

The Relationship Between Job Characteristics and Work-Family Conflict Among Married Women Employed in Clinical Wards of Shiraz University-Affiliated Hospitals

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Background: Work and life have the greatest and strongest bond with an individual and the society. Their balance has a high value. If the relationship between work and life is not managed, the conflict between these two will result in irreparable damage to individuals, organizations and communities.

Objectives: The main objective of the current study is to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and work-family conflict among married women employed in clinical wards of Shiraz University-affiliated hospitals.

Patients and Methods: The study population included 180 married women who work in clinical wards of four university-affiliated hospitals in Shiraz. We used the improved Leiden Quality of Work Life Questionnaire by Van der Doef and colleagues and the work-family conflict questionnaire by Kelloway and colleagues to measure participants' responses. One-way ANOVA and Pearson linear correlation coefficient were used for data analyses.

Results: There was a negative relation between job characteristics and work-family conflict. Respondents experienced higher levels of work-to-family conflict than family-to-work conflict. There were significant negative relations between skill variety, task autonomy, task significance, job security, social support of colleagues and supervisors with work-family conflict and positive significant relations between time, work pressure and hazardous exposure with work-family conflict.

Conclusions: work-family conflict of employed women could be reduced by rearranging job characteristics and conditions. Job resources such as social support should be strengthened and job demands should be adjusted commensurate with the physical and mental capabilities of staff.

Keywords: Job Characteristics; Work-Family Conflict; Working Women, Hospital

1. Background

Work and family are important domains for most people (1). Organizational researchers have considered social roles for each (1-4), the junction between them, and the causes and results of interaction between these domains for both organizations and employees (5, 6). Because of the substantial changes in work and family responsibilities, the topic of work-family conflict (WFC) has attracted many attentions. American and European studies (7-10) have shown that from 40% to over 78% of parents experience WFC at least once. The problem of balancing between work and family is more important among women because the responsibilities of home and children are primarily upon them, and hence they have to balance the expectations that originate from both work and family. Increased participation of women in the workforce (11), has changed the roles of men and women in all societies. As a result of this trend, balancing between responsibilities of work and family has become an important challenge for employed spouses

and parents and specially for women (12). The concept of WFC has been driven from the role theory (13). The role theory implies that the expectations of each role an individual performs can raise conflicts between the roles. It could be concluded that because a person is under pressure of satisfying all the expectations of his or her family and work roles, these two domains could be incompatible (14-16). WFC can be defined as a kind of interrole conflict in which the pressures of roles from family and work are irreconcilable (13). WFC could be originated from either work or family. It means that there are two kinds of conflicts that are work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW). It should be noted that although there is a strong correlation between two mentioned conflicts, employees usually report more WIF than FIW (8, 17). Study of Hackman et al. proposed a job characteristic model (JCM) that addressed the motivational potential of the job. The model identifies five job dimensions including Skill

diversity, task identity, task significance, task autonomy, and performance feedback. This model proposes that five mentioned dimensions have a positive correlation with job satisfaction and finally reduced WFC (18). Some studies developed another job characteristic model entitled Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R model) (19-21). Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that impose physical and psychological pressures on employees. These aspects are proposed to have strong associations with WFC. On the other hand, Job resources imply the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that reduce job demands and decrease WFC (20, 22-28). Although the social identity theory propound that individuals can perform several roles and attain a work-family balance by separating conflicting identities in their various roles, studies indicated many negative consequences for performing several roles for which WFC is one of the most important consequences (29).

Work to family conflict can result in more stress at work or at home, lower health status, higher rate of absence from work, more job turnover, decreased job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment (28, 30). WFC has many negative effects on the health status of the employees including psychological disorders like depression and anxiety, somatic illnesses, burnout, and substance and alcohol abuse (8). Some studies (24, 31) have indicated that job stress and work demands are the most important predictors of WFC. Many researches have found that work demand dimensions such as workload, long working hours, irregular work schedules, and the shift work have significant, positive correlations with WFC (31, 32). Although many studies have investigated the determinants of WFC among the different job categories, there is a paucity of research that has investigated this issue in the nursing profession. Nursing is usually a female-dominated job which often practiced under strict conditions. Therefore analyzing WFC in the nursing context could be important for practical implications. Working conditions of nurses are difficult in many countries; however this is particularly noticeable in economically developing countries. Usually the nurses' responsibilities interfere with their responsibilities at home. In these situations they are more likely to feel divided between these two areas and therefore are unable to fulfill both of their responsibilities. As expected, this results in dissatisfaction with life. Those who experience WFC berate their jobs conditions for the conflict and subsequently feel discontented with their lives and jobs. Hence, WFC appears to be one of the major problems in today's society, particularly among nursing women. Finding a proper solution to prevent WFC is presumed to be a priority in the nursing profession. Therefore disregard for this issue can result in heavy losses for individuals, families and organizations. Also organizational issues, particularly job characteristics, are one of the most important, influential factors on WFC.

