

In this study, most of the respondents experience work-family conflict, but they do it differently. Married muslim women with small children tended to show major distress on family issues. These women, in particular, regretted not being able to give enough attention to their families and children and referred to housework and childcare, as major constraints to their performance of academic work.
Table 3. Multiple regression analysis testing moderating effects of religiosity on the relationship between work-family demands and well-being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(β)</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>Adj. R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Family Demands (WFD)</td>
<td>0.058*</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity (R)</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(WFD, R, WFD *R)</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, ** p < .01.

As they were getting academic teaching, research and administration tasks, they experienced more conflict between work demands and family. Since most of them had more than 60 working hours weekly, and did not have enough time for childcare and family matters.

The work-family demands are considered as a source of conflict between work demands and family responsibilities such as long working hours, office work overload, household work and children matters. The result of this research are supported by previous empirical studies, for example high work-family conflict was positively related to long working hours (Burke et al., 1980; Frone et al., 1997; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Gutek et al., 1991; Pleck et al., 1980; Wallace, 1997) also high work-family conflict was positively related to work schedule inflexibility (Ayee, 1992), and work overload and irregular work schedules had a strong positive relationship with work-family conflict (Burke and Greenglass, 1991; Simon et al., 2004). Some studies have shown the number of children living at home as positively related to, work to family conflict and family to work conflict (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Time spent on family activities has been found to be positively related to family-to-work conflict (Frone et al., 1997; Gutek, 1991). Working women with children younger than 12 years old experience more work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict than working women with older children (Higgins et al., 2004). In the current case, it was suggested to university management for dealing with these problems, they should provide more support and flexibility to its employees especially women.

Beckman (1978) showed that, working women considered parenting and a career as conflicting, if not competing roles. The fundamental consequence of married working women marriage is the fact that, long working hours on the part of both spouses subtracts from the much needed time for completion of household tasks, causes greater fatigue due to energy depletion at work, and deprives them of the most essential element to the growth and strengthening of their relationship-time together.

REFERENCES


