

## Social support as a moderator of the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction

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### CHRONICLE

### ABSTRACT

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This study examines the role of social support in the relationship between work family conflict (work to family; WFC & family to work; FWC) and family satisfaction for private sector employees. Using simple random sampling, data were collected from 260 employees from eight private companies in Terengganu, who responded to the Job Content Questionnaire, Work Family Conflict Scale and Family Satisfaction Scale. Results indicate that both WFC and FWC had significant relationships with family satisfaction. The results of the regression analysis confirmed that FWC was a significant predictor of employees' family satisfaction. However, social support did not buffer the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction. Implication of this study indicates that the organizations need to emphasize the effective strategies of development and implementation for work family balance in improving family satisfaction among employees. The suggestions for future research are also addressed, especially in the Malaysian context.

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## 1. Introduction

Well-being is emphasised by the government of Malaysia. Its Eleventh Malaysian Plan (11MP) 2016–2020 (2015) has been formed to focus on the comfort of Malaysians. The government has created various job opportunities to encourage each citizen to participate in the workforce and nation building. Such opportunities offer career paths that ultimately improve the quality of life of Malaysians. Reports from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2014) recorded that Malaysia's labour market saw a 2.9 percent increase in women participation. This means there are more dual-income families and a shift in responsibilities within the family. Ahmad and Omar (2008) stated that dual-income families must take from their time dedicated to family to fulfil their professional responsibilities and by doing so they lose of the fulfilment of family responsibilities. The Chairman of the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), Tan Sri Napsiah Omar reported that 16.7 percent of career women often left the children aged six years and above at home without adult supervision (Joni, 2015). This trend results from economic pressure and the increasing cost of living which encourage and sometimes forces spouses to earn extra income, indirectly impact on family life satisfaction.

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NPFDB (2011) reported that the well-being of families in Malaysia is not at the level of satisfaction. This issue was addressed in the New Terengganu Transformation (TTB) (2016) by Y.A.B Dato' Seri Haji Ahmad Razif Bin Abdul Rahman, the Terengganu Chief Minister who placed an important emphasis on family well-being. Previous studies have found that the work family conflict has an adverse effect on family satisfaction (Afzal & Farooqi, 2014; Perrone et al., 2006; Sim & Bujang, 2012). This has led to research seeking to identify the factors influencing this dynamic. Accordingly, supervisor and co-worker support have been considered a potential moderator in studies related to work and family due to its impact on an employee's well-being (Hsu, 2011; Van Emmerik et al., 2007; Voydanoff, 2002; Witt & Carlson, 2006). However, numerous gaps exist in the previous studies, especially in Malaysia. Namayandeh et al. (2011) emphasised that empirical studies related to family satisfaction are limited (Mustapha et al., 2011; Rashid et al., 2011; Sim & Bujang, 2012). In addition, previous studies that investigated the supervisors and co-workers' support simultaneously were limited (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Witt & Carlson, 2006). Given this lacuna in the literature, this study examines the support from supervisors and co-employees as a social support and its role in moderating the relationship between work family conflict with family satisfaction. This study aims to reveal possible similarities that allow for a generalisation of the findings with the West, despite the cultural differences between Malaysia and the West.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 *Work Family Conflict: Definitions and Overview*

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work family conflict as the pressure in work and family roles which are mutually incompatible. The study showed that people would spend more time in the most important role resulting in less time spent for other roles thereby enhancing potential conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Previous studies concluded that work family conflict (WFC) and family conflict work (FWC) is a two-way variable (Ismail & Nordin, 2012; Nurmayanti et al., 2014; Streich et al., 2008). Netemeyer (1996) defined WFC as a form of conflict between the general demand, time devoted and the strain of work that interferes with an individual carrying out their family responsibilities, while FWC is the opposite. Frone et al. (1992) argued that there is a greater collective impact when the work family conflict is measured as an overall variable.

Lu et al. (2008) categorised the cause of the disruption of work and family into three categories comprising work demands (overtime), family demands (child care) and a source of employment (family-friendly policies). Previous studies revealed that work family conflict has a direct impact on the well-being of an individual such as low commitment, job and family dissatisfaction, absenteeism, burnout, intention to quit work, lack of commitment, depression and somatic symptoms (Anderson et al., 2002; Boyar et al., 2003; Ford et al., 2007; Major et al., 2002).