2. Objectives

Based on the mentioned theoretical framework and the existing literature, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and WFC among married women employed in the clinical wards of Shiraz University-affiliated hospitals.

3. Patients and Methods

Participants of this cross-sectional study consisted of all married women nurses employed in the clinical wards of four university-affiliated hospitals in Shiraz: Namazi, Chamran, Zeinabieh, and Shooshtari during 2012. We used the Cochrane corrected formula to calculate the sample size; 180 women were enrolled by systematic random sampling. After receiving permission from the hospitals to conduct the study, all participant nurses were ensured about the confidentiality of their answers and informed consent was given by each. We used two questionnaires in order to measure participants' opinions about the research variables. The first questionnaire was improved Leiden quality of work life questionnaire (LQWQ) developed by Van der Doef and Maes (33) that measures job characteristics. The questionnaire was constructed to assess work characteristics from two influential models, the JCM of Hackman and Oldham (18) and the JD-R. The aim of the questionnaire was to create a reliable measure of work characteristics considered relevant from a theoretical perspective. The internal reliability of the scales was assessed by Cronbach's alpha. This questionnaire includes 40 items which evaluate ten job characteristics: 1) skill diversity (6 items, $\alpha = 0.64$); 2) task autonomy (7 items, $\alpha = 0.53$); 3) task significance (2 items, $\alpha = 0.51$); 4) work and time pressure (3 items, $\alpha = 0.55$); 5) physical pressure (2 items, $\alpha = 0.83$); 6) role ambiguity (3 items, $\alpha = 0.64$); 7) hazardous exposure (4 items, $\alpha = 0.53$); 8) job security (3 items, $\alpha = 0.60$); 9) supervisor social support (5 items, $\alpha = 0.83$); and 10) colleagues social support (5 items, $\alpha = 0.75$). The second questionnaire was the Work-Family Conflict (WFC) Questionnaire created by Kelloway et al. (34) which consisted of 22 items. This 22-item scale measures the direction and nature of work and family conflict. The direction is based upon where the conflict originates (Work to family conflict or family to work conflict). There are 11 items that evaluate WFC ($\alpha = 0.86$) and 11 that evaluate family-to-work conflict ($\alpha = 0.83$). For both questionnaires, items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). After translation of the questionnaires into Persian, item analysis was used to determine validity of the questionnaires. The results showed that all items of WFC and job characteristic spectrums had a significant relationship with the sum of the spectrums scores and it was not necessary to delete any question. The validity of the questionnaires was satisfactory. The accepted reliability for all scales was from 0.51 to 0.86. Requested demographic information included

work hours, work experience, number of children, number of dependent children, years of marriage, family income, and the main reason for working and work shift. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 11.0 software for Windows. We used the one-way ANOVA test, and Pearson linear correlation coefficient for data analysis. The P-values less than 0.05 were considered significant.

4. Results

The results of the Pearson linear correlation test showed a significant negative relationship between job characteristics and WFC ($P = 0.001, r = -0.41$). Therefore, there was a reduction in WFC with increased grade of job characteristics. A significant negative relationship between job characteristics and work to family conflict ($P < 0.001, r = -0.43$) and family to work conflict ($P = 0.01, r = -0.28$) was observed. The correlation coefficients showed that respondents experienced higher levels of work to family conflict than family to work conflict. The results showed significant negative relationships between motivational factors of job to WFC ($P = 0.000, r = -0.33$), family to work conflict ($P = 0.000, r = -0.24$), and work to family conflict ($P = 0.000, r = -0.33$). The relationship between dimensions of work-family conflict and different dimensions of motivational factors of job are presented in Table 1. The results of the Pearson correlation test indicated positive significant relations between job demands and WFC ($P = 0.000, r = 0.35$), work to family conflict ($P = 0.000, r = 0.39$), and family to work conflict

