Malaysian Work Family Conflict and Wellbeing: The Moderating Role of Job Control and Social Support

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Abstract*:* The connection of work family conflict and employee wellbeing has been widely researched in Western countries. The present study investigated the relationship between work family conflict (work to family conflict and family to work conflict) and employee wellbeing in Malaysia. Testing the hypotheses of Karasek's model (Job-Demand-Control Model) [27] and Johnson & Hall's model (Job-Demand-Control-Support Model) [25], this study also examines the moderating effect of job control and social support on the relationships. Survey data includes 1125 manufacturing employees from twelve workplaces. Hierarchical regression analyses reveal that work family conflict, job control and social support explained 5.9-29.2% of the variance in each of wellbeing indicators (job satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect). The moderating effects of job control are not supported by the data. However, there were significant two-way interactions (FWC and social support on job satisfaction ($\beta = -.090$, $SE = .016$, $p < .01$); WFC and social support on positive affect ($\beta = -.106$, $SE = .021$, $p < .01$)). Interestingly, the pattern of the two-way interaction reflects a *reverse* buffering effect of social support - employees with high WFC and low social support reported increasing levels of job satisfaction and positive affect, whereas, employees with high work family conflict and high social support reported decreasing levels of job satisfaction and positive affect. The implications of the findings regarding the main and moderating effects of job control and social support are also discussed.

Keywords—Work family conflict, Malaysia, JDC/JDCS, job control, social support.

I. INTRODUCTION

Work family conflict is defined as a form of inter-role conflict which occurs when an individual has to face incompatible role pressures from work and family (p. 77) [23]. There are two types of work family conflict which differ according to the direction of conflict: work interfering with family (WIF) conflict, and family interfering with work (FIW). Noor (2004) defines WIF conflict as occurring when work-related activities interfere with family responsibilities including when an employee tries to complete his/her office tasks at home, during time in which he/she should be with their family [48]. FIW conflict occurs in the opposite direction, such as when an employee needs to cancel a meeting due to child illness, thus disturbing the smooth execution of work demands.

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Nonetheless, it is common to see other terms used to explain the two types of work family conflict in the work family literature. The interchangeable terms often used by scholars include work to family conflict (WFC) and family to work conflict (FWC) [34,54], work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work [12,31], work home conflict [17] and work-family spillover and family-work spillover [21]. From this pool of interchangeable terms, the terms chosen for the current study are work to family conflict (WFC) to illustrate work interfering with family and family to work conflict (FWC) to illustrate family interfering with work. WFC and FWC are widely used in the work family literature, and are more direct and explicitly show the direction of conflicts.

The impact of WFC issues on employees, family members and organizations has been widely researched in developed countries including the United States [16,46,50], the United Kingdom [17,32], Australia and New Zealand [8,49, 34] and Finland [30,40]. Little, however, has been discussed in developing countries, particularly in Asia [59].

Although there is agreement on the adverse impact of WFC on employee wellbeing (mainly focused on job satisfaction) in most East Asian studies, a few studies revealed contradictory findings. For example, Aryee and Luk (1996) surveyed 207 dual earner couples, and their results indicated that there was non-significant correlation between WFC and career satisfaction [5]. Similarly, a later study by Aryee, Luk, Leung and Lo (1999) found that a non-significant relationship existed between WFC and job satisfaction [6]. Both studies were conducted involving Hong Kong employees. The inconsistencies in the findings might be due to cultural differences in the workers' perceptions of work and family matters [6]. Thus, Foley, Hang-Yue and Lui (2005) stated that it is crucial to investigate WFC and FWC in non-western societies, as this will significantly enrich cross-cultural literature on work family conflict [20]. In summary, unbalanced work family relationships have been found to be a severe work stressor that affects employee wellbeing, and therefore, requires more attention [57,59].

In summary, the present study aims to test the Job-Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model in the context of Malaysian workers. In addition, the study employs the JDCS model with work family conflict as a stressor. More specifically, the objectives of the research are as follows:

(A) To investigate the main effect of WFC, FWC, job control and social support on employee wellbeing.

(B) To investigate the extent to which job control buffers the negative effects of work family conflict (WFC and FWC) on employee wellbeing.