### 2.2 *Empirical Studies on WFC and Family Satisfaction*

Studies on the relationship between work family conflict and satisfaction have been conducted in various cultures and occupations. However, research on work family conflict and family satisfaction are limited (Aryee et al., 1999; Kopelman et al., 1983) and those that exist use different approaches to describing family satisfaction such as marital satisfaction and spouse satisfaction. They also concluded that cognitive dysfunction and lack of time for work and family would have an adverse impact on family satisfaction (Karatepe & Sokmen, 2006; Turliuc & Buliga, 2014).

Previous studies found that work family conflict is negatively related to family satisfaction (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Frye & Breugh, 2004). Consistent with WFC, past researchers noted that FWC is also negatively associated with family satisfaction (Karatepe & Baddar, 2006; Wayne et al., 2004). Wayne, et al. (2004) indicated that high WFC and FWC would result in lower family satisfaction. Furthermore, Brough et al. (2005) stated that there is a stronger relationship between FWC and family satisfaction.

Consistent with role theory, individuals who are unable to meet the needs of different roles may be experiencing psychological conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). The scarcity approach emphasised in the role theory states that individual demand and conflict arise from different role pressure in work and family life (Goode, 1960). Poelmans (2001) concluded that the role of work and family can cause conflict in three ways, namely by creating role ambiguity, difficulty in fulfilling another role, and feels burdened concerning both work and family.

### 2.3 Social Support as a Moderator

Social support refers to the support perceived by the recipient as a help or their perception of how they are loved, valued and respected by others (Lee & Hong, 2005). Social support comprises an emotional support and instrumental support (Adams et al., 1996). King et al. (1995) define emotional support as behaviours that provide encouragement, understanding and attention, while instrumental support is behaviours such as helping with troubleshooting and any assistance to facilitate a person achieve their tasks. Supervisors and co-workers support is an essential element for achieving a balance between work and family (Hamid & Amin, 2014; Voydanoff, 2002). Studies have found that supervisors' support is an important source of social support in addressing issues related to work family conflict (Achour et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2002; Burke & Greenglass, 1999). Very limited studies have investigated co-workers support as a moderator, even though it has been emphasised as an important moderator in the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction (Rathi & Barath, 2013). The study by O'Driscoll et al. (2004) involving 23 organisations in New Zealand confirmed that co-workers' support plays an important role in reducing the negative impact of work family conflict on family satisfaction. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) assumes that individuals are motivated to preserve, protect and develop their resources to reduce stress. In the process of managing work and family demands and reducing conflict, social support helps individuals in dealing with work family conflict (Hobfoll, 1989). COR is a theory that is consistent with studies that examine social support as a moderator of the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction.

### 2.4 Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between WFC and family satisfaction.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant correlation between FWC and family satisfaction.
- H<sub>3</sub>: WFC and FWC are significantly predict family satisfaction.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Social support moderates the relationship of WFC and family satisfaction.
- H<sub>5</sub>: Social support moderates the relationship of FWC and family satisfaction.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants and Procedure

A total of 248 employees from the private sector comprising 137 males (52.7%) and 123 females (47.0%) aged between 21 to 59 years participated in this study. Respondents were randomly selected from eight private companies in Kuala Terengganu and Kemaman. Professional connection strategies were used to obtain the involvement of private companies, in which researchers are trying to deal with the senior management (Chen et al., 2009) and any managers or employees who have professional or personal relationships with researchers (Lu et al., 2006). Researchers have been assisted by the Human Resources Officer in the process of distributing and collecting the questionnaires for each organisation.

### 3.2 Instrument

#### 3.2.1 Section A (Demographic Profiling)

This section asked about the demographic background of the respondents including age, gender, religion, race, marital status, education level as well as service period.