($P = 0.000, r = 0.22$). The relationship between dimensions of work-family conflict and different dimensions of job demands are presented in Table 2. The results showed negative significant relationships between job resources and WFC ($P = 0.000, r = -0.32$), work to family conflict ($P = 0.000, r = -0.34$), and family to work conflict ($P = 0.000, r = -0.25$). The relationship between dimensions of work-family conflict and different dimensions of job resources are presented in Table 3. The results of the Pearson correlation test indicated that work hours had a significant positive impact on work to family conflict ($P = 0.05, r = 0.15$). However we did not observe any relation between work hours and WFC ($P = 0.56$) and between work hours and family to work conflict ($P = 0.19$). The results of one-way ANOVA indicated that work shift was significantly related to WFC ($sig = 0.025$) and family to work conflict ($sig = 0.004$). The results of The Tukey test showed women who work only in the afternoon shift experienced WFC (Mean: 81.5, SD: 7.2) and family to work conflict (Mean: 59, SD: 9.4) more than those who worked other shifts. One-way ANOVA test indicated that the most important reason for working in a hospital have impacts on WFC ($sig = 0.05$) and work to family conflict ($sig = 0.02$). The results of the Tukey test showed that women who worked because of financial needs had more WFC (Mean: 69.5, SD: 2.1) and work to family conflict (Mean: 40.5, SD: 2.4) than other groups. The results did not show any meaningful relations between other demographic variables (working experience, number of children, number of dependent children, years of marriage, family income) and WFC.

Table 1. Correlation Between Dimensions of Motivational Factors of the Job and Work-Family Conflict Dimensions

| Dimensions | P Value | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Work-Family Conflict r | Work to Family Conflict r | Family to Work Conflict r |
| Motivational Factors of the Job | | | |
| Skill Diversity | -0.23 (0.001) | -0.16 (0.029) | -0.23 (0.001) |
| Task Autonomy | -0.28 (0.000) | -0.37 (0.000) | -0.12 (0.110) ^a |
| Task Significance | -0.19 (0.009) | -0.15 (0.050) | -0.19 (0.010) |
| Motivational Factors of the Job | -0.33 (0.000) | -0.33 (0.000) | -0.24 (0.000) |

^a Not significant ($P > 0.05$).

Table 2. Correlation Between Dimensions of Job Demands and Work-Family Conflict Dimensions

| Dimensions | Work-Family Conflict r (P Value) | Work to Family Conflict r (P Value) | Family to Work Conflict r (P Value) |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| job demands | | | |
| Hazardous Exposure | 0.27 (0.000) | 0.27 (0.000) | 0.197 (0.008) |
| Physical Pressure | 0.09 (0.230) ^a | 0.22 (0.003) | -0.07 (0.340) ^a |
| Role Ambiguity | 0.05 (0.450) ^a | -0.02 (0.710) ^a | 0.13 (0.080) ^a |
| Work and Time Pressure | 0.37 (0.000) | 0.45 (0.029) | 0.20 (0.000) |
| Job Demands | 0.35 (0.000) | 0.39 (0.000) | 0.22 (0.000) |

^a Not significant ($P > 0.05$).

Table 3. Correlation Between Dimensions of Job Resources and Work-Family Conflict Dimensions

| Dimensions | P Value | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Work-Family Conflict r | Work to family Conflict r | Family to work Conflict r |
| Job resources | | | |
| colleagues Social support | -0.29 (0.000) | -0.27 (0.000) | -0.22 (0.002) |
| supervisor Social support | -0.21 (0.004) | -0.24 (0.001) | -0.12 (0.100) ^a |
| Job security | -0.25 (0.001) | -0.28 (0.029) | -0.16 (0.030) |
| Job resources | -0.32 (0.000) | -0.34 (0.000) | -0.22 (0.000) |

^a Not significant ($P > 0.05$).

5. Discussion

This study intended to investigate the relationship between job characteristics and WFC among the married women employed in clinical wards at Shiraz University-affiliated hospitals. As expected, our findings of the Pearson correlation coefficients revealed a negative relation between job characteristics and the two dimensions (work to family conflict and family to work conflict). This finding supported the results of Aryee (35), and Voydanoff (31). In explaining the relationship between job characteristics and work-family conflict based on the scarcity approach of the role, the combination of job-family roles had a negative impact on each other. Considering the scarcity thought (36), everybody has limitation of resources. Playing multiple life roles such as work and private life could result in a competition for these limited resources, therewith leading to the conflict between work and family. Our results have also shown a negative relation between motivational factors of job and WFC. Jobs which have skill diversity, task autonomy and task significance will be followed by high intrinsic motivation and result in job satisfaction. As long as these job characteristics are salient, we will see a decrease in the job pressures and demands. Therefore, in such case favorable consequences occur, an individual will more readily accept duties and pressures related to her job and effectively fulfill her duties. In other words, as a result of job satisfaction she will be able to maintain the balance between work and family with more wisdom. The next finding showed a positive relationship between job demands and WFC. This finding confirmed the results of a study by Aryee (35). The results confirmed a relation between work and time pressure and WFC. This result was in line with Michel et al. (25), Yildirim and Aycan (22), and Fuss et al. (37). In contrast, we observed no relationship between role ambiguity and WFC. This did not support the results by Michel et al. (25). The low role ambiguity could state that respondents knew exactly what to expect in the workplace and the job description was clearly defined. Job pressure was positively related with work to family conflict. Hazardous exposure had a significant relation with WFC. With regards to the relationship between job demands and WFC, we can argue

