

Causes and Consequences of Work-Family Conflict (WFC) among the Female Employees in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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Abstract: Work-family conflict (WFC) is a universal issue irrespective of the countries and cultures all over the world. But the nature and extent are likely to be different in different societies with different cultural characteristics. This paper is an attempt to identify the factors that result in WFC of female employees working at different universities, commercial banks and government organizations in Bangladesh. WFC is a common issue and produces negative effects for the employees, their families, and work organizations. It is more severe for the female employees compare to male employees in the traditional society like Bangladesh. Female participation in the work place is gradually increasing over the last few decades. Working women are encountering role conflict because of family responsibilities. This study is based on primary data. A sample of 50 female employees from ten organizations is selected and they are asked to unearth the key factors that lead to work-family conflict. The data are gathered by administering questionnaires. The study shows that the main variables responsible for WFC are: long working hour, job inflexibility, work overload, child care responsibility, age of children, dependent care responsibility, discrimination at work place, inadequate supervisory support, autocratic management style, inadequate family support, and the absence of husband's support. The findings of the study emphasized the need to formulate guidelines for the management of WFC at the organizational level as it is connected to job satisfaction and performance of the employees.

Key words: work-family conflict; reasons; female employees

JEL codes: M1

1. Introduction

Work family conflict is becoming a burning issue both in the developed and developing countries. Work-family conflict (WFC) is a common phenomenon of modern life in many countries and cultural contexts. Academicians, researchers, experts and policy makers are very concerned about the WFC and consequently they are taking much interest in making a balance between work and family life. Imbalance between work and family life is detrimental to both for the individual employee and the organization. WFC is more likely to put forth

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pessimistic influences in the family domain, as a result lowering life satisfaction and increasing internal conflict within the family. The issues associated with balancing work and family are of vital importance to the different groups- individuals, employers, families, and government. Balancing WFC produces benefits such as competitive advantage, public welfare and gross national happiness. About half of the population of Bangladesh constitutes women and gradually women participation in the job market is increasing rapidly. Bangladeshi women belonging to all classes have entered into paying occupations.

Currently, the exposure of the women of Bangladesh to educational opportunities is significantly higher than it was some decades ago, especially in the urban setting. Women are receiving higher degrees, and they are becoming the biggest job candidates for a variety of jobs. Our talent pool is lessening, but it is increasingly female. Organizations should address WFC issue of female workers in order to attract and retain valued female employees. Managers should not consider WFC as an issue of employed women; rather it is important to manage effectively for the organizational growth and survival.

Work-family conflict is conceptually bi-directional (Rotondo & Kinsaid, 2008). They are family to work conflict (FWC) and work to family conflict (WFC). WFC and FWC are related through a bi-directional nature where one can affect the other. The work related variables may cause work roles to interfere with family roles; the level of conflict in the family domain impacts occupational behaviors, leading WFC, therefore generating a vicious cycle. This paper mainly focuses on WFC. Work-family conflict causes sufferings for the employee himself/herself, his/her families and employers. WFC is defined as “a form of multiple conflicts in which the role pressures of the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict occurs as the demands of work and family are mutually mismatched to some degree. In other words, it occurs when demands from one role affects one’s ability to meet the demands connected with another role in another field. WFC occurs when there are incompatible demands between the work and family roles of an individual that makes participation in both roles more difficult.

The aim of this paper was to investigate relations between the demand from work and family, work flexibility, WFC, and work-related outcomes in the context of Bangladesh. It is necessary for us to understand the causes and consequences of the construct that persist across time and culture in order to help employees prevent and handle the discomfort that occurs when work and family demands clash. Considering the importance of managing WFC an attempt has been made to address the following questions: a) What are the factors that cause WFC of female employees in Bangladesh? b) What are the outcomes or consequences of WFC? c) What are the possible ways to minimize WFC of female employees?

