

Flexible Work Arrangements, Job Satisfaction and Family Satisfaction: The Spillover Effect of Work-Family Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Since its beginning, the pandemic has forced many organizations to adopt new norms, offering more flexible work arrangements. Yet, there is limited knowledge on how these arrangements, particularly flextime, could affect the work-family conflict (WFC) and its consequences on both job and family satisfaction. Despite this, there has been limited research on the spillover effect of WFC, concentrating on cross-domain effects on both job and family satisfaction in Eastern culture. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate the spillover effect of WFC on job and family satisfaction among academicians from selected Malaysian public universities. The web-based survey questionnaire was employed, and statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software. Flextime was found to have a significant negative association with both WIF and FIW. Furthermore, the findings revealed that WIF has a stronger spillover effect on cross-domains, notably family satisfaction. FIW has a greater impact on its own domain specificity, namely family satisfaction. Thus, the study contributes to our understanding of the spillover effect of WFC on cross-domains, particularly in Eastern contextual cultures, and helps to provide additional insight into family-friendly policies intended to reduce the occurrence of WFC, leading to a better balance of work and personal responsibilities.

Keywords: Flexible Work Arrangements, Work-Family Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Family Satisfaction, Spillover Effect.

INTRODUCTION

Today, most organizations have changed their work arrangements to be more adaptable and flexible in a competitive environment. Beginning with the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on how people work, most organizations find it challenging to carry out their routine operations, affecting a wide range of business processes [1]. The pandemic has not only disrupted the entire operation, but it has also dramatically affected the workforce, ushering in a new era of employment [2]. As such, most businesses are considering flexible work arrangements (FWA) as an alternative to the new norm, leading to the shift of most jobs to online and remote work.

Generally, FWA refers to work options that allow for flexibility in terms of “where” work is completed (flexplace) and “when” work is completed (flextime) [3]. Some empirical evidence consistently indicates that FWA is associated with improved work-life balance, job satisfaction, and employee engagement [4, 5]. Furthermore, FWA is seen as an important factor in reducing absenteeism and enhancing organizational productivity [6, 7]. Despite this, FWA, specifically flextime, could also have a substantial impact on a higher level of work-family conflict since it blurs the boundaries between work and family life, leading to increased interference between these two domains [8, 9, 10].

On the other hand, WFC is often referred to as incompatible interferences between the individual’s work and family roles [11]. Prior studies continuously addressed this notion using two key indicators; work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) [12, 13, 14]. And, WFC is not only contributing to poor job satisfaction, performance, and well-being [15, 16] however, it also possesses the spillover effect on cross-domains such as life and family satisfaction [17]. During the pandemic, most employees experienced great challenges balancing work and family. Particularly, in the tertiary education sector, lectures and tutorials have had to be moved online swiftly, resulting in most academicians shifting to new norms in managing workloads [18]. Academicians who have been observed to work extraordinarily long hours and late nights (including weekends and holidays) may be negatively impacted by WFC [19, 20]. It is because, they have the inability to detach from work [21] and have failed to fulfil both personal and professional responsibilities [22].

Therefore, our study adds three new perspectives to the existing literature. First, we contribute to the current understanding of work-family conflict research by adding the effect of flexible work arrangements on WFC during a pandemic outbreak, whereas prior research studied it differently. Second, the current study investigates the spillover effect of WFC on both job satisfaction and family satisfaction (i.e., cross-domains: work to family and family to work domains), while previous studies have largely looked at the effect of WFC on work-related domains exclusively. Finally, the study sheds light on perspectives from an Eastern contextual culture where research on the spillover effect of WFC is limited, particularly among Malaysian academicians that emphasize high collectivist and power distance values that differ from Western individualistic and low power distance cultures [23].

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretically, we draw on boundary theory, which posits that individuals create discrete boundaries between their work and family domains to deal with the demands of each sphere [24]. This distinction enables individuals to maintain a sense of balance and separation

between the multiple roles they occupy (such as work and family roles). When there are clear boundaries between work and family roles, flexible work arrangements (FWA) seem to offer employees more control over their time and work environment. This situation enables employees to better manage their responsibilities in both domains, and resulting FWA helps to lessen work-family conflict among them. However, if not managed appropriately, FWA can cause work to spill into family time where there are no obvious boundaries.

