THE IMPACT OF WORKING CONDITIONS ON WORK AND FAMILY INTERFACE

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Abstract

The present paper analysed the impact of working conditions on to work and family interface among 167 workers from two big public companies dealing with national civil defence (n=67) and higher education (n=100). Specifically, we have considered the additive influence towards incrementing work-family conflict (WFC) of a number of structural working conditions. Working conditions were clustered in two big groups of work-family demands, that is, (1) time-pressure (frequent trips, working days/hours per week, home-work distance, flexible work schedule, work turnover, and having to work on weekends), and (2) hierarchical pressure (labour promotion, moonlighting, organizational position, experience, money income, and type of contract). We resumed data obtained using self-report measurements on personal and organizational status and WFC based on Carlson, Kacmar and William (2000). As the literature has been confuse on these relationships (White, 1999; Brannen & Nilsen, 2001; Barnett & Gareis, 2002; Rau & Hyland, 2002) the mediated influence of employee sex and the work-family balance phase are also analysed. Because the gender role socialization in women is said to be inadequate for work performance (Dexter, 1985; Babin & Boles, 1998) we expected clearer and stronger relationships between structural working conditions and WFC among women rather than men. Even more, sex differences in the emergence of WFC through various working conditions is understood at the light of multiple role literature (Gutek, Repetti & Silver, 1988; Barnett, 1999; Wethington, Moen, Glasgow & Pillemer, 2000). Therefore, our latest results indicate that women suffer higher WFC than men when working conditions are related to time rather than hierarchical pressures.

Keywords: Work-family conflict, working conditions, multiple role literature, work-family interface.
1. Introduction

The emergence of dual-income couples on recent post-industrial scenarios is forcing new relationships among family and organizational members. The fact for men and women of getting in charge of duties and responsibilities from both work and family domains should motivate us to distribute time, effort, and energy with equilibrium by changing values and personal interests throughout negotiation processes. In order to do so, we must identify working conditions and understand their demanding nature as they are considered important antecedents of work-family conflict (WFC) and other stressful outcomes (such as spillover or crossover effects).

Traditionally, work antecedents have been divided into structural and psychosocial variables (Peiró, Prieto & Roe, 1996). Structural work-variables antecedents deal with relatively static, most quantitative demands in work-family domains such us number of working hours of a worker or number of children in a family. On the contrary, psychosocial work-variables antecedents depict more dynamic, qualitative demands normally related with social interactions (e.g. supervisor’s style, organizational climate, autonomy at work). This division should be perceived inside a continuum dimension of static-dynamic demands. Nevertheless, both set of factors are said to affect individual’s well-being and emotional states (Hughes, Galinsky & Morris, 1992).

For instance, Jones and Butler (1980) once found that employees with monotonous tasks suffered from more stress and WFC. On the contrary, there seem to be higher empirical evidence on the fact that complex, highly demanding positions would be positively related to WFC (Jones & Butler, 1980; Pleck, Staines & Lang, 1980; Greenhaus et al., 1989). Individual differences in reacting to stressful working conditions such us resistance or intelligence may be explaining these facts together with the known curvilinear association between level of stress and productivity. In general, as working demands appear to increase for the employee then the more difficult it seems to achieve them together with family demands. Consequently, we would expect higher WFC or lower work-life well-being as much upper position we achieve at organizations.

Working demands assigned to a job position may also vary in relation to the nature of its content and working processes. The complexity of these nature is normally ascribes through the temporal aspects of the work. Time is a crucial factor at work as it is used to rationally organise our work by giving a sense of advance to our tasks. Following a dimensional approach to temporal working aspects (Staines & Pleck, 1983), the impact of time in working setting is usually analysed in three dimensions: amount of time, scheduling, and flexibility. It is broadly accepted that higher amount of time (days per week or hours per day) will contribute to interfere with other domains because time is a limited resource (Young & Willmot, 1975; Sorensen, Pirie, Folsom, Luepker, Jacobs & Gillium, 1985; Almeida, Maggs & Galambos, 1993). That is, the time that we dedicate to work is time not devoted to family duties. However, the literature shows unclear relationships between work-time and satisfaction or well-being (Hughes,
The impact of time on these variables may be mediated by gender and family negotiation among members.

Due to gender role definitions, working women may be stressed when they have to spend more hours at work, specially when they are young children at home, but they may maintain well-being feelings if they choose socially accepted strategies to attend family duties (baby-sitters, partner’s contributions, and so on). This is true only taking for granted that an increase in time devoted to work is associated with economical rises.

