

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOSITY AS A COPING STRATEGY IN COPING WITH WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND ACHIEVING EMPLOYEES' WELL-BEING

Meguellati Achour
Institute of Graduate Studies
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: megue_a2007@yahoo.fr

Ali Bin Boerhannoeddin
Faculty of Economic & administration
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: aliboer@um.edu.my

Abstract-The purpose of the present study is to examine religiosity as a strategy to achieve employees' well-being among Muslim women academic staff of Malaysian learning institutions. The determinants of well-being included under this research are job satisfaction, family satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Researchers used questionnaires as the instrument to collect data. The results show that religiosity is positively related with well-being and work-family demands, and although negatively not significant, related with work-family conflict. The findings also revealed that work-family conflict is significantly related with work-family demands and negatively related with well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Though the field of organizational behavioural science has been around for at least thirty years and we are now in the new millennium, there are still significant human-oriented problems facing many organizations across different industries. Human resource experts are still struggling with employee-related problems that contribute to lower performance level. In the past few decades, managers were preoccupied with restructuring their organizations to improve employees' performance and enhance their productivity, meeting competitive challenges in the global marketplace. The problem of workers is that they do not work according to the expectations of their employers.

The human resource managers are commended to offer and propose solutions to many problems that are faced by workers such as job dissatisfaction, low job performance, less employee commitment, as well as create a balance between work demands and family life. Concern for the quality of working life has occupied social scientists for the past 50 years. Thus, work-life balance is a pertinent issue at present. The work-life balance debate seems to focus on a number of assumptions and perceptions that work is experienced negatively, with long hours of work as a problem that affects employees' well-being and commitment to family institutions.

Research on work-family conflict and its negative impacts on employees have been explored extensively in Western industrialized countries (Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000). Despite strong indications that work and family issues are increasingly important phenomena in Asian

countries, studies of work-family conflict in Asia are rare (Luk, 2001; Yang, Choi & Zou, 2000; Spector, Sanchez, Oi Ling Siu, Salgado & Jianhong, 2004). However, those few researchers who have considered the problem believe that Asian people view work and family differently because of cultural differences. Some research results about Western and Asian countries suggest that more research is needed to investigate work-family conflict and its impact on different groups and settings, because work and family issues are strongly related to cultural beliefs, values and norms (Lobel, 1991).

II. WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND POLICIES IN ACADEMIA

Higher-learning institutions have been experiencing major changes with a significant impact on the role and working practices of the academics (Barry *et al.*, 2001). In the context of the "increasingly economist and managerial nation, which environment university life," (Currie *et al.*, 2000, p. 269), academic jobs have become more challenging in terms of effort, as well as time. With growing institutional demands, accountability and work intensification of 50 to 60 hours per week, workload has become the norm in many universities (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004).

Research on work-family conflict has found that such conflict is higher among those who work longer hours or have greater work demands, and report higher job involvement and greater autonomy (Eby *et al.*, 2005), thus rendering the academic context particularly sensitive to work-family issues. The fact that total commitment might be self-imposed by social and career expectations does not change the main argument in this paper: as long hour culture becomes 'the norm' in university settings, academics are increasingly likely to feel the tensions between work and family life, and the work-family culture that prevails in academia is unlikely to make things easier for faculty members, particularly women, trying to balance job requirements with the demands of family life.

III. WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

In the case of Malaysia, some empirical studies investigating the phenomenon of work-family conflict have

been reported (Ahmad, 1996; Noor, 2002; Komarraju, 2006). Nevertheless, these studies focus on the consequences of work-family conflict instead of their antecedents. As such, it remains unclear whether the findings on the antecedents of work-family conflict abroad are applicable to Malaysia. A study on the associations among work-family conflict, job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction among married professional Malaysian women found that work-family conflict is vital to the firms where these women work, as well as to the women themselves. Thus, in Malaysia the problem of balancing work and family obligations is a critical issue to address.

