

Gender Differences in Commitment to Roles, Work-family Conflict and Social Support

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this paper was to examine gender differences, if any, in commitment to various roles, the work environment, work-to-family conflict, types of strain, and social supports among employed parents with school going children belonging to the upper socio-economic status in urban India. Data was collected from employees working full time ($N = 208$) and belonging to dual-career families in Bombay. Survey method was used to collect data. Regarding commitment to various roles, only occupational role commitment was statistically significant but not marital role commitment, homemaker role commitment or parental role commitment. Regarding work environment, there was a significant difference between men and women in job variety but not in job complexity and work schedule flexibility. Of the various work-to-family conflict variables, there was a significant difference between men and women in work-to-parent conflict and energy-based strain but not in work-spouse conflict, work-leisure conflict or work-homemaker conflict. In general, employed parents in urban settings find it very challenging to balance their occupational and parental responsibilities. In this study, research participants were from the upper socio-economic strata with considerable resources at their disposal as compared to those from lower socio-economic strata. Men reported significantly more support than women in supervisor support, co-worker support and extended family support in managing work and family responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991 economic liberalization and reform of the Indian economic policies resulted in Indian businesses becoming connected to the global economy; consequently there was an economic boom. With increased employment opportunities, more and more women are entering the workforce in large numbers (Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007). This increased labor force participation outside the home among women led to dual-earner/career families trying to balance their work and family responsibilities. It also presents a diversity of work and family issues across caste, class and socio-economic status.

Cultural Context

Traditionally, the labor force participation of women in the paid workforce had remained low

in India and the gender ideology and norms followed very rigid traditional norms with the male as the principal provider and the female as the principal caregiver in the family. While many aspects of India's economy appear to be catching up with developed world most notably its achievement in the field of software development and information technology (Arora and Gambardella 2006), India's gender and class inequities are also fairly well-known in the global arena (Kristoff and WuDunn 2009). India in general presents a culture of contrasts and contradictions typical of a transitional economy (Muselman 2008). With the advent of women into the paid workforce, families have to adjust to the fact that they no longer have a female caregiver at home to take care of the household and caregiving responsibilities. When individuals are not able to manage the demands of their work and family life then they experience work-family conflict.

Work-family Conflict

Globally, work and family issues have been extensively studied for the past four decades (for recent reviews, see Allen et al. 2000). A major theme in this literature is that both work and

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family responsibilities demand time and energy. When employees are unable to cope with the conflicting demands of work and family, they may experience work-family conflict. Increased work-family conflict has been found to be associated with (1) Poor health outcomes such as increased depressive symptoms and decreased physical health (2) Reduced levels of reported life satisfaction and marital satisfaction and (3) Compromised work-related outcomes such as lower job satisfaction and less commitment to the employer. Excessive work-family conflict, therefore, presents challenges for employees, their families, employers, and for society as a whole (MacDermid 2005).

Research on work and family in India has followed two separate and disconnected paths. One is the route charted out by women's studies centers with a focus on under-privileged women that looks at structures of patriarchy and their contribution to the sub-ordination of women at work and home. The other path of psychosocial research, conducted largely from a role theory perspective, has examined work family relations within urban settings, (Rajadhyaksha and Smita 2004) focusing mainly on a conflict perspective, though recently Aryee et al. (2005) found support for work-family facilitation in the Indian context.

Studies on work and family roles have indicated that the division of these roles occurs along traditional lines for working men and women even in dual career and dual earner families (Ramu 1989; Sekaran 1984). Repeatedly studies have indicated that Indian women tend to be more involved with family roles and Indian men with work roles. (Aryee et al. 2005; Bharat 2003; Kanungo and Misra 1988; Larson et al. 2001; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar 2000). Studies on working women have found that they bear a dual burden across different socio-economic classes which, causes considerable stress and strain (Khanna 1992; Mukhopadhyay 1996), and that they experience psychological spillover of the work domain in to the family domain (Unwalla 1977). Further, gender has been found to moderate the relationship between work variables (such as income, discretionary time, job involvement, career salience and self-esteem from job) and outcomes of life satisfaction and job satisfaction (Sekaran 1985).