The impact of time aspects at work also depends on the type of working hours/days distribution. According to the deprivation framework (Barling, 1990), the longer a worker (especially female) is away from home, the greater the negative effect of WFC. Therefore, turnover, night-jobs, time-stressful activities, moonlighting, and having to work on weekends may increase WFC and affect worker’s well-being (Shamir, 1983; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Voydanoff, 1988). On the contrary, there is evidence of lower satisfaction at work and higher stress among women with part-time jobs (Hall, 1986; Backer, 1993) or even among teleworkers. Temporal or physic proximity of work and family demands may cause individual problems to concentrate on each of them properly. Nevertheless, the perception of a flexible worktime seems to mediate between the working scheduling and WFC. In this sense, when a worker is able to control and organise his working activities he/she is prepare to prioritise and delegate according to his/her needs (Christensen & Staines, 1990; Adams & Jex, 1999).

Finally, spatial demands of work may also be perceived as stressful sources for workers. Labour mobility is a special worry for dual-income couples as they are sometimes forced to choose between their respective jobs in order to avoid separation. If the couple accept a new emplacement for one of the members it may cause problems to re-start work for the other one. Frequent travels or work-home distance may also be related to WFC because family duties are exclusively assigned to one member (Greenhaus & Kopellman, 1981; Gracia, Gonzalez & Peiró, 1996).

The general purpose of this study is to acquire more insight into the predictive value of certain work-related variables on to work-family interface in order to redesign working conditions or modify member’s attitudes towards work-family interface. We have adopted a quantitative approach to the analysis of work antecedents, which places interest on objective features of working conditions rather than on worker’s perceptions and subjective reactions towards them. Gender and work/family centrality will be considered as important mediated variables on this study.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

In accordance with most of work-family research we have obtained a sample of 167 participants sending surveys to the whole staff belonging to (a) a national
civil defence department (39.5%) and (b) to a high educational faculty from the University of Sevilla (60.5%). The original response rate was 26% and 45%, respectively. However, the final sample only included individuals that fulfilled the common requirements in this matters; (1) Be 18 years old or over, (2) Work at least 20 hours per week, and (3) Be living with a partner who also works 20 hours/week or more -dual-income couple- (Greenhaus et al., 1989). The sample had 79% men most of which were religiously married (74.4%). The average age of the participants was 38.8 (SD= 7.89) similar to their partners, 36.9 (SD= 9.11). The children rate per family was 1.3 (SD.94). Respondents occupied high (9%), middle (15.6%) and low (73.7%) organizational positions.

2.2. Measures

*Socio-demographic variables* were obtained using multiple-choice questions that referred to work antecedents (time-related, emotion-related and space-related variables among others), and family antecedents (marital status, family size, years of marriage and family stage).

*Work-family centrality* were measured using Lobel and St. Clair (1992) mono-item scale of work-family salience. Respondents had to define themselves choosing from a graduated 5-point answer from 'I primary consider myself as a family person' up to 'I primary consider myself as a working person'.

*Work-family conflict (WFC)* was measured using Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) scale consisted in 9 items that rated along a five-point frequency scale from 1 (=never) to 5 (=always). The item contents include perceptions of work-family incompatibilities due to time (3 items), strain (3 items), and behaviour (3 items) matters. Internal scale consistency obtained in the present study accounted for a coefficient alpha of .83.

2.3. Procedure

The representativeness of the samples was not considered because attention was paid to internal variable relationships with little intention to generalised results. Therefore, accidental mailings or handouts of the selected questionnaires were done to those workers that matched mentioned criteria. The average feedback was of 43% after a 2-week period delay.

3. Results

Table 1 provides summary measures for variables in the analysis comparing between men and women. We show weighted percentages or means of the variables with standard deviations in parentheses. According to our sample, men compared to women seems to attend higher organizational positions, with better working contracts the majority of which were inside a tenure track post. Men also appeared to travel for business more often and to perceive near promotion opportunities at a greater extent than women. However, women showed higher educational level than men although this fact was not reflected on salary differences.
Results of correlations and contingency analysis between the study variables and WFC considering for sex are shown in Table 2 (below). As far as WFC concerns, its level decreases as women grow up and gain work experience but then arises when attending high organizational positions or work more hours. In the case of men, they suffer from higher WFC as they struggle with long working hours, higher positions, demanding contracts, moonlighting, turnovers, and near promotions.

Multiple regressions were used to assess the potential relationships between the predictor’s variables and WFC criterion variable, for men and women separately. As shown in Table 3a, flextime, turnover, moonlighting, organizational position, and type of contract were the unique statistically significant variables to explained WFC levels in men (F=3.78, p<.01). No other variable was found important in this first equation whose variables explained 75.2% of total variance. Therefore, men’s WFC perception seem to deal with strain-related working conditions that weaken men’s energy and effort to tackle both work and family demands. On the other hand, women’s WFC levels were explained by the presence of working-hours per day, work on weekends, and the salary. These variables that accounted for the 25.5% of the total variance had more to do with time-related variables (see Table 3b).

### Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables in analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE (range)</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38.01 (7.51)</td>
<td>39.02 (8.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Position (1-3)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study level (1-4)</td>
<td>1.7 (.90)</td>
<td>2.32 (.85)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (1-4)</td>
<td>1.54 (.83)</td>
<td>1.64 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type contract (4-1)</td>
<td>1.53 (.88)</td>
<td>2.01 (.99)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>12.5 (7.75)</td>
<td>14.16 (7.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work days per week</td>
<td>5.31 (.77)</td>
<td>5.29 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-hours per week</td>
<td>39.0 (8.57)</td>
<td>37.31 (6.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-home distance</td>
<td>13.07 (25.21)</td>
<td>8.27 (15.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonlighting</td>
<td>.98 (2.81)</td>
<td>.93 (3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business traveling</td>
<td>1.68 (4.9)</td>
<td>.34 (.89)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication to work</td>
<td>53.5 %</td>
<td>52.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexitime (1-2)</td>
<td>26.7 %</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover (1-2)</td>
<td>18.7 %</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on weekends (1-3)</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near promotion (1-2)</td>
<td>27.9 %</td>
<td>10.3 % **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These initial results encouraged us to consider a dual approach in the study of WFC, considering both quantitative and qualitative variables. Consequently, two work-family fit variables were created to analyse the psychological consistency of the respondents both alone and in their relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE (range)</th>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.296*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Position (1-3)</td>
<td>6.1%**</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study level (1-4)</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (1.4)</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>-.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type contract (4-1)</td>
<td>70.6% *</td>
<td>42.0%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>-.264*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work days p.w.</td>
<td>.435**</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-hours p.w.</td>
<td>.547**</td>
<td>.452**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-H distance</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonlighting</td>
<td>.263*</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business traveling</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flextime (1-2)</td>
<td>47.3 %</td>
<td>36.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover (1-2)</td>
<td>33 % **</td>
<td>30.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on weekends (1-3)</td>
<td>58.5 %</td>
<td>53.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near promotion (1-2)</td>
<td>50% *</td>
<td>23.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Correlations and contingency analysis between variables and WFC, considering for sex.

Table 3a. Regression analysis for predictive variables and WFC, men cases (n=94).
Firstly, we classified cases of work-family centrality (family, work, and both domains) and dedication devoted to work (work-biased and family-biased) variables clustering the conditions (6) in two groups: personal coherency (e.g. family centrality and time devoted to family) or personal incoherency. Results showed that respondents inside personal incoherency conditions suffered from higher WFC (F=11.38, p<.01).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W-Hours/day</td>
<td>-.777</td>
<td>-.450</td>
<td>-3.04</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>-1.60</td>
<td>-.423</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on weekends</td>
<td>-4.06</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>-4.22</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3b. Regression analysis for predictive variables and WFC, women cases (n=73).

Secondly, we crossed work-family centrality variable of both respondents and those of their partners and made 3 groups out of 9 conditions referring to (1) totally balanced couple (e.g. both members stated work and family salience), (2) partially balanced couple (e.g. only one expressed work-family salience), and (3), no balanced couple (e.g. both members stated work centrality). As it was expected, those cases in the totally balanced couple showed lower WFC levels (F=9.18, p<.01).

4. Discussion

The present research has tried to analyse the impact of certain working conditions on WFC. We can conclude that this influence must consider sex variables. Therefore, men seem to be more affected by strain-related variables such as organizational position, moonlighting, and near promotions rather than time-related variables. For women, WFC is primarily a perception of not having time to achieve demands from both domains. These results are in line of those presented by White (1999) that stated that men perceived WFC sequentially rather than in parallel as it seem to be in women. Consequently, women tend to look for available time to attend responsibilities from both domains while men would spread their effort throughout time along their duties.

Another important reminder in this study is associated to the concept of work-family fit referred by others as perception of role balance (Marks & McDermid, 1996, Voydanoff, 2004). We have then found support for the need to get involves working conditions that allow us to develop our work/family centrality in quantity and quality. This is a matter of having the chance to choose the type of working conditions one would prefer most something that for the vast majority is just a luxury. Even more, this work-family fit operates within the worker and within the couple in the sense that both members have got to coordinate themselves to balance their mutual lives. These couples, called acrobats by Hall
and Hall (1980), have appeared in this research as the ideal one to lower WFC levels.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming confusion in relation to these antecedent variables may be explained as an effect of certain mediated variables. Among these, gender is probably the most commonly referred by researchers. Androcentric cultures have traditionally forced women to attend non-paid roles and therefore being considered as "second category" citizens. Access to complete education and total freedom was something frequently denied for women forty or fifty years ago. Although this situation has changed drastically men are still looking for and developing themselves in tenure track positions with higher working demands. They seem to be engaging in careers rather than jobs. Contrary to Wallace (1997), and Bielby and Bielby (1989), no differences were obtained in relation to working-hours (around 40 per week) neither to time devoted to work between sexes (both men and women are said to balance).

At the light of these results, we must admit that social desiderability may be influencing these outcomes as a mean to protect self-esteem or to shelter (normally, men’s) informal economy. In this sense, we encourage different methodology in future WFC studies that could avoid self-report measures in order to better describe the complexity of work and family interface context.

5. References


