

## Work-Family Conflict and Work-Family Enrichment and Their Consequences in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study was performed to review the experience of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment among Malaysian employees. Work-family conflict or enrichment occurs when behaviors, moods, stresses and emotions from work bring bad or good effects into family. Dual working parents were more likely to experience work-family conflict and stressful work conditions due to the difficulty to manage their work and family life at the same time. The review also revealed that two-third of the respondents prioritized their family, while others were still struggling to balance between work and family life. The review provide evidence that modifying certain work conditions may be helpful in improving the quality of work-family life of Malaysian employees.

**Key words:** Work-family conflict • Work-family enrichment • Malaysian employees • Dual working parents

### INTRODUCTION

Work and family are two important domains which are inter-related. Factors in work domain may affect family life and vice versa [1]. Work's impact on the family and the family exerts important influences on the workplace. The relationship is considered as interdependent and dynamic [2]. Balancing between work and family life is important and it is considered a challenge in an individual's life. Multiple roles with limited available resources, such as time and energy, make employees struggle in order to balance between work and family roles [3]. The increasing number of women entering the workforce, dual earner-couple and single-parent families increases the importance of balancing between work and family demands [4].

Work-family balance has been recognized as an important issue to be highlighted in work-family related researches. Work-family balance deals with potentially conflicting demands of individual career, child care, elder care and other personal life issues. A growing number of researches suggest successful balancing in work and family requires minimum conflict and maximum benefits between work and family, where it contributes to work related outcomes [5, 6] and non-work related outcomes. Some examples of work-related outcomes are increased organizational commitment [7], reduced turnover

intentions and lower level of absenteeism [8]. Meanwhile, non-work related outcomes include personal and health-related outcomes. This is supported by Allen *et al.* [9], who suggested that work-family balance is associated with better marital and family satisfactions that leads to greater family performance. Success in balancing between work and family can avoid conflict.

**Work-Family Conflict and Work-family Enrichment:** Work-family conflict is defined as the difficulties faced when balancing between work and family [5, 10, 11]. Based on "scarcity hypothesis" [12], an individual has a fixed sum of energy to expand in various roles. Therefore, the time and energy devoted in one role will reduce the amount of time and energy that can be used in the other role. Work-family conflict has negative consequences for both employees and organizations. Among the negative effects at home are domestic violence [13], poor physical activity [14, 15], decreased emotional well-being and low level of life satisfaction [16]. As far as an organization is concerned, work-family conflict may lead to poor performance that may give negative impact to the organization.

Work-family conflicts exist when the demands of roles in both domains are incompatible in some aspects, so one's participation in a role is more difficult because of participation in another role [17]. Empirical evidence

suggests that work-family conflict gives negative impact to affective organizational commitment [18, 19]. Interaction between work and family can lead to work-family enrichment. It is a positive outcome in managing both work and family roles based on enrichment theory by Greenhaus and Powell [20].

Hence, combining work and family roles does not necessarily bring conflict, but enrichment too. This is supported by Eby *et al.* [21], where there is an extended research towards work family paradigm that includes the positive side of work-family interface rather than the negative side. Based on role enhancement theory, Marks [22] suggested that individual will get benefits from the commitment in multiple roles and resources from one domain, which then can be used to fulfil the demand in another role. Work-family enrichment, also known as work-family facilitation, can be understood as a relationship between work and family, where experience and participation in one role may help to increase the performance in another role [20]. Work-family enrichment, as well as work-family conflict, may occur from work to family and also from family to work [5, 23, 24].

Work-family enrichment refers to experiences in one role that helps to improve the quality of life in the other role [20]. An employee's ability in dealing with work and family demands may not only help to balance between work and family, but also may lead to work-family enrichment. For example, work-family enrichment provides synergistic effect, positive spill-over and increases the ability to handle multitasks between work and family domains [25, 26]. Work-family conflict and work-family enrichment can effect affective organizational commitment.

#### **Participation of Malaysian Women in Work Force:**

In Malaysian context, continuous effort to establish gender equality has seen great progress achieved by women in various socio-economic developments since the country gained independence in 1957. Participation of women in the work force has also increased since 1957, where more women are involved in almost all source jobs that sum up to 34.7 percent of the total employment in 2000, compared to 24.5 percent during the early years of independence. According to the Department of Statistic Malaysia [27], the participation of women labour force has increased steadily from 44.7% in 1995 to 46.1% in 2010. Statistics indicated that more than half of the women who participated in the labour force were married as there was an increase in percentage, from 57.5% in 2002 to 60.7% in 2010 [27].