Furthermore, the boundary theory acknowledges that these boundaries can be permeable, resulting in spillover effects from work to non-work domains. The spillover process outlines how the intra-individuals transmit strains or emotions across domains [25], with transmission occurring at work potentially spilling over to the family domains. So that, when boundaries between work and family roles are permeable, work is more likely to interfere with family responsibilities, and vice versa. In a nutshell, the spillover process describes how expectations from one role frequently result in poor performance and low satisfaction in other roles. Following the concept of cross-domain effects [26, 27], we argue that WIF is highly connected with family-related outcomes, whereas FIW is more strongly associated with work-related outcomes than family-related domains.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Family Conflict

As changing patterns in work environments necessitate greater flexibility, the FWA is widely acknowledged as a new norm for working arrangements, leading to favourable outcomes for both individuals and organizations. FWA provides employees with flexibility in how, when, and where they work, including hybrid work, telecommuting, a compressed workweek, and flextime. A meta-analysis found that FWA is associated with fewer physical health issues, less somatic symptoms, and reduced absenteeism, suggesting that FWA can help employees maintain their health [28].

Despite this, some studies have extensively investigated the effect of FWA on WFC, notably in Western literature [29, 30]. The uneven boundaries of FWA when working remotely from the office have caused conflict among family members. Even though some scholars claim that FWA does not directly affect WFC [8], others argue that FWA such as telecommuting, taking work home, having flexible hours, and taking a family leave are negatively associated with WFC among employees [31, 32]. To support this notion, FWA is more highly associated with WFC, specifically work interference with family (WIF), than family interference with work (FIW) [13, 14]. Empirical evidence confirms that flextime has a stronger relationship with WIF [33] compared to its FIW counterparts [12, 13].

Nevertheless, the FWA is considered uncommon in Eastern working cultures, particularly in Malaysia. Even though some organizations sought to establish FWA, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, flextime appears to be a more viable alternative than flexplace arrangements. Employers may prefer flextime because it provides greater control and effective management. To date, studies on FWA and WFC have primarily concentrated on traditional working arrangements [33], with few studies focusing on FWA, specifically flextime, during a pandemic outbreak involving academicians with an Eastern cultural background. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: flextime arrangements negatively associated to work interference with family
- Hypothesis 2: flextime arrangements negatively associated to family interference with work

Work-Family Conflict, Job Satisfaction and Family Satisfaction

Work and family conflict (WFC) are consistently interrelated regardless of the nature of work [34] and ultimately affect the imbalance of fulfilment between employees, family members, and organizations. WFC refers to incompatible interferences between the individual's work and family roles [11]. Western scholars reveal that conflicts between work and family will arise when employees spend too much time on the job [35]. These conflicts subsequently result in significant influences on the spillover process from work (e.g., performance, turnover, emotional exhaustion, and well-being) to non-work-related domains (e.g., life and family satisfaction) [17].

As previously mentioned, the literature has widely discussed two types of WFC; WIF and FIW, each having its own set of occurrences and outcomes [36, 37]. Both WIF and FIW were classified as time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based [38]. Time-based conflict occurs when the time spent on one function makes it difficult to participate in another, such as working overtime or long hours, which affects family time allocation [39, 40]. While strain-based conflict occurs when one role's function interferes with another, particularly when work-related weariness during the day impairs an individual's capacity to play with children at home. Finally, behavior-based conflict develops when particular behaviors necessitated in one function do not match expectations in another [38, 39], such as a leadership approach that is not feasible at home while engaging with family members.

Particularly when individuals perceive a high level of WIF or FIW, their energy and effort are reduced, and they may then become aggrieved and create troubles for the job itself or the organization [41]. WIF is a common issue among employees and has a significant spillover impact on family life compared to FIW [42]. WIF often causes conflict between work and family [43], resulting from greater work stressors [44, 45, 46]. Frequently, work stressors have a different impact on WIF, especially involving working women [47], as they have tight schedule flexibility or job autonomy.