(C) To investigate the extent to which social support buffers the negative effects of work family conflict on employee wellbeing).

(D) To investigate the extent to which social support buffers the negative effects of high work family conflict and low job control (job strain) on employee wellbeing.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A sample of 1125 Malaysian manufacturing workers, consisting of 536 men (47.6%) and 589 women (52.4%) aged from 18 to 59 years participated in this study.

B. Instruments

Work family conflict. Work family conflict was measured using the Work Family Conflict Scale [44]. The scale consists of two subscales: WFC and FWC. There were ten items measuring general demand, time and strain conflict. An example of a WFC item is "The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfill family responsibilities", while a sample item of FWC item is "My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime". For the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was 0.92 for both WFC and FWC.

Job control and social support. Nine items of job control (e.g. "My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own") and eight items of social support (e.g. "People I work with are competent in doing their jobs") measures were derived from the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) [28]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.60 for job control and 0.84 for social support.

Job satisfaction. This study measured the composite job satisfaction by using the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) [58]. Thirty-six items were used to assess total job satisfaction. Respondents who agree with positively worded items (e.g. "I feel I am being paid amount for the work I do"), and disagree with negatively worded items (e.g. "There is really too little chance for promotion on my job") will have high scores on JSS, indicating higher levels of job satisfaction.

Positive affect and negative affect. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988) [65] which measures general affective factors, positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). It is one of the top three well-known scales used to measure positive and negative affect [60].

In the current study, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt certain affects during the past few weeks. This included 10 items of positive affect (e.g. excited and strong) and 10 items of negative affect (e.g. jittery and nervous). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .84 (PA) and .87 (NA) in the present study which were comparable to previous research [65].

C. Procedure

Approval from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee was obtained. Respondents were selected from a chosen industry, situated on the East and West Coast of Peninsula Malaysia, where more manufacturing companies are located [19] by approaching the top management team members [13], managers or employees with whom the researcher has professional connections or personal contacts [38]. In each organization, the contact person was the Human Resources Manager who helped the researcher in identifying the prospective respondents, and distributing and collecting the questionnaires. To ensure that the procedure of data collection followed by ethical considerations, the researcher included the information letter explaining the aim of the research, research instructions and confidentiality as well as the consent form.

D. Statistical Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to test the direct and moderating effect hypotheses [14]. This technique has been widely used in work stress literature testing the JDC and JDCS models [e.g. 39,45]. In this study, two-way interaction and three-way interaction were tested. Thus, this study created interaction terms by standardizing the variables before multiplying the variables together as recommended as this technique is able to reduce the risk of multicollinearity [15]. The variables were introduced into the regression models in four successive steps. In the first step, demographic variables were entered into the model as control variables. With regards to direct effect, this study tested the effects of WFC, FWC, job control and social support in predicting employee wellbeing. Thus, these four variables were entered into the model in the second step. In the third step, two-way interaction was added into the model (WFC x job control, FWC x job control, WFC x social support, FWC x social support). In the final step, three-way interaction was entered into the model to complete the analysis (WFC x job control x social support, FWC x job control x social support). Statistical significance of the term indicates evidence for the moderation effect. The graphical plot furthers explain the pattern of moderating effect [2].

III. RESULTS

All data entry and analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 20. WFC, FWC, job control and social support were correlated with wellbeing (job satisfaction, positive and negative affects) in the expected direction. A summary of the means, standard deviations and correlations between variables is shown in Table 1.

TABLE I
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND CORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDY VARIABLES

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WFC	18.32	7.38	–	.55**	-.06	-.22**	-.37**	-.12**	.20**
FWC	15.43	6.60	.55**	–	-.05	-.17**	-.27**	-.15**	.21**

Job control	37.81	4.74	-.06	-.05	–	.26**	.11**	.31**	-.022
Social support	23.37	3.33	-.22**	-.17**	.26**	–	.43**	.24**	-.07*
Job satisfaction	132.66	19.50	-.37**	-.27**	.11**	.43**	–	.23**	-.24**
Positive affect	32.63	6.00	-.12**	.20**	.31**	.24**	.23**	–	.05
Negative affect	21.80	6.79	.20**	.21**	-.022	-.07*	-.24**	.05	–

N=1125. All are significant at *p* <0.05; **p <0.01

Table 2 presents the results of regression analysis tested the main and moderating effects hypotheses. Control variables (gender, age, ethnicity and marital status) accounted for a significant increment explaining 1.9, 2.0 and 0.8 percent of variance in each wellbeing indicators.