According to Noor (2003) who proposes and tests an exploratory model using demographic variables, personality and roles as predictors of well-being, with work-family conflict acting as a mediator or an intervening variable between these sets of predictors and well-being. Her study is most important because it incorporates personality variables as predictors of women's well-being. Although previous researchers (e.g., Amatea & Fong, 1991) have shown that the personal resources that women bring with them into their roles are important, Noor's (2003) study is one of the few that have directly tested personality variables within their frameworks. Noor's (2003) results show that although work-related variables explain the most variance in the prediction of work-interfering-with-family (WIF) conflict and job satisfaction, personality variables account for the most variance in the prediction of family-interfering-with-work (FIW) conflict.

Aminah *et al.*, (2009) conduct a study on work-family conflict among single mother employees and its antecedents including dispositional (locus of control and perfectionism), job (role overload, role conflict and job flexibility) and organizational (supervisor support) factors. This study was applied on 159 Malaysian single mother employees using self-administered questionnaires. The findings of the study indicated that 66% of the single mother employees experienced moderate to high levels of work-family conflict.

The ability to balance work and family roles is a challenge for women and men in the 21st century workforce (Eby *et al.*, 2005). During the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in the conflicting demands of work and family roles, and the effect of that conflict on both organizations and employees (Allen *et al.* 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Nowadays, in many developed and developing countries, working men and women experience problems balancing their work and family domains (Joplin, Shaffer, Francesco & Lau, 2003). However, the impact of multiple roles at work and in family lives may be culture-bound in different countries. As the modern world begins the third millennium, the significance of work and family is clearly visible in the daily challenges faced by employed parents who are combining work and family roles (Fallon, 1997; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990).

According to this review, most employees attempt to use different strategies to cope with conflicting family roles and work demands, and there are many researchers interested to study the methods of dealing with work-family issues in a variety of environments and their relationship to some

variables. Lazarus and Folkman (1988) found social support, transition from subject, self-control and plans of problem-solving as a coping strategy to deal with pressing conditions. Also some researchers say religiosity and self-efficacy have important roles in the prediction of satisfaction with work and life.

Coping strategies are the ways an individual, group or organization use to minimize the effects of stress (Belal *et al.*, 2009). Coping strategy is also defined as "any activity, in thought or deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity" (Breakwell, 1986, p. 78).

Two common types of coping strategies can be distinguished: problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies (Folkman, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1979; Leventhal & Nerenz, 1982). Problem-focused coping strategies are used to tackle the problem directly and emotion-focused coping strategies are used to handle feelings of distress, rather than the actual problem itself.

Religious coping strategies that consist of elements of emotion-focused coping strategies and problem-focused coping strategies also include social support as a strategy to cope with the pressures by including advice, assistance, subsidies, and emotional support and justifying the perceptions of the individual and his actions. The same thing is experience with religious coping strategies, which include more practice of prayers and religious worship that focus on emotion. A religious coping strategy is more important and useful with stressful events that individual can not control.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of religiosity as a coping strategy and its influence on achieving employee' well-being among Muslim women academic staff of higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

IV. METHOD

A. Participants and procedure

Data were collected from 130 Muslim women academicians working in Research Universities in the Klang Valley included University of Malaya, National University, and Putra University, Malaysia. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60 years. Rapport was established by explaining the importance and the relevance of the study. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and utilized only for the research purpose. They were asked to complete the questionnaires by following the instructions written at the top of the first page.

B. Measures

Work-Family Demands: Family demand was measured by a 3-item scale developed by Yang (1993), the Cronbach alpha reported .77; and work demands were measured by a 5-item scale by Spector (1975). The Cronbach alpha reported .81.

Work-family conflict: Work-family conflict was measured using two subscales (5 items for WFC and 5 items for FWC) and included ten items developed by Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996). The Cronbach alpha reported .77.

Well-being: In this research major components of well-being are considered: job satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction. Family Satisfaction was measured using 3 items developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975), the Cronbach alpha reported .68; Job satisfaction was measured using 5 items developed by Hachman and Oldham (1975); the Cronbach alpha reported .83; and life satisfaction was measured using 5 items developed by Diener *et al.*, (1985), the Cronbach alpha reported .87.

