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THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ENVIRONMENT ON WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to investigate how individual characteristics, family environment, and work environment predicted work-family conflict. Work-family conflict has the two directions of conflict (family to work conflict and work to family conflict). The sample consisted of 702 government officials in Bangkok, Thailand. Self-report inventories with a five-point rating scales ranging from always true to never true were administered to collect data. Data were analyzed using hierarchical regression. The results indicated that psychological characteristics and environment taken together accounted for 54 % of the variance in family-to-work conflict and 75 % variance in work-to-family conflict, respectively. The most powerful predictors for family-to-work conflict were workload, family load, optimism, and work support respectively. Similarly, family load contributed to work-to-family conflict the most whereas workload was the second in terms of the strength of its contributions. Family-friendly organizational support, intrinsic motivation, and work involvement were the third, fourth, and fifth powerful predictors of work-to-family conflict, respectively. The results support the importance of psychological characteristics and environment impact on work-family conflict. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords:

Work-family conflict, Psychological characteristics, Family environment, Work environment

JEL Classification: A30

Introduction

Nowadays, working people have multiple roles. Specifically, family and work roles are significant for working people. Therefore, family and work roles impact each other in positive or negative directions. According to the spillover type of work-family linkage, experiences or resources in one domain (family or work) can be transferred to the other domain (work or family) (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). That is, family and work can facilitate or enhance one another (positive spillover) or they can conflict or interfere with another (negative spillover). Specifically, work-family negative spillover is referred to as work-family conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Voydanoff, 2005). There are two directions of conflict between work and family roles: family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict (Frone, 2003). However, there are few studies in Thailand on work-family conflict especially in both directions of work-family conflict. To gain a better understanding of the work-family conflict comprehensively, this study is interested in examining predictors of both directions of work-family conflict (work to family conflict and family to work conflict). Specifically, the objective of this study is to investigate effects of psychological characteristics, family environment and work environment on work-family conflict

Conceptual Framework

Work-family conflict is the concept that work and family roles are incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). That is, participation in the one role is made more difficult from participation in the other role. Moreover, participation in one role domain can negatively influence functioning of the other role domain. In other words, work-family conflict occurs when one role interferes with the individual's effectiveness in the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), family-to-work conflict means that participation in the family role is made more difficult from participation in the work role. Likewise, work-to-family conflict means that participation in the work role is made more difficult from participation in the family role.. A conceptual framework for this study is based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) assuming that work microsystem and family microsystem interact and influence one another to create the work-family mesosystem. This relationship is seen as bidirectional; that is, work and family affect each other. The ecological perspective also suggests that work, family, and individual characteristics interact in ways that may be facilitative and conflictual. Similar to ABCX model (Hill, 2005) suggesting that work, family, and individual characteristics as stressors or resources and support have direct effects on the perception of work-family linkage which in turn affects work, family, and individual outcomes.

Based on integration and application of ecological systems theory and ABCX model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Optimism, intrinsic motivation, family involvement, work involvement, family load, workload, family support, work support, and family-friendly organizational support are related to family-to-work conflict.

Hypothesis 2: Optimism, intrinsic motivation, family involvement, work involvement, family load, workload, family support, work support, and family-friendly organizational support are related to work-to-family conflict.

Hypothesis 3: Optimism, intrinsic motivation, family involvement, work involvement, family load, workload, family support, work support, and family-friendly organizational support predict family-to-work conflict.

Hypothesis 4: Optimism, intrinsic motivation, family involvement, work involvement, family load, workload, family support, work support, and family-friendly organizational support predict work-to-family conflict.

Methodology

Sample

The participants were 702 married government officials in Bangkok, of which 52% were male, 48% were female. The majority of participants had a bachelor degree (78.8%), followed by those with a master degree (5.1%).

Measures

Self-report inventories with a five-point rating scales ranging from true to untrue designed to measure study variables were administered to collect data. Each type of variable measures is described below.

Optimism Scale consisted of ten items assessing individuals' disposition in the positive way of life and having hope. Cronbach's alpha for optimism was .76.

Intrinsic Motivation Scale assessed individuals' need to act for its own sake with 10 items. Cronbach's alpha for intrinsic motivation was .70.

Family Involvement Scale of 5 items measured the extent to which individuals care and be responsible for their families. Cronbach's alpha for family involvement was .59.

Work Involvement Scale of 6 items assessed individuals' caring and commitment to their job. Cronbach's alpha for work involvement was .67.

Workload Scale was assessed with 8 items corresponded to psychological pressure concerning time, quantity, and quality in working. Cronbach's alpha for workload was .83.

Family Load Scale was assessed with 6 items corresponded to psychological pressure concerning time, quantity, and quality in doing family matters. Cronbach's alpha for family load was .89.

Work Support Scale was operationalized using 5 items corresponded to feedback, appreciation, and emotional support in the workplace from coworkers and supervisors. The coefficient alpha for work support was .67.