The variables of WFC, FWC, job control and social support were entered in the second step of the analyses, which was significant for job satisfaction ($F_{(4, 1116)}$=54.92, $p<0.001$, ΔR^2 0.263), positive affect ($F_{(4, 1116)}$=23.24, $p<0.001$, ΔR^2 0.123) and negative affect ($F_{(4, 1116)}$=9.55, $p<0.001$, ΔR^2 0.056).

The third step of regression analyses revealed that the two way interaction; FWC x sosial support ($F_{(5, 1116)}$=35.21, $p<0.05$, ΔR^2 0.009), WFC x social support ($F_{(5, 1111)}$=16.27, $p<0.001$, ΔR^2 0.017) gained significance for job satisfaction and positive affect respectively.

Table II
RESULTS OF HIERARCHICAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES: STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS (BETA VALUES)

Predictors	Job Satisfaction	-Wellbeing indicators- Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Gender	-.039	.133***	.019
Age	.028	.025	.064*
Ethnic	-.120***	.039	.031
Marital status	-.041	-.047	.031
Block 1 R2 and ΔR^2	**.019/.019***	**.020/.020***	**.008/.008**
Gender	-.059*	.089**	.020
Age	.064*	.030	.075*
Ethnic	-.098***	.047	.048
Marital status	-.023	-.061*	.033
WFC	-.244***	-.022	-.131***
FWC	-.068*	-.100**	-.134***
Job control (JC)	.005	.250***	-.011
Social support (SS)	.366***	.145***	.022
Block 2 R2 and ΔR^2	**.282/.263***	**.143/.123***	**.064/.056***
Gender	**-.055***	**.087****	.024
Age	**.069***	**.034**	.075*
Ethnic	**-.100***	**.042**	.048
Marital status	**-.024**	**-.060***	.031
WFC	**-.245***	**-.028**	-.131***
FWC	**-.071***	**-.097****	-.131***
Job control (JC)	**-.006**	**.245***	-.017
Social support (SS)	**.374***	**.155***	.028
WFC x JC	**-.021**	**-.014**	-.068
WFC x SS	**-.007**	**-.106****	.040
FWC x JC	**.036**	**.012**	.031
FWC x SS	**-.090****	**-.032**	-.023
Block 3 R2 and ΔR^2	**.292/.009***	**.160/.017***	**.067/.003**
Gender	-.054*	.089**	.026
Age	.070*	.035	.075*
Ethnic	-102***	.040	.046
Marital status	-.023	-.059	.033
WFC	-248***	-.034	-.142***
FWC	-.064*	-.087*	-.122***
Job control (JC)	-.015	.236***	-.017
Social support (SS)	.377***	.158***	.031
WFC x JC	-.022	-.015	-.066
WFC x SS	.004	-.093*	.048
FWC x JC	.020	-.006	.022
FWC x SS	-.071*	-.013	-.021
WFC x JC x SS	.016	.033	.058
FWC x JC x SS	-.072	-.090*	-.066
Block 4 R2 and ΔR^2	**.295/.003**	**.164/.004**	**.069/.002**

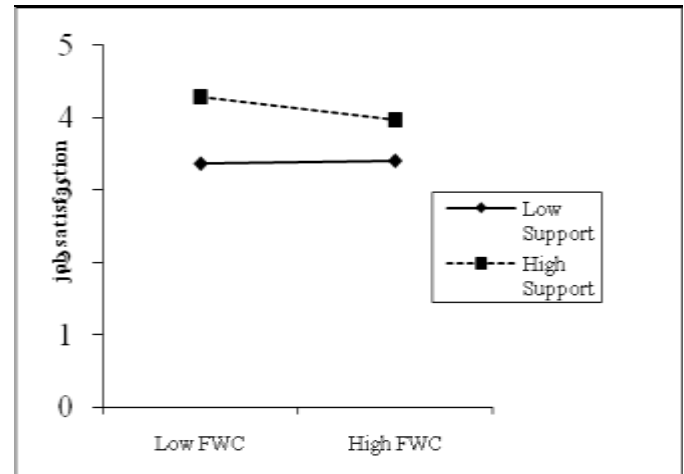The bold columns show the last significant block.