### 3.2.2 Section B (Work Family Conflict Scale)

Work family conflict was measured using the Work Family Conflict Scale (Carlson et al., 2000) which consists of 18 items and divided into six subscales. The subscale consists of a time-based, strain-based and behavioural-based for each direction in work family conflict (WFC) and family work conflict (FWC). Respondents were asked to evaluate on a scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (sample item: "My job confine my activities with the family"). Higher scores on the scale show the higher level of work family conflict. In this study, the reliability of this scale is 0.93, which is consistent with a (Lawrence, 2013), which showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

### 3.2.3 Section C (Family Satisfaction Scale)

Family satisfaction was measured using three items from the Family Satisfaction Scale (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Respondents were asked to evaluate based on the scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (sample item: "Generally, I am satisfied with my family life."). A higher score indicates a high level of family satisfaction. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

### 3.2.4 Section D (Job Content Questionnaire)

The study used eight items from the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) (Karasek, 1985) to measure the support of the supervisor ("My supervisor/chief cares about the welfare of his subordinates.") and co-workers ("My co-workers help to ensure the works is completed."). Respondents were asked to evaluate based on a scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. A high score indicates high social support. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the eight items is 0.93.

## 4. Results and Findings

The data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Descriptive statistics including mean, frequency and percentage were used to measure the level of WFC and FWC. Meanwhile, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between work family conflict with family satisfaction. Also, multiple regression analysis was used to identify predictive factors for family satisfaction. Next, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine the role of social support as a moderator of the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction.

### 4.1 Level of Work Family Conflict

Overall, the study reported that WFC was higher than FWC (see Tables 1 and 2). This is shown in the overall mean for WFC which recorded higher scores ( $m = 2.86$ ) compared to the dimensions of FWC ( $m = 2.71$ ). However, the overall average for the WFC and FWC is moderate among private sector employees. Behavioural factors contributed more to WFC than FWC. Overall, the majority of respondents have work family conflict at a moderate level (53.1%), while 40.8 percent have a low level and only 6.2 percent had high levels.

**Table 1**  
Summary of mean dimension WFCY

Dimensions	Mean	Level
Time WFC	2.78	Moderate
Strain WFC	2.83	Moderate
Behavioural WFC	2.94	Moderate
Overall average	2.86	Moderate

**Table 2**

Summary of mean dimension FWC

Dimensions	Mean	Level
Time FWC	2.69	Moderate
Strain FWC	2.49	Moderate
Behavioural FWC	3.02	Moderate
Overall average	2.71	Moderate

The findings show that work family conflict among employees in the private sector is moderate. However, a study conducted in Malaysia on public sector employees showed different findings, where the level of work family conflict as a whole was low (Jamadin et al., 2015; Panatik & Badri, 2012). It proves that private sector employees are experiencing conflict in fulfilling the work duties more than public sector employees because they have to work longer hours and have a heavier workload (Hassan et al., 2010). The findings suggest that private sector employees are distracted by their family responsibilities due to work obligations. Employees who are unable to complete their tasks on time at work will bring work home. This situation will displace the pressure and disturb the balance of their responsibilities in the home (Panatik & Badri, 2012).

These findings also showed that private sector employees suffer from WFC more than FWC, which is consistent with previous studies in Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2010; Ibrahim, 2012; Panatik & Badri, 2012) and studies in the West (O'Driscoll et al., 2004). The results of this study demonstrate that private sector employees can reduce stress in the workplace when with family members. This, in turn, explains that the responsibilities of the family is very important in reducing the conflicts faced by an individual. Panatik and Badri (2012) also claimed that work family conflict arises when there was a incompatible regarding performing roles in the workplace and family.

Panatik and Badri (2012) explain that negative behaviours could trigger a work family conflict. In the context of this study, the behaviour is defined as interactions among private sector employees with their surroundings. Behaviour-based conflict is a major contributor to the WFC and FWC, therefore, a good understanding between family members and co-workers is important in avoiding conflicts. The cognitive dissonance (such as opposite behavior or misunderstanding) between husband and wife and coercion or support from supervisors create unpleasant feeling thereby increasing the tension to employees (Beehr et al., 2003; Panatik & Badri, 2012). The majority of employees in this study are married and have children. Their difficulty in distinguishing how to behave and interact with employers, co-workers, spouses and children has led to conflict, whether in the workplace or home.