that job demands provide a situation in which the fulfillment of family duties can be established in a specific way for a working woman in the house. Job demands can give rise to an agitation stirred up in an individual's thoughts about life affairs, which in turn deters her from properly fulfilling her household roles. Stress and job demands, in the form of pervasiveness in different environments, instill negative behavioral and emotional states such as despair, frustration, fatigue, and feeling of a lack of energy in individuals. Job demands cause individuals to have a lesser level of individual and working energy, which in turn lays the foundation for experiencing imbalanced feelings. Our findings have confirmed the relation between job resources and WFC. With considering the relation between job security and WFC, we can say that a woman who is confident about her future career compared to the one who is uncertain of her job will readily accept the job pressures, and therefore has increased patience and attempts to create and maintain the balance between job and family. The meaningful relation between supervisor social support and WFC and work to family conflict supported results provided by Casper et al. (38), Michel et al. (25), Blanch and Aluja (39), Taylor (40), and Frye and Breugh (41). However the results did not confirm the relation between supervisor social support and family to work conflict. This contradicted results obtained by Van Daalen et al. (42) and Frye and Breugh (41). The meaningful positive relation between socially supportive colleagues and WFC confirmed results of Taylor (40), Hennessy (43), Blanch and Aluja (39) and Michel et al. (25). Concerning the relationship between social support and WFC, we can draw on Carlson and Peru's model in which job or family social support is proposed to be a means of neutralizing the conflict between work and family. They cite studies regarding the relationship between work-family, where they have recognized social support as a main source or a matching mechanism for reducing the effects of stressful stimuli on the WFC. In the demographic section, results showed a positive, meaningful association between work hours with work to family conflict. This was in line with studies by Adkins and Premeaux (26), Drenzo et al. (44), Taylor

(40), and Voydanoff (31). In justifying this finding, we can refer to time-related conflict which occurs when time pressures of one role deter an individual from carrying out the expectations of the other role (2). To perform only family roles, a woman needs enough time and energy. If the housewife spends a major part of her time in the workplace, she will be tired and need to rest after work. Thus, she lacks sufficient energy for being an excellent mother and wife. According to the above findings which showed that women with afternoon shifts experienced more serious conflicts, we could conclude that working women away from home in the late evening, were more subject to mental engagement than others in their households because family members, in particular children, stay home longer during the evenings than other times and need planning and support from their families, particularly their mothers. In addition, a housewife would be able to deal with household chores during daytime hours. In explaining the fortified relationship between WFC and financial need, we could argue that because of the crucial and sensitive role a wife plays in the house, Islamic thoughts removes the responsibility of a woman as breadwinner and holds man responsible for providing financial support for his family. So it is natural that women can fulfill her household tasks with peace of mind when they do not have to be concerned with costs of living. Such financial concern drives her to spend her time and effort for working outside and deprived of sufficient, efficient strength for having an influence in the house. The following suggestions can be effective with respect to the research findings. Inasmuch as employees may confront various issues on the path of their own lives and jobs, it is necessary for managers to support them in critical situations. The obligation of each employee should be determined accurately. What exactly causes the feeling of job insecurity among personnel needs to be considered. Flexible working hours for those who have small children or related issues should be created. Increasing social support from supervisors and colleagues should be emphasized. Investing considerable effort for reducing potential risks involved in the workplace, which may influence many aspects such as mental health, physical health and motivation to perform tasks as well as WFC.

Authors' Contributions

Alireza Mooghali designed the study and critically revised the manuscript; Kamran Bagheri Lankarani designed the study, managed the study and critically revised the manuscript; Hamideh Abedi collected and analyzed data and wrote most parts of the manuscript; Yaser Sareikhani designed the study, wrote some parts of the manuscript and critically revised the manuscript.

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