Role Conflict, Work-Family Conflict and Job Satisfaction among Single Mother Employees

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ABSTRACT

Despite previous studies on job satisfaction and its antecedents, few studies have explored the interrelationships between role conflict, work-family conflict and job satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of role conflict on job satisfaction, with work-family conflict as a potential mediator. Data were gathered from 159 Malaysian single mother employees, aged 45 and below, using self-administered questionnaires. Results of regression analyses indicate that work-family conflict serves as one of the mechanisms through which role conflict influences job satisfaction. Role conflict experienced at the workplace can increase the interrole conflict between work and family domains which in turn can reduce the level of job satisfaction. The findings suggest that to improve the job satisfaction of employees the management should avoid seeing the problem of work in isolation from the total life space of employees.

Keywords: Role Conflict, Work-Family Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Single Mother Employees

INTRODUCTION

Increasing the participation of women in the labour force brought a great increase in the number of individuals with significant responsibilities both at work and with family including single parents and dual-career couples. In Malaysia, the labor force participation rate of single mothers in 2007 was 4.1% for widowed and 2.8% for divorced/separated (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2008) compared with 4.0 and 2.4% in 2005 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2006). Besides the increase in single mothers entering the work force while continuing to maintain the majority of the family responsibilities (Jackson, Tal & Sullivan, 2003) there is a growing interest in the interface of work-family roles. This interest has also in large measures been fuelled by the growing concern shown by policy makers regarding the well-being of employees (Aminah & Zoharah, 2009). Since the pioneering work of Pleck (1977) there has been a general consensus that work and family influence each other and of particular interest to researchers has been the topic of work-family conflict.

Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) defined work-family conflict as a form of interrole conflict in which the simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures is in such a way that compliance with one would make compliance with the other difficult. The interrole conflict occurs because it is not possible for the focal person to satisfy all expectations of his or her work and family roles since each role requires time, energy and commitment. Based on the work of Kahn et al. (1964), Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) conceptualized work-family conflict as a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible, such that participation in one role makes it more difficult to participate in the other. Married working women are susceptible to work-family conflict because of the incompatible demands of work and family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and this conflict could result in negative consequences. Job dissatisfaction as one of the consequences of work-family conflict has been examined by many researchers (Bhuian Menguc, & Borsboom, 2005; Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002; Eby et al., 2005; Howard, Donofrio, & Boles, 2004; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Karatepe & Tekinkus, 2006; Lu, Gilmour, Kao, & Huang, 2006; Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, & Cooper, 2008; Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007; O’Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath; 2004; Thanacoody, Bartram, & Casimir, 2009; Wayne et al., 2004; Yildirim & Aycan, 2008).

Besides work-family conflict, role conflict is another predictor of job satisfaction. Role conflict refers to situations where the priorities of two systems cannot be achieved at the same time, or incompatibility between the
expectations of parties or between aspects of a single role (Shenkar & Zeira, 1992; Peterson & Smith, 1995). Role conflict occurs when there exists different policies or demands and this can cause individual dissatisfaction and decreased organizational performance (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Shenkar et al., 1992). Bhuian, Menguc, and Borsboom (2005), and Lu and Lee (2007) found that the role conflict experienced by employees can result in job dissatisfaction. Role conflict is not only a predictor of job satisfaction but also work-family conflict. The more conflict among work roles employees experience the greater the chances that stress will spill over and cause negative behaviors that interfere with fulfilling family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

### Conservation of Resources Theory

The model in this study is developed based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), as well as the work of previous researchers. The COR theory proposes that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources to reduce stress. Stress is a reaction to an environment in which there is the threat of a loss of resources, an actual loss in resources, or lack of an expected gain in resources. Resources include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies. Loss of this resource, or the threat of such a loss, may cause the experience of stress such as work-family conflict. COR theory has been used by Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) in their research on the consequence of stressors on work-family conflict.