2. Methodology

This study has been based on primary data. Data were collected from a sample of 50 female working employees of age between 20 and 50 years. Purposive sampling method was used to select respondents for the study. Respondents were working in public and private universities, nationalized and private commercial banks, and government organization in Bangladesh. The study is limited to female-teachers and officers. Clerical staffs are not included in the sample because questionnaire was prepared in English and most of them had faced difficulties in completing the questionnaire in English. The respondents consisted of married, unmarried and married employees with children. Of the respondents, 65% were married and 35% were unmarried. Of the married respondents, 35% were having young children on the other hand 30% married women having no child. Data were

collected through an open ended questionnaire. The respondents were asked questions to identify the factors that cause WFC, and to explain the impact or consequences of WFC on individual and organizational performance. Relevant books and articles were also reviewed to make the study more informative. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3. Literature Review

There is an enormous academic literature dealing with the issue of work-life conflict. A full review of this literature is beyond the purview of this study and contradicts to our main objective. In recent years, research has increasingly focused on examining work-family issues due to the changing nature of work and family responsibilities. Work-family conflict (WFC) refers to an incompatibility between the demands of work and family to a working person. Work family conflict occurs when an individual has to perform multiple roles: spouse, workers and parent. To be performed adequately each of these role demands time, energy and commitment. WFC exists when pressures from work and family roles are mutually incompatible, such as participation in one role is made more difficult because of participation in another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In other words, when a person at work playing his/her role, he/she cannot simultaneously play his/her work role (Khan, 2014).

Jacque L. King (2013) defines the incompatibility between the domain of work and the domain of family as work-family conflict. Conflict between these domains occurs when participation in one role is more difficult due to participation in the other role. Today, work-family conflict (work interfering with family) is more prevalent than family-work conflict (family interfering with work) though both can occur. However, regardless of the direction of causation, when one domain is discordant with another domain, the result is conflict and increased stress on the individual.

The cumulative demands of multiple roles can result in two types of conflict: interference from work to family (e.g., illness of children prevents attendance at work) and interference from family to work (long working hours prevent performance of duties at home). Three forms of WFC have been identified — time based conflict (longer working hours, inflexible work schedule, shift work, excessive family responsibility, caring children), strain based conflict (role conflict, role ambiguity, low spouse support) and behavior based conflict (expectations for warm, emotional, human relationship). Time-based conflict is evident when time pressures of one role prevent an employee from being able to allot time to meet the demands of another role. Strain or tension based conflict occurs when a strain from one role affects how a person performs in other roles, and behavioral conflict arises when behavioral patterns required and exhibited in one role are incompatible with those required for another role.

Aminah Ahmad (2008) identified three categories of factors such as job-related, family-related and individual-related cause WFC. Individuals who experience difficulties with partners or children or receive little support and aid from their families may find that their family stress intrudes into their work life. It is difficult to give oneself fully to work when preoccupied with a stressful family situation. Research on WFC has found that this variant influences a variety of dysfunctional outcomes, including psychological well-being — depression, marital contentment, and life happiness, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, burnout, and turnover. WFC is affected by the cultural context (i.e., values, assumptions, norms, belief systems). This is why; WFC differs from country to country due to cultural variations (Yardley & Markle's, 1997). It appears that there are differences among countries in the prevalence of work-family conflict and work-family enhancement. With the passage of

time the issue of WFC is gaining more importance and has become one of the major challenges confronting managers in organizations today (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). Adoption of family responsive human resource policies is now the demand of the time.

4. Factors Causing Work-Family Conflict

Respondents working in the different organizations in Bangladesh have identified a good number of factors that cause WFC. These factors are presented in Table 1 and enumerated below.

Longer working hours: Most of the respondents have experienced WFC due to longer working hours. It has been found that the intensity of WFC occurs due to time a person spends on the job. Long hours could have negative consequences for families and for workers who struggle to balance the demands of work and family roles. Longer working hours result in job stress among the employees, particularly female employees. Many female employees are in tremendous job stress because they could not manage work and family demand, particularly since family life is conventionally highly valued in Bangladesh. It is revealed that longer working hours affect work family balance directly and children are the worst victims of this WFC (Alam, 2010).

Work schedule: Female employees work schedule often conflict with their family life. Many married female employees do not like to work in the night shift.

High Work Demand: Work demands are perhaps the most consistent predictor of work-family conflict. Other work demands connected with work-family conflict includes compulsory or unexpected overtime, shift work, job pressure, excessive work, job hassle, and working fast or having many interruptions. One of the major causes of work and family stress has to do with individuals not having sufficient time to dedicate to both domains.

