

Working Hours, Work-family Conflict and Work-family Enrichment Among Professional Women: A Malaysian Case

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Abstract—There has been public concern about employees facing work-family conflict towards longer working hours and few scholars have explicitly examined the effects of working hours on work-family enrichment. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between working hours with work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. The data came from a survey to 286 married professional women that are working with the government sector in Sarawak, Malaysia. Results indicate that the average working hours is 45 hours per week. The findings reveal that working hours had a positive relationship towards work-family conflict, however no relationship with work-family enrichment. The results suggest that practicing work-home segmentation and support from family members help them to manage work and family commitment effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: working hours, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, professional women.

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, working is defined as the amount of time spent by an individual to carry out a job or task (Brett and Stroh, 2003). Typically, workers are physically bound to their office desks with telephones and typewriters for five to nine hours. Nowadays, with the advent and advancement of the digital age, performing tasks in the workplace has become more flexible in terms of time and setting. Mobile technology such as laptops, cell phones and BlackBerry devices enable the employees to execute their work related task virtually anywhere and at anytime. Thus, affecting the location of boundaries between two culturally different spheres (Tietze and Musson, 2003), experiential categories (Nippert-Eng, 1996) – ‘home and work’ or in term of working long hours (Feldman, 2002). Information technology enables managers to work longer hours, and create expectations that managers will keep doing their work even at odd hours, weekends, and other nonstandard times (Kurland and Bailey, 1999). Studies have been carried out regarding time management in the western countries, especially those that involve working long hours and its effects on individuals, family as well as organization. (Eastmen,1998; Feldman,2002; Ng et al, 2007). Most studies done in developed countries such as North America, Britain and Japan have shown that the percentage of working long hours is higher compared to European

countries such as France, Italy and Germany and those countries enjoy the privilege of balancing between work and personal life. (Burke and El-Kot,2009).

Every extreme worker has his or her own reason that motivates him or her to work for longer hours. According to a survey, the most popular belief suggests that people love the intellectual challenge and the thrill of achieving something big. This is followed by high-quality colleagues, recognition, compensation packages and for power or status. (Hewlett and Luce,2006). Due to the above reasons the scenario of working longer hours has become a common thing among the managerial and professionals. (Brett and Stroh, 2003, Hewlett and Luce, 2006). A study by Galinsky et al (2005) showed that generally, 20% of workers in the US work more than 49 hours per week. Likewise, a research carried out by Daly (2001) showed that the managerial and professionals are the groups that have practiced working longer hours which is 50 hours a week. However, the latest findings by Hewlett and Luce, (2006) are the most shocking because working for 70 hours per week is a common matter among the current managers and chief executives.

II. EFFECTS OF TIME TOWARDS WFC AND WFE

The concept of work-family conflict (WFC) has been enlightened by Kahn et al (1964) using the role theory framework that describes the tension between work and family roles as an “inter-role conflict”. In another view, Goode (1960) has identified that the time constraints, energy and commitment are barriers in performing various roles as he emphasized in the scarcity hypothesis. The scarcity hypothesis debated that the more responsibilities that an individual needs to execute, the lesser his resource will be dealing with in executing other responsibilities. In particular, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), has conceptualized WFC into three sources of conflict, namely time-based, strain-based and bahaviour-based. The time-based source has been highlighted as long working hours in paid jobs that will reduce the amount of time available for family activities, thereby making it difficult for employees to perform family duties and maintain family relationships. (Voydanoff, 2004).

Looking at the current scenario nowadays, working long hours which are above the given standard time, one will be

able to tell that it will bring to more negative implications. Many studies, especially those done in the west have proved that the total working time had a positive relationship with WFC and a strong factor that can influence the level of WFC (Frone et al.1997, Judge Boudreau and Brets1994). According to the total working time and roles in a family result showed that when more time is allocated for one role, it shows that there is a decrease in carrying out another role. (Frone et al 1997; Netemeyer et al, 1996). Besides the above, the result constantly shows there is a relationship between working long hours and the difficulty in balancing work and personal life (Moen and Yu, 2000). Working long hours is also frequently associated with stress, exhaustion, insomnia as well as chronic health disorders such as back pains, coronary heart disease and an increase in accidents (Sparks et al, 1997). Therefore, the first objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between working hours and WFC.

