Leadership Excellence and Gender in Organizations

How important are informal work-family support? A meta-analytic path analysis of supervisor work-family support and employee outcomes

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The work-family literature distinguishes two types of work-family support in the workplace: formal work-family support and informal work-family support (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Formal work-family support comprises organizational work-family policies, such as onsite child care. Informal work-family support includes supportive work-family culture, family supportive supervisor, and supportive coworkers (Kossek et al., 2011; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). While the outcomes of formal organizational work-family support have been meta-analytically examined (e.g., Butts, Casper, & Yang, 2013; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), there has yet to be a comprehensive review of the effect of informal organizational family support. There is a lack of consensus among researchers on the significance and magnitude of its effects across diverse samples.

Our meta-analysis examines relationships between informal work-family support in organizations, which are organizational supportive work-family culture and supervisor family support, and employee outcomes. Bivariate results indicate that supportive work-family culture had positive associations with supervisor family support ($r = .36$) and employees' use of work-family policies ($r = .13$). Supervisor family support had positive relationship with employees' use of work-family policies ($r = .20$). Employees' use of work-family policies was negatively related to employee work-family conflict ($r = -.23$), which had negative relationships with job satisfaction ($r = -.32$), organizational commitment ($r = -.19$), and positive relationship with turnover intention ($r = .39$) and work-related strain ($r = .43$).