Family Demand: Women in our society are supposed to take care of children and other family members. Society expects that women should be family responsive. The survey shows that married working women experience more conflict than non-married women. Working women experience conflict due to time pressure. The study has found that respondents, who are married with young children, large families and spouses holding responsible positions, have experienced the most extensive work-family conflict. All these family features increase the amount of time needed to accomplish family role requirements that can interfere with work-related activities. The authors interviewed a few top managers of surveyed organization and found that many female students, although are doing well academically, but their performance is not up to the mark in the universities. They opined that they demand of their family life make it difficult for them to concentrate at work. Researchers have not found any significant and consistent differences between male and female in terms of their analytical, learning and intellectual skills (Hyde, 1981). Our traditional society places additional family responsibility on women. Working mothers may experience greater WFC comparable male counterpart as working mothers need to spend more time in care giving and household labor. It has been found that married employees experience higher FWC than their single counterparts. Furthermore, employed women with young children experience higher FWC than those with grown children. A female respondent states, "My family is my priority; I do everything for them — I work like crazy so that they don't have to go through the difficulties that I have gone through in life".

Commitment to their family: It has been found that female employees who are more committed to the family experiencing more WFC. Women with children were significantly lower in occupational commitment relative to women without children. For example, a mother with a sick child may not be able to stop thinking about her child, even though she must be at work and accomplish her work-role responsibilities. In our society the

interference of work with family is seen as threatening to the family identity. To a mother’s career may be disposable, but not children.

Individual perception: Variation in values as expressed by prioritization of life roles should lead to differing experiences of work-family conflict Individuals who valued work over family experienced greater conflict. Respondents are not identical with regard to their priority of life roles.

Traditional gender role experience: It is found that female employees who believe more in the traditional gender roles experience greater work-to-family conflict.

Unsupportive Family Members: Female employees experience more WFC, when they do not find necessary support from their family members. Traditionally, male members do not engage in household activities. On the other hand, working women play dual-roles in our traditional society. They need to perform responsibilities both in family and office.

Demand for leisure time: Few respondents complain that after work they do not have time to take a rest at home although they are very tired. They need to do some of the things they do not like to do.

Personal Problem: Sometimes personal problems of female employees make them irritate at work. They engage in a job which is no more enjoyable and interesting.

To find out the causes of WFC is the primary objective of the study. The following table shows the causes of WFC of female respondents in the enterprises of Bangladesh:

Table 1 Causes of WFC

Serial No.	Causes of WFC	Respondents	Percentage
A	Family Demand	47	94%
B	Longer working hours	45	90%
C	Commitment to their family	43	86%
D	Work schedule	40	80%
E	High Work Demand	38	76%
F	Individual perception	34	68%
G	Traditional gender role experience	31	62%
H	Unsupportive Family Members	29	58%
I	Demand for leisure time	24	48%
J	Personal Problem	21	42%

Out of 50 respondents, 94% take family demand as one of the prime causes of WFC. 90% respondents think longer working hours are resulted in WFC. 86% undertake commitment to their family, 80% agreed with work schedule for the causes WFC. 76% female employees believe that high work demand, 68% consider individual perception, 62% female respondents imagine the traditional gender role experiences, 58% are unsupportive family members, 48% respondents feel the demand for leisure time, and 42% respondents assume that personal problem are the causes of WFC. The following bar chart ranks various causes of WFC as perceived by the respondents.

Bar chart 1: Ranks various causes of WFC

Thus, it is important to have a comprehensive causal model that explains how these consequences arise so as to help all parties involved to prevent these consequences.

5. Consequences

Researchers, employers and employees have become increasingly interested in understanding the consequences of work-family conflict. Keeping this in mind respondents were asked to pinpoint the outcomes of WFC. The consequences of WFC are devastating. An understanding of the concept of conflict between work and family is important for organizations and individuals because it is linked to negative consequences. The findings of the study have indicated that WFC is related to a number of negative job attitudes and results, such as poor job satisfaction and greater propensity to leave a position. For instance, the clash between work and family is connected with increased occupational burnout, quitting intentions, high level of absenteeism due to physical and mental or emotional fatigue, job stress, violence in the workplace, and decreased health and job performance. Extensive turnover among this group result in high cost and low productivity. Excessive WFC can produce high level of work absenteeism and extensive stress, which in turn lower organizational productivity. Women need to play multiple roles and multiple roles have also been found to cause a variety of adverse effects on women’s mental and physical health, such as back pains, sleeplessness, intemperance, and loss of appetite.