Contradictory, Zhao et al. [11] claim that FIW is considered the main barrier among employees to achieving career success as they perceive family roles as non-negotiable. Family-related issues brought into the workplace often trigger counterproductive work behavior, which can harm job performance and reduce job satisfaction [14]. In this sense, both of the above-mentioned situations empirically indicated that the spillover effects are highly associated with WIF and non-work-related domains, such as life and family satisfaction. While the spillover effect between FIW is highly associated with work-related domains. Despite this, cultural beliefs may have a significant influence on how work and family responsibilities are allocated [48]. Therefore, the current study suggests the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 3: WIF has a stronger negative association with family satisfaction than job satisfaction

- Hypothesis 4: FIW has a stronger negative association with job satisfaction than family satisfaction

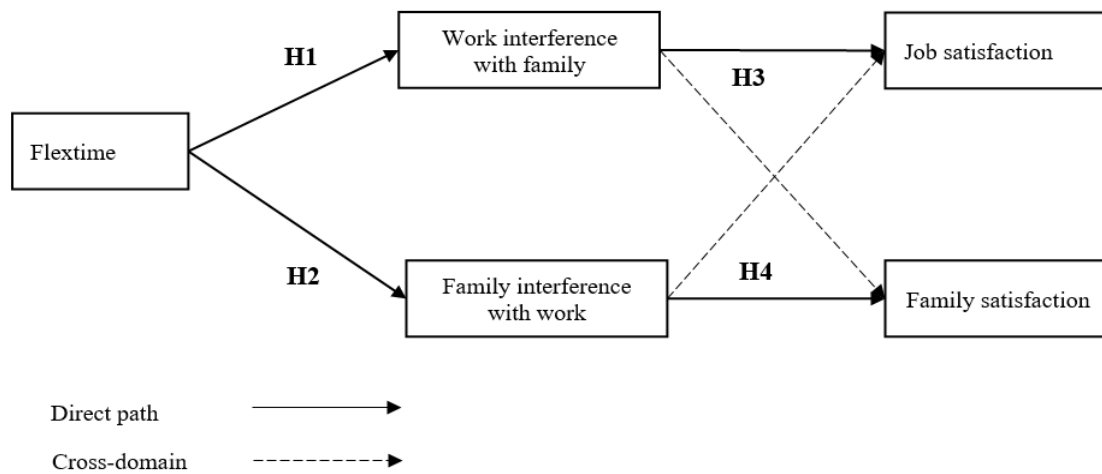


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

The current study used a cross-sectional research design involving full-time academicians from selected Malaysia public universities. Using a web-based survey, this study employed a purposive approach because participation rates among Malaysians are very low if using other sampling approaches. Out of 250 web-based surveys distributed via email, 155 academicians returned the questionnaires, obtaining a total response rate of 62%. In general, most participants were female (89.6%), with most aged between 35 – 39 (38%) and 30 – 34 (24%) years. The majority of participants were married (76%) with most of them having 2 (19.8%) and 3 (20.8%) children respectively.

Measures

Flexible work arrangements. Flextime arrangements were assessed using four-item scale from Hyland [49]. A sample question is “I change the time that I begin and end my workday due to personal preferences.” All items were used a five-point Likert scale where 1 = four or five times per week, 2 = between one and three times per month, 3 = once or twice per month, 4 = less than once per month and 5 = never.

Work-family conflict. WFC consist of two categories, namely Work-Interference with Family (WIF) and Family-Interference with Work (FIW). WFC were assessed using six-item scale from Mathews, Kath and Barness-Farrell [50], an abbreviated version of Carlson, Kacmar and Williams’s [38] multidimensional measure of WFC. Sample questions for WIF and FIW are “I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities” and “I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities respectively.” All measured were used a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfactions were assessed using the traditional three-item scale from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh [51]. All three items were measured using a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. A sample question for job satisfactions is “In general, I like working here.”

Family Satisfaction. Family satisfactions were assessed using three-item scale from Brough et al. [52]. All three items were measured using a five-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. A sample question for family satisfaction is “In general, I like my family.”

Common Method Variance

In this study, Harman’s single-factor test was used to assess common method variance. The statistical remedy was carried out to validate that the common method bias did not pose a significant threat to the measured data. In conducting research based on self-reported data of the same person, variations are likely to be problematic [53]. Though Brough and Boase [54] claimed that self-report is an appropriate research design for evaluating employees’ subjective experiences with occupational stress, the single-source data and its potential bias remain a source of concern.

All the measurement items of every construct (flextime, work interference with family, family interference with work, job satisfaction, and family satisfaction) were included in the unrotated principal component factor analysis. According to Podsakoff et al. [53], evidence of common method bias appears when a single factor emerges from the analysis or when one general component accounts for the majority of the covariance. Common method bias is a significant concern when a single latent component accounts for more than half of the total variation of the measurements. In this research, the single-factor model accounted for just 24% of the overall variation. In short, multiple scale components in this investigation did not load onto a single common factor, implying that common method bias was not a substantial threat in this observed data.