Figure 1. Social support as moderator between FWC and job satisfaction.

Figure 1 shows the interaction between FWC and social support (β = -.090, SE = .016, $p < .01$). There is much steeper negative relationship between FWC and job satisfaction for respondents with high social support and less pronounced for respondents with low social support. Employees with high FWC and high social support reported decreasing levels of job satisfaction.
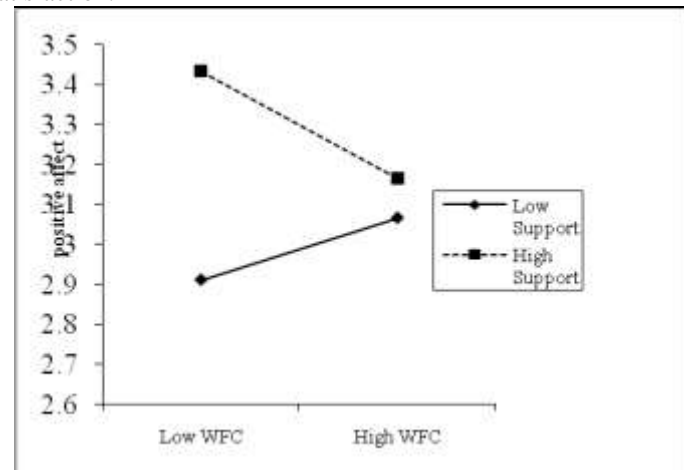

Figure 2. Social support as moderator between WFC and positive affect

Figure 2 shows the significant two-way interaction between WFC and social support on positive affect (β = -.106, SE = .021, $p < .01$). However, the interaction did not provide support for the prediction of the Job Demands-Control (JDC) and JDCS models in which there is a positive relationship between WFC and employee positive affect among employees with low social support. Employees with high WFC and low social support reported increasing levels of positive affect.

whereas, employees with high WFC and high social support reported decreasing levels of positive affect.

IV. DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, both WFC and FWC were negative predictors of employee wellbeing in this study. These findings corroborate earlier research [18,46,49]. The results suggest that work family conflict was a significant stressor to Malaysian as well as to Western workers. In the current study, the majority of respondents were married or had children which raised the responsibility for juggling the demands from both family and work domains regardless of gender. Employees in the current study might feel some conflict between work and family duties such as managing their work demands while feeling guilty for not spending more time with their families, and vice versa -thus affecting their wellbeing. Although Noor (1999) [47] found that Malaysian women are primarily responsible for household chores, the available evidence in the current study shows that work family conflict is an issue of concern to both men and women. This may indicate that changes in attitude occurring recently are endorsed by young workers with secondary education as well.

The negative association between work family conflict and wellbeing found in the current study is consistent with role theory [26] and in agreement with most of the studies in Eastern settings [e.g. 4,5]. Malaysian employees engage in different roles in the workplace as well as at home (e.g. husband, wife, parent, son and daughter), exhibiting their capabilities at performing another role, resulting in conflict, and therefore affecting their wellbeing.

In particular, the findings indicated that social support was associated with wellbeing which is consistent with previous studies in Western contexts [39, 62]. However, in the Malaysian workplace, it appears that the job control plays a lesser role in predicting wellbeing. Verhoeven, Maes, Kraaij and Joekes (2003) [63] advocate investigation of the relationship between the JDCS variables, and wellness and health in non-European countries (e.g., African, Latin American or Asian workplaces) where concepts such as control or social support have very different connotations. Western studies established that job control (the extent to which employees can control their work environment according to their work demands, abilities, needs and circumstances) is associated with employee wellbeing [see 56,64]. Contrary to these Western studies, the current findings showed that job control did not predict job satisfaction as well as negative affect. This may imply that there is a different conception of job control in Asian cultures, as a few studies have found that the lack of job control did not affect individuals in collectivistic societies (such as, for instance, the Chinese) as much as it affected those in individualistic society (e.g. the US) [43,35,36].