Malaysian Family Life Survey (MFLS-1) and Fourth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS-4), conducted by the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), revealed that between year 1978 to 2004, there had been a significant increase in the proportion of working women in formal sectors such as professional, technical, clerical and sales workers. There was a change in the government policy due to the world's economic situation in early 1970s. Malaysian industrialization has shifted from import-oriented industrialization (IOI) to an export-oriented industrialization (EOI). Thus, this situation led to the emergence of foreign owned multinational companies that were mostly based on the electric and electronic industry. Both women and men had been given the same opportunity to contribute in the working sector and most opportunities were based on academic qualification and merit rather than gender. The culture of dual working parents in Malaysia has been increasing since then and therefore, it is important to understand how the integration of work and family responsibilities will influence each other [28].

#### **Consequences of Work-family Conflict and Work-family Enrichment in Malaysia:**

The Bernama News [29] reported that a survey conducted among 10,000 Malaysian (28% Chinese, 22% Indian and 18% Malay) about feeling of strain stated that one among five Malaysians felt very stressful and faced difficulty to ensure they could manage their work and family life at the same time. The survey also revealed that two-third of the respondents prioritized their family, while others were still struggling to balance between work and family life. Apart from being employees, they still need to occupy other roles, such as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. The Integrity Perspective Index National Research (IPIN), conducted by IIM since 2010 until 2013 to 160,000 respondents all over Malaysia, revealed that family institution is becoming loose because of several factors and one of the factors is dual working parents do not have enough time to spend with their children. IIM President, Datuk Dr. Mohd. Tap Salleh stated that even though most Malaysian parents are busy with their work, they should not neglect their family and at the same time, they need to balance between work and family life [30].

Many studies have suggested that work-family conflict contributes to work, personal/family and health related outcomes. A study done by Aminah [31] among 120 married female secretaries in Selangor reported that

work-family conflict issue led to lower job satisfaction, as well as family dissatisfaction. Furthermore, job and family satisfactions were significantly related to life satisfaction. In the study conducted by Siti Aishah *et al.* [32], work-family conflict was highly correlated with stress and psychological strain. The study was conducted among academic staffs from three research universities in Malaysia, which are Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Another study done by Elisa Ezura [33] regarding the relationship between work and family conflict towards job burnout in Sarawak Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), found that there was a significant relationship between work and family conflict and job burnout. Work-family conflict also has relationship with affective organizational commitment.

A study done by Meera [34] amongst 116 Malaysian dual career employees (faculty and staffs) from three universities suggested that work-family conflict and sources of supports, namely spousal and organizational supports, were strongly related to work satisfaction. Employee with higher level of work satisfaction will contribute to affective organizational commitment.

In Malaysia, work-family enrichment is measured in terms of job satisfaction, family satisfaction and marriage satisfaction [35, 36, 37]. According to Safidah and Rozumah [38], Malaysian married professional women were satisfied with their jobs and have good relationship with their employees. Another study done among Malay professional women indicated that 90% of them were satisfied with their work [39]. Besides satisfaction, work can give working women a form of motivation, self-improvement, control and also autonomy and power, where they can give benefits to both domains, which are work and family [40]. In addition, a study carried out by Rozumah [41] indicated that child academic performance has a significant relationship with the level of mother's education and knowledge. This is supported by the studies done in the western countries, whereby a mother's involvement in work environment could enrich the environment at home, which can lead to successful child development [42]. Positive spill over from work to family can also lead to affective organizational commitment.

### CONCLUSION

Malaysian employees are still struggling to balance between work and family life. This work-family conflict likely in part stem from stressful work conditions associated with difficulty to manage their work and family

life at the same time. The present review provides insight on the experience of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment among dual working parents in Malaysia. This information is important to the government and industries because workers today put a premium on balance and having a life outside of employment. Without understanding work-family balance among Malaysian employees, the government or industries may lose the opportunity to improve the quality of human resources, presumably, by understanding this issue, the government or industry may increase retention.

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