Statistical Analyses

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Pearson bivariate correlations were performed and preceded the overall analyses. Several regression analyses were performed for each direct path, including regression of the dependent variable on both predictors.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents mean, standard deviations, and correlations between measures involving flextime, WIF, FIW, job satisfaction, and family satisfaction. We used gender and marital status as control variables in the study. As shown in Table 1, only marital status had a significant relationship with flextime arrangements and FIW.

In Hypothesis 1 (H1), we predicted that flextime arrangements would have a negative relationship with both WIF and FIW. As shown in Table 2 (Model 1), we found that flextime arrangements were negatively related to WIF ($\beta = -.29$, $SE = .12$, $p < .05$). Thus, H1 was supported. In Hypothesis 2 (H2), we expected that flextime arrangements would have a negative relationship with FIW. The result shows that (see Model 2), flextime arrangements

were negatively related to FIW ($\beta = -.33$, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$). Thus, it indicates that H2 was supported.

With reference to Hypothesis 3 (H3), which proposes that WIF has a stronger negative association with family satisfaction than job satisfaction. From the results, we found that WIF has a greater negative spillover effect on family satisfaction (Model 7; $\beta = -.16$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$), than job satisfaction. Therefore, H3 was supported. While Hypothesis 4 suggested that FIW had a more significant negative association with job satisfaction than family satisfaction. However, the results indicate that FIW had a stronger spillover effect on the same domain, which is family satisfaction FIW (Model 8; $\beta = -.14$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$), indicating that H4 was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The current study aims to gain a better understanding of how flexible work arrangements (FWA) during a pandemic outbreak affect both WIF and FIW, resulting in a spillover effect on cross-domains, including work-related and non-work-related aspects. We contend that WIF had a greater spillover effect on non-work domains (i.e., family satisfaction) than on work-related domains (i.e., job satisfaction). While FIW has a greater spillover effect on job satisfaction than on family satisfaction. Despite a plethora of WFC research, the study was undertaken during a pandemic among academicians from Eastern contextual cultures in order to better understand the spillover effects of WFC on both job satisfaction and family satisfaction. Even though the overall findings appear to be consistent with previous studies in Western literature, some of them are conflicting and correspond to Eastern cultures.

With regard to direct hypotheses, we found that flextime arrangements have a negative association with both WIF and FIW. These findings corroborated prior studies indicating that high levels of flextime arrangements are significantly associated with lower levels of WIF [33, 55, 56, 57] and FIW [55, 57], respectively. However, we found interesting findings in which flextime arrangements have a stronger negative effect on FIW than WIF. This indicates that Eastern societies often incorporate both work and non-work domains, as they believe work is necessary for the survival of the family. Then, family members are probably more understanding if work is carried out at home, implying that the family domain is more adaptive than the work domain [37].

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and Pearson bivariate correlations

Variables	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender	-	1.9	0.31	1						
Marital status	-	1.78	0.44	0.063	1					
Flextime	0.84	3	0.75	-0.08	-.214*	1				
WIF	0.89	3.33	0.89	0.061	0.139	-.244*	1			
FIW	0.97	3.01	0.88	0.146	.259*	-.335**	.642**	1		
JS	0.97	4.23	0.89	-0.044	-0.112	.239*	-.216*	-.247*	1	
FS	0.85	4.61	0.44	0.006	0.005	0.088	-.322**	-.261*	.563**	1

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, JS = job satisfaction, FS = family satisfaction

Table 2: Direct effects between variables

Variables	WIF	FIW	JS	JS	JS	FS	FS	FS
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender	.11(.29)	.32(.74)	-.04(.17)	-.05(.17)	-.12(.17)	.02(.15)	.03(.14)	.06(.15)
Marital status	.18(.21)	.38(.20) +	-.08(.12)	-.10(.12)	-.61(.12)	.02(.11)	.05(.10)	.08(.10)
Flexitime	-.26(.12) *	-.33(.11) **	.16(.07) *			.06(.06)		
WIF				-.13(.06) *			-.16(.05) ***	
FIW					-.14(.06) *			-.14(.05) **
R2	0.263	0.401	0.248	0.293	0.252	0.233	0.327	0.275
Δ R2	0.069	0.161	0.061	0.086	0.064	0.054	0.107	0.076