Reduction of Organizational Commitment: Higher the work family conflict lowers the organization’s commitment. Five respondents did job in the multinational company with lucrative salary. After marriage, they quit the organization and join public university with one third salary. Work family conflict is lower among the unmarried respondents compared to married with children respondents.

Distress and Depression: The WFC produces dysfunctional consequences, both in the family and workplace, such as family distress and depression and job distress and depression. A few respondents complain “we are irritable at home because our work is demanding.”

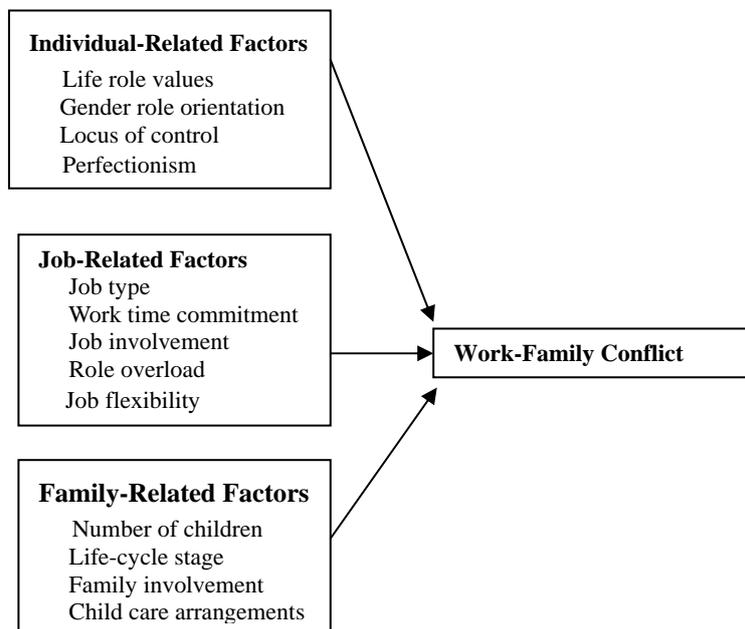


Figure 1 Consequences of Work-Family Conflict

6. Recommendations

These findings leave little doubt that high work-life conflict is associated with several indicators of physical and mental health problems at the employee level. It is a fact that depressed are less productive compared to employees having a sound mental health. Depressed employees have increased absenteeism, much use of medical treatment and employee support programs and these factors collectively lower creativity, innovation and risk taking capacity of employees. Respondents were asked to suggest measures to manage WFC.

Social Support: Social support is a must to make balance WFC. Support can enable spouses to solve WFC effectively and strongly associated with partner's well being. Social support is very essential when both husbands and wives are in a job that is two-career couples. Both husband and wife have a role to play in the success of a two-career relationship. Support must be mutual, in that each partner must provide support as well as receive support. A family orientation among husband, for instance, strongly associated with marital happiness, particularly when the women place a great deal of importance on her career. Women whose husbands hold more democratic orientation tend to experience less work-family conflict. In fact, companies in Bangladesh have recently developed a so-called family-friendly policies and practices in order to alleviate tensions between these two central life domains.

Flexible Time Schedule: Flextime has been found to be useful to most employees. Faculties' particularly female faculty members often shift class routine according to their convenience. For frequent shifting of class routine students expresses dissatisfaction and distress. Too much work flexibility may cause problems for others. A few respondents demand flexibility in the workplace. They should be given autonomy in deciding when to start and finish work every day and the freedom to take brief leaves to attend to family matters, may be more practical and useful for Bangladesh employees. Respondents have opined that flexibility at work is an indication of autonomy and personal control over one's work schedule and routine that has been shown to be universally beneficial for employees and particularly for Bangladesh workers who normally have very few opportunities to exercise control at work. Moreover, flexibility at work is likely to be perceived by respondents as care and support from management, especially direct supervisors.

Child Care Centers: Respondents suggest establishing child care centers at the close to the workplace. A few respondents make the argument that child care centers may be less relevant in Bangladesh context where the support of extended families is still available and relatively inexpensive paid help is accessible.