Although many studies have shown that the overlap between work and family roles lead to conflict (Aminah, 1995; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al, 1964), there is also evidence that the benefits or advantages derived from the relationship of work and family (Carlson et al, 2006; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Rohany and Fatimah, 2006). Work family enrichment (WFE) is a term used to describe the positive effect that work can have on family and the positive effect that family can have on work. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define work family enrichment (WFE) as “the extent to which experience in one role improves the quality of life namely performance or affect, in the other role”. WFE had been found to be positively related to individual’s mental health (Allis and O’Driscoll, 2008; Grzywacz and Bass, 2003), family functioning (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Haar and Bardoel, 2008) and job outcomes such as job satisfaction (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008) and organizational commitment (Wayne et al, 2006). In addition, employed women suffer less from depression and have a positive impact on their psychological well-being (Baruch and Barnett, 1986; Rohany and Fatimah,2006).

Despite of most studies that reveal negative effects that relate to working time and WFC, there is a proof to show that working long hours can be beneficial or favorable. A study done among the alumni in a prominent business school in the United States showed that there is a higher degree of satisfaction amongst male and female workers even though their working hours is at an average of 60 hours or more per week. (Bret and Stroh 2003). A recent study by Hewlett and Luce (2006) likewise found that chief executives are satisfied with their work even though their working hours are about 70 hours per week. The satisfaction they gain from work seems very rewarding, meaningful and challenging. They need those in order to attain their own targets as well as the organizations they work for. All the information regarding this finding is in line with Barnett’s statement (Barnett, 1988), which states that working long hours, brings about a positive impact and psychological well-being. He also states that working long hours does not necessarily affect WFC directly, but it

depends on situations and in specific conditions. With the available studies, the connection between working hours and the level of satisfaction and of an individual has brought about a non-consistent result which causes researchers to propose that more studies be continued in order to further address the issue (Burke, 2006). Therefore, the second objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between working hours and WFE.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out among 286 professional working women in Sarawak, Malaysia. The respondents were women officers from senior officials and managers working in the public sector. The inclusion criteria for the study are chosen based on their marital status and must at least have a child. These criteria were outlined in order to ensure the samples have near similar work and family roles (Aminah, 1996). The data was collected through questionnaires that were distributed personally to each respondent at their respective workplace. WFC used the nine-item work to family direction of the conflict scale developed by Carlson et al. (2000). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.846. While, WFE also used the nine item of work to family direction of the enrichment scale developed by Carlson et al (2006). The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.940. Measurement on working hours required the respondent to notify the average of working hour per week.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample consisted of 286 professional working women with 89% returned rate for the questionnaire. The age range of the respondents was 27 – 54 years old with the mean age is 40 years old. Majority of the respondents had bachelors degree (72.5%) followed by master’s degree (21.6%) and other qualifications (5.9%). In terms of the number of children, most of the respondent had 1–2 children (49.8%) followed by 3–4 children (41.1%) and only a small number had 5-7 children (9.1%). More than half of the respondents were Malay (52.5%), followed by Chinese (17.6%), Iban and Bidayuh (10.6% respectively) and other ethnics group represents only (8.6%). The findings revealed that, (70.6%) did not have stay-in maids which were consistent with research done in Peninsular Malaysia (Noor, 2006; Sabitha, 2009).

The descriptive data revealed that almost half, 54% respondents work more than 40 hours per week, 49.4% bring office work at home and 29.4% have to go to work on weekends. On average, the women worked 45 hours a week, meanwhile the average working hours in Peninsular Malaysia is 44 hours a week (Noor, 2006). The average working time is still small compared to the average working time in the western countries that are 60 hours per week especially among the managerial and professional group (Brett dan Stroh, 2003; Burke dan El-Kot, 2009; Daly, 2001, Galinsky et al, 2005; Hewlett dan Luce, 2006).

Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were used to test the relationship between the variables. The findings indicated that there is a positive relationship

between WFC and working hours ($r = 0.205$, $p < 0.01$). This result are in line with results done in the western countries that suggests working long hours will influence WFC (Frone et al.1997, Judge Boudreau and Brets1994; Moen and Yu, 2000). On the other hand, findings also exhibited that WFE and working hours show statistically significant positive relationship with WFC. WFE alone accounts for 11.4% and if both WFE and working hours are counted, the value accounts for 16.2%. Even though the increased of the value is small, the inclusion of the two predictors has explained its influence on WFC.

Nevertheless, the findings show that there was no relationship between working time and WFE. Thus working hours at an average of 45 hours perweek did not influence WFE. In the perspectives of family relation,the finding in the western countries shows that working long hours, weekends job and travelling hours does not influence marriage relationship (Crouter et al, 2001). Results also showed that WFC and age of the respondent show positive relationship with WFE. For the first model, WFC accounts for 11.4% and for model 2, both WFC and age of the respondent accounts for 13.7%. The inclusion of both predictors did not influence much on the variance in WFE.

Written comments illustrated that work-home segmentation and family's support are important strategies for working women in managing work and family roles and to support the small relationship between variables. This finding shows that 35% of the respondents placed a border line between working hours and the time spent at home. In theory, a person who needs to balance multi tasks or roles especially the responsibility of work and chores will try to limit the border or the uncertainty of situations or office roles and home. Segmentation is used to represent the degree to which aspects of each domain (such as thoughts, concerns, physical markers) are kept separate from one another – cognitively, physically or behaviorally. (Edwards and Rothberd, 1999; Kreiner, 2006). On the other hand, intergration represents the merging and blending of various aspects of work and home. Both the concept of segmentation and intergration have been conceptualized as two poles on a continuum each representing opposite approaches to work-life balance (Ashhfort et al, 2000). The statements below are part of the feedbacks received from respondents regarding on the segmentation of work and family.

Respondent 1:*From 8 am to 5 pm is for work, after that is all for my family.*

Respondent 2:*To balance work and family commitments, time management need to be well-planned and to be compromised during adhoc situation. Preferable working hours only dedicated working and once it's family time, no working issues/matters to be interfered.*

Respondent 3 : *I avoid transferring the stress from family into the office, so that can fully utilize my work time in a focused manner. This help to reduce the need to bring office work at home,therefore allow me to participate equally in household activities and responsibilities.*

Apart from the above strategy, family's support plays an important role in helping these women in managing their

multiple roles. A study done by Noor (2001) has proved that the support received from family members especially husbands is able to enlighten work and family burden and stress. The feedbacks below shows that 20% of the respondents share their experience with regards to the help and support they receive from their spouses, family members as well as live in maids.

Respondent 1:*As a working mother, it's not an easy job to balance work, family commitments. If the responsibility equally shared with the spouse, there won't be any conflict between work and family. I'm thankful that my husband shared the responsibility in housekeeping and childcare. His support motivates me to be a competent worker, mother and wife.*

Respondent 2 :*Determine that family always comes first, and then manage time accordingly. Strong support from extended family mmebers and religious teachings also help.*

Respondent 3 :*Having a good maid will help to reduce time to do housework. The time that is normally used to do housework can be used to spend with family.*

Hence, in the individual perspective, it is interesting to note that working hours is still manageable in this context if working women are able to handle the task effectively with appropriate strategies chosen suit with their needs. However, at the organizational perspective, the role of the organization is vital in the efforts to minimize the burden of working women. Providing a supportive culture and having a family friendly policies such as considering of implementing flexible work hours, flexible workplace and child-care center are among the initiatives that can help working women in managing work and family responsibilities, thus enhancing their capability and performance at work.

V. CONCLUSION

As hypothesized, this study empirically documents that working hours influence on work-family conflict, however it does not influence on work-family enrichment. The idea of practising work-home segmentation and family's support help them to manage both work and family commitment. As research in this area continues, it is important that scholars consider not only strategies that are commonly used to manage work-family commitment, but predictors of working long hours and the consequences of those working hours as well. In doing so, it is important that both the detrimental and beneficial consequences of working long hours be considered for institutional and managerial effectiveness alike.

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