Social Support

Support for balancing work and family within the Indian context comes primarily from non-institutional sources that include family members such as spouse, parents and parents-in-law, paid help, friends and neighbors (Sekaran 1992). The nature of this support tends to be informal, ad hoc, contingent and bound in a web of reciprocal relationships of dependence and counter-dependence. There is low institutional and organizational support for balancing work and family demands in India. Institutional support takes the form of governmental policies that are progressive on paper (for example, Factories Act of 1948; Maternity Benefits Act of 1961 and laws to prevent sexual harassment at work) but poorly implemented by organizations that often circumvent the law (Rajadhyaksha and Smita 2004). Organizational support is generally inadequate – many times companies adopt a fairly rigid, non-flexible and bureaucratic style of functioning that does not give employees control over their schedule or work environment (Poster and Prasad 2005). However when job control is available to Indian employees, it has been found to predict and reduce general work-family conflict (Pal and Saksvic 2006). Work support has also been found to be positively related to work-family facilitation (Aryee et al. 2005). Gender differences, if any, will be examined in:

1. Commitment to various roles – occupational role commitment, marital role commitment, homemaker role commitment and parental role commitment.
2. Various aspects of the job - job variety, job complexity and work schedule flexibility.
3. Work and family interface – work-to-spouse conflict, work-to-leisure conflict, work-to-homemaker conflict, work-to-parent conflict, time-based conflict, psychological strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict.
4. Support available – supervisor support, co-worker support and extended family support.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the current analyses come from research participants living in dual-career families from Bombay ($N = 208$ including 104 husbands

and 104 wives). Snowball technique was used to identify research participants and surveys were used to collect data. All participants were full-time employees and most research participants were from the fields of Medicine, Management and Academics among others. A perusal of the literature revealed research done on dual-earner families (for example, Ramu 1989; Sekaran 1984) and this research focused on professionals as people who are in the field of management and medicine work long hours and it affects their family life. Purposive sampling was used; one of the researchers was from the field of management and reached out to her friends and thereafter through snowball sampling other research participants were identified. Research participants self-identified themselves as being career-oriented and belonging to dual-career families. Most respondents were Hindus (95%) and had completed Master's degree and above (77.7%) while 20% had completed undergraduate college and 2.3% had a Diploma. Respondents had three or less children; the average age of the oldest child was 12 years and the average age of the youngest child was about 10 years. Sixty-six percent of the respondents lived in nuclear families and about 34% of the respondents lived in extended families of which only 3.8% were three-generation families.

The life role salience scale developed and validated by Amatea et al. (1986) and was used to assess commitment to various roles – occupational, marital, parental, and homemaker roles. This scale was used in the present study because it has been widely used in Western and non-Western countries (for example, Aryee 1992; Chi-Ching 1995; Day and Chamberlain 2006;

Shukla and Gupta 1994). The scale developed and validated by Small and Riley (1990) was used to assess work spillover into family life. The social support scale developed by Caplan et al. (1975) was used to assess support from supervisor, co-workers and extended family. Other scales used in the study include job variety scale (Hackman and Oldham 1980), job complexity scale (Parasuraman and Alutto 1981) and work schedule flexibility scale (Staines and Pleck 1986). All scales had good reliabilities (alpha 0.70 or above) except for marital role commitment (alpha = 0.68). However factor analysis revealed that all items converged on a single factor with an eigen value of 1.00 for marital role commitment and the factor loadings were above 0.30.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender differences in the work environment and commitment to various roles are reported in Table 1. Men reported greater job variety, job complexity and work schedule flexibility than women. Among these variables used to assess the work environment, the differences reported by men and women were statistically significant only with respect to job variety (*Mean* for men = 4.20, *Mean* for women = 3.83 and *t* value = 3.07, $p < .01$) but not for job complexity and work-schedule flexibility. It is well known that husbands and wives belonging to dual earner/career families occupy various roles such as parent, spouse, employee and homemaker and each of these roles are salient for one's own identity. With respect to commitment to the different roles that working men and women occupy, men reported more commitment to the occupational role