Formulation of family friendly policies: Organizations need to formulate and implement family-friendly policies such as telecommuting or part time work arrangement, compressed work hours and reduced hours schedules to reduce WFC. Workplace policies and initiatives must increase work, family fit. It is evident that workplace initiatives can alter the work environment to help employees manage work and non-work responsibilities. In particular, increasing employee appraisal of control over their work time is an important mechanism for alleviating work-family conflicts. In Japan, when women employees get married, they are provided with part time and contingent work arrangement. To be an ideal mother, working women take of the impeccable care of their children and home. A woman's identity as a worker/employee is secondary. In fact, few organizations in Bangladesh have recently developed a so-called family-friendly policies and practices in order to alleviate tensions between these two central life domains

Shared parenting: Shared parenting is a good solution to manage WFC. Many developed countries have introduced a paternity leave scheme.

Redefinition of Structured Role: WFC can be reduced by changing the expectation of role senders such as husband, children and other family members on working women. Husband and children must extend full support to working women to reduce domestic pressure. Men should get involved in home and child care activities and they should do it for the greater interest of the society.

Family Supportive Work Environment: Top managers should create a family supportive work environment in order to minimize turnover and job stress among female workers. Family supportive work environment can improve employees’ commitment to their organizations. Reduced WFC leads to higher commitment of female workers to their organizations and vice versa.

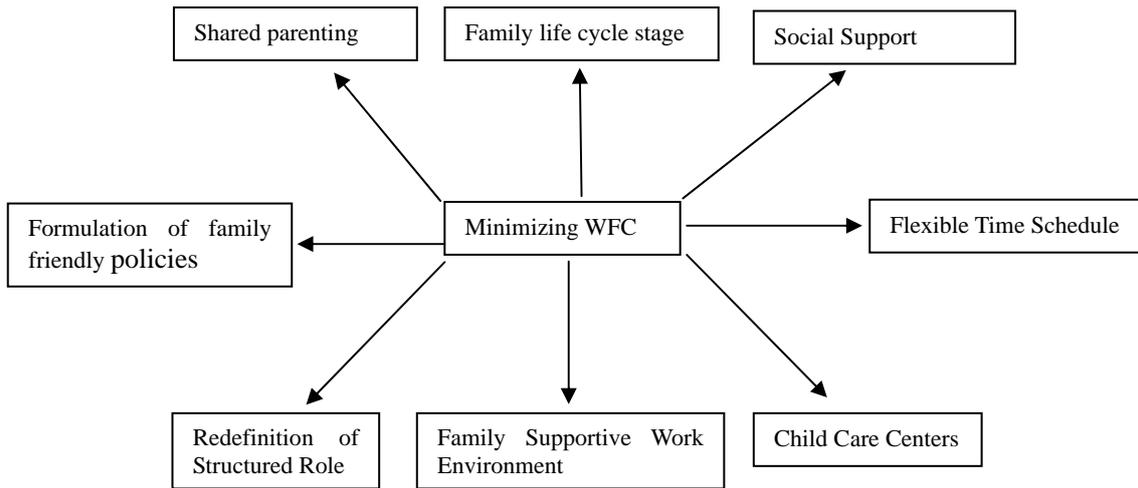


Figure 2 Proposed Model for Minimizing WFC

7. Conclusion

Findings from the research indicate that work-family conflict has become a significant problem for the married professional women in Bangladesh. Married working women in Bangladesh are guilty of demands playing multiple roles as a mother and professional. Work-life balance is the maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and at home Work family balance allows an employee to manage multiple duties both at home, workplace and society at large. Workplace characteristics contribute to higher levels of WFC. The study shows that long working hour, the volume of mandatory overtime, a rigid work schedule, uncooperative supervisor, and an unfriendly organizational culture increase the possibility that women employees will experience conflict between their work and family role. In the present study, women working in bank reported more WFC, while WFC was found to be less among women working in the public universities. Mutual goal, encouragement, healthy expression of differences and willingness to compromise are of much importance to minimize WFC of working women. Self interest, coercion and suppression of disagreement spark work family conflict. Alteration of the mindset of both husband and wife is necessary to lessen WFC and they should from a “me” orientation to “we” orientation. Rigid patterns of behavior are not beneficial to the resolution of stressful situation. Women should keep in mind that their career may be disposable, but not children as well as family. This study is not without a few limitations. The sample size is small; therefore, the findings may be oversimplified. Further research needs to be made in other employment settings (such as hospital, industry) to explore the

association between WFC and quality of life among working women especially married women.

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