Religiosity: Participants completed the questionnaires developed by the researcher, a 12-item self-report measure of “Strength of Religious Faith”. Sample items include “religion is important to me because it helps me to cope with life events” (Item-1) and “the primary purpose of prayer is to reduce stress” (Item-12). The scale uses a 5-point Likert response format, ranging from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (5) “Strongly Agree.” Scores can range between 10 and 40, with higher aggregate scores reflecting stronger levels of “Strength of Religious Faith.”

C. Reliability Results

The reliability test was conducted. Coefficient Cronbach’s Alpha is a measure of reliability or internal consistency. A value of Cronbach’s Alpha of .50 or above is consistent with the recommended minimum values stated by Nunnally (1967). Cronbach’s alpha indicating reliability for each variable is seen in Table 1.1: work-family conflict: .906, work-family demands: .756, coping strategies: .846, and well-being: .501. Therefore, as related by Nunnally (1978), the research results can be accepted.

D. Results and Discussion

Table 1.2 exhibits the correlation coefficients among all variables. All independent variables are not significantly correlated to well-being. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The standard used for the level of significance is set a priori.

Religious coping strategies are found to be negatively related with work-family conflict and work-family demands; these variables are negatively related with well-being. Table 1.2 also shows that religious coping strategies are found to be positively related with well-being; therefore, religious coping strategies play a role to achieve well-being but they are not significant in Malaysia. The finding also reveal that work-family conflict significantly related with work-family demands ($r=0.568$, $p=0.000<0.01$); and negatively related with well-being ($r= -0.326$, $p=0.040<0.05$).

Three work demands measures (workload, long working hours, and irregular work schedule) are significant predictors of work family conflict related to lower job, life and family satisfaction. For example, high work-family conflict positively related with high long working hours (Bruck *et al.*, 2002; Burke *et al.*, 1980; Eagle *et al.*, 1997, Major *et al.*, 2002; Walance, 1999; Yang *et al.*, 1980). High work-family conflict is positively related with work schedules inflexibility (Ayee, 1992), and work overload and irregular work schedules have a strong positive relationship with work-family conflict (Burke & Greenglass, 2001; Simon *et al.*, 2004). Family demands measures number and age of

children and time spent on family activities; some studies have shown the number of children living at home is positively related to work-family conflict (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996); also time spent with family activities has been found to be positively related to family-work conflict (Frone *et al.*, 1997., Gutek., 1991). Some studies have shown negative relationship between family satisfaction and work-family conflict (Kopelman *et al.*, 1983; Rice *et al.*, 1992; Burke & Greenglass, 2001). Finally, Arora *et al.*, (1990) found a negative relationship between work-family conflict and job and life satisfaction.

The present study also indicates that religiosity coping strategies has an effect on well-being. All kinds of work-family demands are negatively and significantly correlated with well-being. Moreover, work demands such as long working hours, work overload, and irregular work schedule and family such as number of children, age of children and time spent for family activities are the main sources and causes of work-family conflict. The findings also reveal that religious coping strategies negatively relate with work-family demands and work-family conflict, and positively relate with well-being but this is not significant. Religious coping strategies play a role to cope with work-family conflict but this is not important in Malaysia.

Table 1.1: showing reliability of the measures used in the present study

Variables	Number of Items	Alpha (α)
Work-family conflict	10	.906
work-family demands	8	.756
R. Coping Strategies	12	.846
Well-being	13	.501

Table 1.2: showing correlation among variables used in the present study

		WFC	WELL BEING	COPING STR	WFD
WFC	Pearson Correlation	1	-.026	-.076	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.773	.390	.000
	N	130	130	130	130
WELL BEING	Pearson Correlation	-.026	1	.082	-.326*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.773		.351	.040
	N	130	130	130	130
COPINGSTR	Pearson Correlation	-.076	.082	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.390	.351		.373
	N	130	130	130	130
WFD	Pearson Correlation	.568**	-.326*	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.040	.373	
	N	130	130	130	130

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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