Table 1: Gender differences in work environment and commitment to various roles

Variables	Mean values		t-test values
	Men	Women	
<i>Work Environment</i>			
Job variety	4.20 (.66)	3.83 (.96)	3.07**
Job complexity	4.32 (.56)	4.19 (.62)	1.48
Work schedule flexibility	1.88 (1.11)	1.83 (1.06)	0.33
<i>Commitment to Various Roles</i>			
Occupational role	4.16 (.63)	3.91 (.74)	2.45*
Marital role	4.02 (.62)	4.15 (.63)	1.43
Homemaker role	3.76 (.85)	3.96 (.87)	1.67
Parental role	4.04 (.80)	4.17 (.75)	1.15

Note: Figures in parentheses denote standard deviation
* Significant at 5% level and ** Significant at 1% level

than women (*Mean* for men = 4.16, *Mean* for women = 3.91 and *t* value = 2.45, $p < .05$) and this was statistically significant. In a study of 196 business executives (98 male and 98 female), Singh (1994) reported significant differences between male and female executives in their job involvement, attitudes to earning and job satisfaction. With respect to all the roles related to the domain of family, namely, spouse, homemaker and parent, women reported greater commitment than men to these roles, but the difference was not statistically significant. These results are consistent with what has been reported in the literature (Bharat; 1995; Ramu 1987). Ramu found traditional gender role ideology reported by dual earner working class couples wherein the wife's income was thought to be supplemental and her primary role was that of a caregiver. Bharat compared working class dual earner couples and professional couples and reported that both men and women reported that they appreciated the wife in her domestic role more than in her provider role but the husband in his provider role more than in his caregiver role. This may be due to the socialization of boys and girls in the Indian context wherein men are expected to be the primary economic providers whereas women are socialized to give greater importance to the family roles, although these attitudes are changing with the advent of women entering the paid workforce in greater numbers than before. In a study of the work and family lives of

one hundred fathers of 8th graders in northern India Larson et al. (2001) reported that fathers did twice the amount of housework if their wives were employed fulltime versus when their wives were either working part-time or not at all, although the actual amount of housework done by fathers was still less than that of mothers. Furthermore, it was reported that with respect to the parental role, fathers were more involved (than mothers) in discipline, homework help and leisure time activities with their children. In a study of dual career couples in Mumbai, India, Shukla and Gupta (1994) reported no significant difference between husbands and wives in marital role commitment, homemaker role commitment and parental role commitment.

Just the fact that one occupies multiple roles such as that of parent, spouse, employee and homemaker is not stressful by itself. When individuals are not able to manage or deal with simultaneous pressures from the roles occupied in the work and family domains, it may result in work-family conflict (Kahn et al. 1964). Gender differences in the work-family conflict and social support are reported in Table 2. Work-family conflict was computed for work interfering with various aspects of one's personal and family life, such as, work-to-spouse conflict, work-to-leisure conflict, work-to-homemaker conflict and work-to-parent conflict. Furthermore, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggested three types of conflict based on the processes by which interfer-

Table 2: Gender differences in work-family conflict and social supports

Variables	Mean values		t-test values
	Men	Women	
<i>Work Interfering with Family</i>			
Work-to-spouse conflict	2.39 (.81)	2.27 (.73)	1.15
Work-to-leisure conflict	2.60 (.99)	2.78 (.94)	1.30
Work-to-homemaker conflict	2.58 (.92)	2.75 (.80)	1.36
Work-to-parent conflict	2.34 (.71)	2.63 (.82)	2.57**
<i>Type of Strain</i>			
Time based conflict	2.77 (1.12)	2.78 (.91)	0.11
Psychological strain	2.01 (.99)	1.93 (.94)	0.53
Energy-based conflict	1.69 (.66)	1.92 (.61)	2.54**
<i>Supports Available</i>			
Supervisor support	3.49 (.92)	3.09 (1.04)	2.80**
Co-worker support	3.57 (.75)	3.36 (.68)	2.00*
Extended family support	4.51 (.52)	4.32 (.74)	2.08*

Note: Figures in parentheses denote standard deviation
* Significant at 5% level and ** Significant at 1% level

ence between work and family domains could occur: time-based conflict, psychological strain-based conflict and behavior-based conflict; these are computed as well.