Family Support Scale was measured with 5 items corresponded to feedback, appreciation, and emotional support from spouses and family members. The coefficient alpha for family support was .69.

Family-friendly Organizational Support Scale was assessed individuals' perceptions of the organization's concern for their families and living outside the workplace by using work-family friendly support (5 items). The coefficient alpha for Family-friendly organizational support was .70.

Family-to-work Conflict Scale (9 items) was assessed individual's perception of affect, skills, and experience in the family role interfering the work role. Cronbach's alpha for family-to-work conflict was .94.

Work-to-family Conflict Scale (9 items) assessed individual's perception of affect, skills, and experience in the work role interfering the family role. Cronbach's alpha for work-to-family conflict was .95.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by using Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis.

Results

The Relationship between Psychological Characteristics, Environments and Work-Family Conflict

It was found that family-to-work conflict was positively associated with work-to-family conflict ($r = .70$, $p < .01$).

Psychological characteristics such as optimism, family involvement, and work involvement were negatively related to family-to-work conflict ($r = -.19, -.25, \text{ and } -.22$ respectively). Whereas, optimism and intrinsic motivation were positively related to work-to-family conflict ($r = .11, .21$).

Family environment such as family load was positively related to family-to-work conflict ($r = .61$) and work-to-family conflict ($r = .81$)

Work environment such as workload was positively correlated with family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict ($r = .62$ and $.81$ respectively) whereas family-friendly organizational support was negatively related to family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict ($r = -.55$ and $-.77$). Moreover, work support was negatively related to family-to-work conflict ($r = -.25$).

Impact of Psychological Characteristics and Environment on Work-Family Conflict

Psychological characteristics and environment such as optimism, intrinsic motivation, family involvement, work involvement, family load, workload, family support, work support, and family-friendly organizational support could account for 54% and 75% of family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict respectively. The powerful predictors for family-to-work conflict were workload ($\beta = .44$), family load ($\beta = .23$), optimism ($\beta = -.19$) and work support ($\beta = -.18$) respectively. In fact, workload was the most powerful predictors of family-to-work conflict whereas family load ($\beta = .39$) contributed to work-to-family conflict the most. Workload ($\beta = .31$), family-friendly organizational support ($\beta = -.19$), intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .11$), and work involvement ($\beta = -.10$) were the second, third, fourth, and fifth powerful predictors of work-to-family conflict, respectively (see Table 1).

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and ABCX (Hill, 2005) suggesting that individual characteristics, family, and work as stressors or resources affect work-family conflict. The results also indicated that the most powerful predictor of family-to-work conflict was workload whereas family load was the second in terms of the strength of its contributions. In contrast, family load contributed to work-to-family conflict the most and workload was the second. That is to say, having more workload and family load can increase family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict. Moreover, the results suggest that optimistic officials having work support can reduce family-to-work conflict. The findings also showed that work involvement and family-friendly organizational support affected work-to-family conflict. Therefore, increased work involvement and family-friendly organization support may reduce work-to-family conflict. The results are consistent with previous studies

suggesting that organizational support had positive impacts on work-family conflict (Wadsworth & Owens, 2007). Moreover, evidence from the present study confirms that the two directions of conflict are distinct and have different antecedents (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Table 1 Standardized Effects of Psychological Characteristics and Environment on Work-Family Conflict

Predictor	Standardized estimate (β)	
	Family-to-work conflict	Work-to-family conflict
Optimism	-.19*	ns
Intrinsic motivation	ns	.11*
Family involvement	ns	ns
Work involvement	ns	-.10*
Family load	.23*	.39*
Workload	.44*	.31*
Family support	ns	.30*
Work support	-.18	ns
Family friendly organizational support	ns	-.19*
R	.73	.86
R ²	.54	.75
F	88.94*	227.14*

* $p < .05$, ns = non significant effect

Implications for Practice

Family and work roles are important for individuals' life. Involvement in one role can positively or negatively affect another role. As a result, family and organization should be aware of effects of both roles. To lessen work-to-family conflict, the organization should create family-supportive work environments such as flexible work schedules, on-site child care service, and family leave. Similarly, work support is necessary to lower family-to-

work conflict. In addition, government organizations should manage officials' workload to reduce work-family conflict. Particularly, family members should help each other in family matters to lower work-family conflict.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. The first limitation of this study is that self-report inventories were used to collect data, creating mono-method bias. Future research should use multiple sources of data to resolve the common method bias. A second limitation is that data were collected from married government officials in Bangkok, limiting the generalizability of findings. It would, therefore, be interesting for future research to expand on the present study by using different samples, variables, and measures to provide generalizability and advance knowledge of work-family conflict. The directions of the work-family conflict, in general, were measured in this study. Hence, further research should study the relationships between dimensions or forms of work-family conflict with the same and other variables.

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