In addition to behavioural factors, time and strain also contribute to the occurrence of work family conflict (WFC & FWC). Elloy and Smith (2004) concluded that conflict is compounded when spouses with children work together. In Malaysia, the increase in women who have tertiary education has led to an increase in the number of dual-earner families (Zaimah et al., 2015). The growing number of career women means there is an overlap in the workplace and home responsibilities.

#### 4.2 Work Family Conflict with Family Satisfaction

Correlation analysis showed WFC ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ) and FWC ( $r = -.37, p < .01$ ) had a significant negative relationship with family satisfaction. Overall, variables are interconnected. A summary of means, standard deviations and correlations between variables including predictor variables (WFC & FWC) and a criterion variable (family satisfaction) as well as moderation variable (social support) are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Means, standard deviations and correlations between study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. WFC ( <i>overall</i> )	2.78	1.11					
2. WFC	2.86	1.17	.97**	-			
3. FWC	2.71	1.11	.98**	.91**	-		
4. FS	5.94	.92	-.36**	-.33**	-.37**	-	
5. SS	5.40	.92	-.37**	-.37**	-.36**	.41**	-

Note: All are significant at \*\* $p < .01$ ; WFC: Work Family Conflict, FWC: Family Work Conflict, FS: Family Satisfaction, SS: Social Support

The results showed that the WFC and FWC are relevant to family satisfaction. This is consistent with previous studies (Afzal & Farooqi, 2014; Perrone et al., 2006; Sim & Bujang, 2012) in which the satisfaction of families will be affected when the employee is unable to resolve the conflict. This situation can be explained with higher WFC and FWC; family satisfaction will decrease. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Brough et al., 2005), which proves that the FWC has a stronger relationship with family satisfaction than in WFC. In other words, FWC correlated with variables related to the family, while WFC is closely linked to work-related variables (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). This suggests that private sector employees feel disturbed by the role that puts pressure on them to the detriment of the quality and performance of their role. Theoretically, certain individuals tend to perceive the unsatisfied job which give negative impact on the overall family satisfaction (Wayne et al., 2004).

Consistent with role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), individuals who engage in diverse roles were more likely to run out of steam leading them to experience role conflict. The majority of respondents are individuals who are married. Current trends are continuing, the future promises that it will be increasingly difficult to manage each role. Thus, the constraints of time and energy in performing a dual role will affect the well-being of individuals (Allen et al., 2000; Lijun & Chunmiao, 2009). Further, Sharif and Roslan (2011) pointed out that parents are busy at work resulting in limited communication concerning the needs and problems faced by their children. This contributes to social ills. Lack of attention and affection from parents cause children in adolescence to suffer emotional distress and revolt. The difficulty that occurs in the family will indirectly have a negative effect on the satisfaction level of their families.

Tsaur et al. (2012) indicated that the work rules such as shift work, overtime work and work on holidays might prevent or reduce individual time with the family. This situation the Malaysia's private sector work environment offers less flexible work arrangements (Noor & Mahudin, 2016). Clearly, private sector employees will feel dissatisfied with family life due to demanding work requirement that prevents them from engaging fully with their family. However, there are varied findings that work family conflict has significant relationships with family satisfaction with some studies showing that family satisfaction was not affected by work family conflicts faced by employees (Karatepe & Kilic, 2009).

#### 4.3 Predictive Factors and Moderator

Table 4 shows the results of regression analysis to examine the effect of predictive and moderator factors. The findings prove the FWC is a significant predictor factor for family satisfaction ( $F = 18:57, p < .01$ ). Also, the results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 4 revealed that social support was not significantly moderating the relationship between WFC ( $\beta = -.215$ ) and FWC ( $\beta = .048$ ) with family satisfaction.