Job control is the commonly investigated job resource in occupational stress studies and has been found to be limited in work family conflict research. The current findings have been unable to demonstrate a significant moderating effect of job control in the relationship between work family conflict and employee wellbeing. This is consistent with Barich (1994)

[9] who investigated the moderating role of control on the experience of work family conflict. However, the current findings did not offer further support for the findings by Mauno et al. (2006) [41].

A possible explanation for the inconsistency of the findings might have been due to the strict nature of Malaysian organizations' practices regarding working hours, particularly in the study organizations investigated in this study. These practices hindered the possibility of testing a more specific form of job control. A recent study by the American Sociological Association (2011) [3] found that a specific control (schedule control − control over when and where to work) is a significant form of control that benefits employees and their families. However, this is not applicable in the context of the current study in which schedule control is almost impossible as supported by Hassan and Dollard (2007) [24] who point out that flexible work options are not commonly offered by Malaysian organizations.

The results of two-way interaction (social support and work family conflict) revealed significant effect in predicting employee wellbeing. However, this interaction differs from predictions in the JDCS model. In the current study, among high WFC and FWC employees, the availability of high social support decreases the levels of workers' job satisfaction and positive affect. This reverse buffering effect of social support may explain the occurrence of interactions which are not in accord with the expected prediction [e.g. 11,55]. A similar phenomenon in another Eastern cultural setting (China) was explained in research by Liang and Bogat (1994) [33] in which participants who perceived higher social support during stressful periods reported more illness than those who perceived lower social support. A possible explanation for the presence of this reverse buffering effect is the content of the support [61]. It seems possible that Malaysian employees in the present study need support beyond that provided by work specific communication [10]. In addition, consistent with Kaufman and Beehr (1986) [29], occurrence of the reverse buffering effect of social support might be attributed to the possibility that employees who received high support in the current study were not encouraged by their co-workers and supervisors in the right ways to face the challenges of work family conflict.

Social support was not found to moderate the relationship between work family conflict and employees' wellbeing (negative affect) in the current study. Although this differs from the findings of some published studies [e.g. 34], it is consistent with the findings of Frone, Russell and Cooper (1991) [22] and Parasuraman, Greehaus and Granrose (1992) [51]. These results offer inconsistent findings to demonstrate the effects of cultural differences on the importance and availability of social support [52]. It seems possible that these contradictory findings related to the moderating role of social support might be attributed to cultural differences. Barak, Findler and Wind (2003) [7] stated that the structure of the social support network may vary from one culture to another, and found that the social support network was highly interconnected in collectivist societies. In the current study, the focus of social support was on the workplace and not

expanded to family, friends and neighbours which is another important social network in the collectivist culture of Malaysia, thereby creating a significant main impact of social support on wellbeing indicators rather than a moderating effect.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings have implications for human resource management practices. In Malaysia, a relationship-oriented society, loyalty, trust and a sense of belonging are highly valued [1]. Thus, managers must cultivate personalised relationships with their subordinates, especially in work related factors. For example, team leaders or supervisors can regularly give information related to the job and discuss realistic workloads to reduce job stressors. Implicated organizations could consider providing training for team leaders or supervisors to equip them with the capability to provide feedback, support and coaching [53]. Managers could expand social support not only confined to job-related issues, but to non-job matters. Issues such as work family conflict experienced by employees must be seriously dealt with as they affect the wellbeing of workers. For example, Beehr et al., (1990) [10] found that non-job-related communication between supervisors and subordinates was significant in dealing with stress, which indicated that the different levels of staff know and are concerned about each other. As Love, Galinsky and Hughes (1987) [37] reported, support at work, particularly supervisor concern about work and family issues, was a crucial need among workers.

Again, the roles of knowledgeable counsellors, psychologists and human resource managers are important in assisting employees to achieve a work life balance. As the seventh challenge of Vision 2020 stated, to be a developed country, Malaysians need "to establish a fully caring society and a caring culture, a social system in which society will come before self, in which the welfare of the people will revolve not around the state or the individual but around a strong and resilient family system" [42].

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