Note: The first value is the unstandardized parameter estimate; the value in parentheses is the standard error (SE); *p <.10 * p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001, JS = job satisfaction, FS = family satisfaction

Concerning the spillover effect, the study confirmed that WIF has a greater impact on family satisfaction than job satisfaction. Thus, these findings are consistent with prior meta-analyses that contend that WFC outcomes, particularly WIF, have stronger spillover effects on cross-domains such as family satisfaction [26, 27]. Despite a plethora of research on the effect of WIF on specific domains, the findings suggest that the attribution perspective, in which individuals favor contributing more negative effects to the domain where the interferences come from [58], could also shift in the opposite direction [17]. We believe that, when employees have a heavy workload at work, it can dramatically blur the boundaries between work and home life, potentially leading to family dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, our study found an unexpected finding in which FIW is more prevalent in its own specific domain, family satisfaction. Based on the assumption of a cross-domain effect, work-related domains contribute a substantial degree of variance in family satisfaction, whereas family-related domains contribute a significant degree of variation in job satisfaction [26]. So that, FIW should have a greater spillover impact on job satisfaction, but our findings indicate otherwise. Despite this, numerous studies have consistently shown that FIW has a greater impact on family satisfaction, implying that it spills over on domain specificity [59, 60]. Indeed, some studies of Eastern culture suggest that Asian employees typically place the priorities of family over individual interests, with work serving as a trade for family is continued existence rather than pursuing individual career advancements [61, 62].

RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite a plethora of research investigating the effect of WFC on its domain specificity, such as work-to-work versus family-to-family-related outcomes, this study provides a different perspective on the spillover effect of WFC on both outcomes. In terms of theoretical contribution, the current findings suggest that both WIF and FIW are consistently regarded as mechanisms that link to spillover processes across multiple domains (i.e., cross-domains), including job satisfaction and family satisfaction.

Even though the study's findings support the boundary theory, in which academicians are more likely to establish boundaries between work and family responsibilities during the pandemic,

it appears that only WIF can provide the spillover effect on cross-domain, particularly family satisfaction. While FIW only considers the spillover effect in specific domains, which indicates that cultural values in Eastern societies, have a substantial impact on family satisfaction since they are more family-oriented due to strong collectivist attitudes. Thus, the study contributes to existing knowledge on the spillover effect, particularly in collectivist cultures that may differ from Western societies with individualistic values.

Furthermore, the study offers several practical implications for the organization in terms of developing a family-friends policy, which can help policymakers design a more accommodating work environment. Better flexible work arrangements, such as flextime or flexplace, could help to lessen WFC challenges and, subsequently, help employees manage their work stress more effectively while fulfilling both professional and personal responsibilities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of this study should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the response rate from the academicians' survey was lower than expected, limiting the generalizability of the findings. A larger sample size would have allowed for a more robust result. Second, the current study relies on cross-sectional data to make inferences about employee behavior and its effect on job satisfaction and family satisfaction. Despite the fact that we used statistical remedies to compensate for common method variance for the current study, this limitation should be counterbalanced by using a better research design, such as a longitudinal design. Third, this study used commonly self-reported nature of data. Following research could avoid this problem by collecting the variables independently, such as from their children, spouse and colleague by using multisource data.

Future research might focus on other outcomes such as work productivity; turn over, intention, and mental health effects among academicians in addition to the typical outcomes of job satisfaction. In addition, future research could replicate this study using longitudinal design data that would have the advantage of testing for causality, limiting inherent bias from cross-sectional studies, and testing the mediated models [63]. Additionally, the study also opens avenues for future research, such as the need to explore other variables or other potential mediators that could help to determine the job and family satisfaction of academics and to investigate the issue of WFC from different position levels in university.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of our study was to investigate the spillover effect of WFC within the association of FWA on job satisfaction and family satisfaction among academicians during the pandemic. Hence, this study has made significant contributions to existing knowledge on the spillover effect of WFC on cross-domains, notably in Eastern societies. Academicians play an important role in delivering their lectures via online approaches; thus, it is critical to understand if they are satisfied with their commitment and if WFC is considered a negative issue that influences their job satisfaction and family satisfaction. Finally, the study's findings are intended to provide more guidance to family-friend policies aimed at reducing the occurrence of WFC, thereby leading to a better balance of work and personal commitments.

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