Work role stressor (role conflict) and work-family conflict are expected to be related to one another. In particular, those who experience work role conflict will be more likely to report work-family conflict. According to the COR model, experiencing high levels of conflict at work might tap available resources and leave fewer resources available for meeting the work and family demands (Grandey & Cronpanzano, 1999). In this manner, work role conflict would lead to work-family conflict.

The COR theory proposes that interrole conflict leads to stress because resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles. The potential or actual loss of these resources results in job dissatisfaction. Once employees are confronted with high levels of conflict in work-family interface, they are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs.

Based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as well as previous findings, one could argue that there are interrelationships among role conflict, work-family conflict and job satisfaction, and that changes in the levels of role conflict could lead to changes in the levels of work-family conflict which could in turn lead to changes in the levels of job satisfaction and thus the following hypotheses were tested.

H1: There is a significant relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction.
H2: There is a significant relationship between role conflict and work-family conflict.
H3: There is a significant relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction.
H4: Work-family conflict mediates the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction.

### METHOD

#### Sample and Procedure

The sample of this present study consisted of single mothers working in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Single mother employees who met the following criteria were identified: (a) married, (b) working full-time, and (c) having at least one child staying at home. These criteria were established to ensure that the women in the sample had quite similar responsibilities in terms of family and work roles. Data were collected from a sample of 159 single mother employees using self-administered questionnaires through the drop and collect method. The questionnaire was administered in Malay language. Before its administration, the questionnaire was translated from English to Malay, and was validated by back-translation to ensure that both versions were equivalent.

#### Measurement

**Work-Family Conflict.** Work-family conflict was measured using the interrole conflict scale developed by Pleck, Staines and Lang (1980). This scale consists of eight items based on the three most prevalent aspects of work-family
conflict, namely excessive work time, schedule conflict, and fatigue or irritability. Five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) were used. Examples of items are: “My work takes up time that I would like to spend with my family” and “On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interest”. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of this work-family conflict scale was 0.89.

**Role Conflict.** Role conflict was measured using 8 items adapted from Kopelman et al. (1983). The respondents were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of items are: “On the job I work under incompatible policies and guidelines” and “At work I receive incompatible requests from two or more people”. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of this role conflict scale was 0.76.

**Job Satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured using five items. Three of the items were adopted from the instruments developed by Hackman and Oldhman (1975), and two by Clark (2001). The subjects of this study were requested to respond using five-point scaled response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Examples of items are: “I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in this job” and “I frequently think of quitting this job”. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of this job satisfaction scale was 0.81.

**Statistical Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were computed to present the main characteristics of the subjects. Correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between work-family conflict, supervisor support and job satisfaction. A series of regression analyses was employed to test the hypotheses of the study. Judd and Kenny (1981) recommended the use of a series of regression analyses to test the meditational model. Testing for mediation requires the estimation of the following regression equations: first, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator; and third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The following are the four conditions for establishing mediation; (1) The independent variable significantly affect the dependent variable; (2) The independent variable significantly affect the mediator; (3) The mediator significantly affect the dependent variable; (4) The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model. If the independent variable does not affect the dependent variable upon regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator, then full mediation is established. If otherwise, the test supports partial mediation.

**RESULTS**

The respondents’ age ranged from 31-45 years (M = 37.13, SD = 6.07) with 62.3% aged 36-45. They had an average of about 9 years of working experience (M = 9.41, SD = 6.41) (Table 1). Among the respondents, 36.5% had 5 years or less of experience while 30.2% had 6-10 years of experience in their present jobs. The mean income for the respondents was RM 1942.28 (SD = 1296.37). 57.9% of the respondents had only one to two children and on the average, the respondents had 2-3 children (M = 2.48, SD = 1.34). The mean score for work-family conflict on a five-point scale was 2.84 (SD = 0.87), role conflict 2.58 (SD = 0.58) and job satisfaction 3.88 (SD = 0.68) (Table 2).

Correlational analysis results revealed that there were significant correlations between role conflict and work-family conflict (r=0.46, p<0.01), and job satisfaction (r=-0.27, p<0.01). Work-family conflict was significantly related to job satisfaction (r=-0.35, p<0.01) (Table 2). The results show that an increase in role conflict leads to an increase in work-family conflict and a decrease in job satisfaction. An increase in work-family conflict leads to a decrease in job satisfaction. These results support H1-H3.