**Table 4**  
Results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses

	Step 1	Standardised Coefficient $\beta$ Step 2 Additive Model	Step 3 Interactive Model
<i>Control variables</i>			
Gender	.063	.022	.032
Marital status	-.102	-.090	-.086
Education level	-.015	-.013	.011
Service period	-.156*	-.049	-.058
<i>Predictor variables</i>			
WFC		.136	.125
FWC		-.333*	-.301*
SS		.226***	.233***
<i>Two-way interaction</i>			
WFC×SS			-.215
FWC×SS			.048
R2	.058	.276	.301
$\Delta$ R2	.058	.217	.026
F change	3.93	15.00	2.28
Df	4,255	5,250	4,246

Note: \* p <.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001; WFC: Work Family Conflict, FWC: Family Work Conflict, FS: Family Satisfaction, SS: Social Support

The results showed that the FWC predicts the satisfaction of the family. This is consistent with previous studies (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). This indicates that private sector employees who have a conflict with the family will experience a decline in the performance of work. Family is blamed for the disruption that occurs in the workplace thereby reducing the level of satisfaction in the family. This finding suggests that private sector employees consider work as an important aspect and they appreciate the role of the workplace. This situation will indirectly create the perception that the family threatens work and could lead to lower family satisfaction (Beutell, 2010; Rathi & Barath, 2013). The results also indicate that social support did not act as a moderator in the relationship between work family conflict and family satisfaction. In particular, social support with WFC and FWC showed no interaction of family satisfaction among private sector employees. The findings are consistent with previous studies that prove that the support of the supervisor does not play a role in moderating the relationship between work family conflict with job satisfaction and family (Yildirim & Ayca, 2008). These findings show that the work family conflict experienced by private sector employees does not affect the satisfaction of their family, even if they have low social support. There is an inconsistency between the findings of a study by the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), in which this theory assumes that individuals are motivated to preserve, protect and develop their resources in order to reduce stress. It seems possible that private sector employees in the present study need support beyond that provided by work specific communication to reduce the negative consequences of high work family conflict (Beehr et al., 1990; Ibrahim, 2012). Also, social support did not work as a buffer in this study may be due to other factors, namely the organisational flexibility became an indirect buffer on work family balance. In Malaysia, flexible time is viewed as an alternative to employees who have difficulty in balancing their work and personal life (Mumin et al., 2014). In other words, flexible time can reduce the conflict between work and family, which improves employee morale by providing autonomy and work control.

Most of the respondents in this study are women who are frequently associated with balancing work and family. Thus, flexible time is considered to be a source for resolving problems faced by women in the organisation (Carlson et al., 2010). A review by Subramaniam et al. (2014) showed that the majority of career women in Malaysia consider flexible time as allowing them to spend more time with family and children.

#### 4.4 Managerial Implication

This study provides benefits to workers and employers in terms of a better understanding of the importance of a healthy balance between work and family as well as their impact on the well-being of individuals and organisations. Noor and Mahudin (2016) reported that the private sector lacks the commitment and readiness to offer any form of flexible work arrangements. Therefore, the family-friendly initiatives such as the implementation of flexible working considered to assist in enriching the well-being of the worker are important. This study can also distribute and provide important empirical evidence to respond to the government through the 11MP (2015) which emphasises Malaysian's well-being. Indirectly, this can contribute to industrial psychology literature in Malaysia, particularly for the private sector on the East Coast.

#### 4.5 Limitation and Future Research

The current study involved a few private organisations in the East Coast of Malaysia. Therefore, to achieve better findings generalisation, future study should involve more participants from different sectors in Malaysia. This study employed self-reported questionnaire which can be improved by using more objective measurement in order to achieve more reliable data. In addition, a longitudinal study using a structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis should be conducted to examine the cause and effect related to work family balance and family satisfaction. Finally, this study mainly focused on social support involving supports from supervisor and co-worker. Therefore, support from family is also suggested to be investigated as a moderator in the study of work family balance for future research.

### 5. Conclusion

This study implies that work family conflict is an important concern for individuals and organisations alike because such conflict, serves as one of the mechanisms of stress, has been correlated with a negative impact on family satisfaction. Thus, both employers and employees should emphasize the important contribution of FWC on family satisfaction through the implementation of work family balance policies and flexible work arrangements such as flexi hours, job sharing and leaving early from work. The effectiveness instillation of work family balance indirectly can give impact the overall well-being performance.

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