Men reported greater work-to-spouse conflict than women whereas women reported greater work-to-parent conflict, work-to-homecare conflict and work-to-leisure conflict than men. Of these, men and women significantly differed from each other only with respect to reported work-to-parent conflict (*Mean* for men = 2.34, *Mean* for women = 2.63 and *t* value = 2.57, $p < .01$). Regarding the type of strain reported, both men and women reported more or less same amount of time based conflict. Men reported more psychological strain than women whereas women reported more energy-based conflict than men and this was statistically significant (*Mean* for men = 1.69, *Mean* for women = 1.92 and *t* value = 2.54, $p < .01$). This may be because mothers are more involved in tasks that are time-bound such as getting the child ready for school, getting meals ready on time, feeding, etc. whereas fathers are involved with children in leisure activities such as watching TV.

Social support has been found to moderate the amount of stress and strain an individual experiences in managing one's work and family responsibilities among medical professionals in Norway and India (Pal and Saksvic 2006). In this study, we examined the differences, if any, among working men and women in the social support they received from their supervisors, co-workers and extended family members in managing their work and family responsibilities. Both men and women reported receiving the most support from extended family members, co-workers and supervisors, in that order, in managing their work and family responsibilities. Men reported significantly greater support from supervisors (*Mean* for men = 3.49, *Mean* for women = 3.09 and *t* value = 2.80, $p < .01$), co-workers (*Mean* for men = 3.57, *Mean* for women = 3.36 and *t* value = 2.00, $p < .05$), and from extended family members (*Mean* for men = 4.51, *Mean* for women = 4.32 and *t* value = 2.08, $p < .05$) and the gender differences in support received in managing one's work and family responsibilities is statistically significant for all types of support received.

It is interesting that women reported significantly greater work-to-parent conflict and energy-based conflict than men but men reported

significantly greater support from supervisor, co-worker and extended family members than women. This is a result of the fact that the Indian economy is in transition and both traditional and modern gender role ideologies co-exist simultaneously. With the advent of women into the workforce, more and more families are rejecting the traditional male breadwinner – female homemaker model and opting for more egalitarian roles, particularly in dual-career families where both husbands and wives are unwavering in their commitment to the work and family roles. However, due to structural lag, society and social policies are slower to change and so we see that men report more support from colleagues, supervisor and extended family members than women because people assume traditional gender role ideologies and do not think that women need support when in fact they report significantly greater work-to-family conflict than men.

Implications for Future Research

One needs to be cautious while generalizing the results from this study. This survey used a cross-sectional research design; consequently causal statements cannot be made. Also, surveys need to be complemented with other methods such as observational studies. Key variables such as gender role ideology and whether domestic help was available either on part-time or full-time basis for household chores and child care needs to be included as a variable in future studies. Also, the research participants in this study were employed in well-paying jobs such as doctors, managers, professors and therefore had access to greater resources to manage their work and family demands. Future studies need to focus on dual earner couples from other socio economic strata.

CONCLUSION

The economic reforms initiated since 1991 has put India on the global map and India is an emerging economy. This unprecedented economic growth has opened up employment opportunities at a rapid pace and women in India are entering the paid workforce in large numbers. This is leading to many experiencing work-family conflict as employees now have to manage both their work and family responsibilities. Findings from this study show that there was a

significant difference between men and women in work-to-parent conflict and energy-based strain but not in work-spouse conflict, work-leisure conflict or work-homemaker conflict. In general, employed parents in urban settings find it very challenging to balance their occupational and parental responsibilities. Men reported significantly more support than women in supervisor support, co-worker support and extended family support in managing work and family responsibilities. This is an important area that needs to be researched further to help design interventions and workplace policies that will mitigate this stress leading to better quality of life for all employees.

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