A series of regression analyses was used to test the role of work-family conflict as a mediator in the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction. Applying the four conditions for establishing mediation, it was found that work-family conflict fully mediates the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction since the independent variable did not affect the dependent variable upon regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator (Table 3). The results indicated that role conflict increased the work-family conflict of single mother employees (β= 0.46, p<0.01) which in turn could lead to reduced job satisfaction experienced by the single mother employees (β = -0.28, p < 0.01) (Figure 1). These results support H4.
Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.13</td>
<td>6.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 40</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 45</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working experience (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>6.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (RM/month)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1942.28</td>
<td>1296.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 – 1000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001 – 1500</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501 - 2000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 2001</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations of the Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Work-Family Conflict</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role Conflict</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.35**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 3: Results of multiple regression analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Variable</th>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>12.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>-0.35**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>21.65**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family conflict</td>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>42.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>Work-family conflict</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>12.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>-0.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < 0.05   ** p < 0.01

Figure 1: Results of multiple regression analyses with work-family conflict as a mediator of the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction

DISCUSSION

The present study developed and tested a research model that investigated the effects of role conflict and work–family conflict on job satisfaction, and the mediating role of work-family conflict in the relationship between role
conflict and job satisfaction of single mother employees. The hypothesis suggesting that role conflict increases single mother employees’ work–family conflict was confirmed by the results of this study and the results are in consonant with those of Carlson and Kaemar (2000). Similar findings were also reported by Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, and Keough (2003), and Bhuian, Menguc, and Borsboom (2005).

In this study, work-family conflict was found to be significantly and negatively related to single mother employees’ job satisfaction. Similar findings were obtained by Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, and Cooper (2008), and Thomas and Gangster (1995). The findings of this study indicate that single mother employees experiencing conflict between non-work and work domains would not be able to carry out their job-related tasks successfully and thus become dissatisfied with their jobs.

Theoretically, the findings show that the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) could be used as the basis for explaining the mediating effect of work-family conflict in the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction. According to this theory, experiencing high levels of conflict at work might tap available resources and leave fewer resources available for meeting the work and family demands (Grandey & Cronpanzano, 1999). In this manner, work role conflict would lead to work-family conflict.

The COR theory proposes that interrole conflict leads to stress because resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles. The potential or actual loss of these resources results in job dissatisfaction. Once employees are confronted with high levels of conflict in the work-family interface, they are likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. The results show that changes in the levels of role conflict could lead to changes in the levels of work-family conflict which could in turn lead to changes in the levels of job satisfaction.

There are limitations to this study that should be noted. First, a significant limitation is the small sample size that was utilized. The results reported here may only be generalized to single mothers meeting the selection criteria (full-time working, aged 45 years and below, and having at least one child). Caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings from this sample to other single mother employees in the study area, as well as to other groups of women employees such as those with partners and working part-time, as well as those without children. Second, the inferences drawn from this study are limited by self-report data and cross-sectional characteristics of the data.

The findings suggest that role conflict affect work-family conflict which has the potential to influence job satisfaction. Managers can make adjustments to offset role conflict, and therefore reduce work-family conflict which could affect job satisfaction. Role conflict occurs when work roles interfere with each other, limiting the employee’s ability to accomplish goals in one of their work roles (Boyar et al., 2003). In order to minimize the negative effects of role conflict, managers can provide training to help employees develop strategies for dealing with the conflict.

In conclusion, our study showed that work-family conflict serves as one of the mechanisms through which role conflict influences job satisfaction. The role conflict experienced by single mother employees at the workplace can increase the conflict that they experienced in meeting the demands of work and family roles which in turn can reduce the level of job satisfaction. The findings suggest that to improve the well-being of employees such as their job satisfaction, the management should avoid seeing the problem of work in isolation from the total life space of employees.

REFERENCES


