

# **Work-Family Facilitation, Job Satisfaction and Psychological Strain Among Malaysian Female Employees**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Previously, work-family conflict has been the main focus of work and family studies in Malaysia. However, recent research has found that combining work and family domains does not always result in negative outcomes for employees. In this study, the relationships between the positive aspect of work-family interface (work-family facilitation) and job satisfaction with psychological strain among employees were tested. Additionally, the roles of job satisfaction as a mediator

between work-family facilitation and psychological strain were examined. A total number of 740 female employees from several organisations in Malaysia completed the survey. The hierarchical regression and structural equation modelling analyses were conducted to analyse the data. As expected, the findings provided evidences for (i) direct effects of work-family facilitation and job satisfaction on psychological strain and (ii) mediating effects of job satisfaction on the relationship between work-family facilitation and psychological strain. The implications, limitations, and recommendations were also discussed.

**Keywords:** work-family facilitation, job satisfaction, psychological strain, female employees, Malaysia, mediation.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Work and family are closely related in employed women's lives. Work and family domains represents important components of their self identity (Frone, Russel, & Cooper, 1992). While work provides

employed women with financial security and status, family provides the foundation of support and intimacy. Although women work, they are still actively act as the homemakers for the family. Therefore, there is a need to examine how work and family positively affect employed women's lives.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Work-family facilitation**

Work-family facilitation occurs when participation in work and family roles benefit each other. In other words, work-family facilitation represents the extent to which individuals' involvement in their work role makes it easier for them to fulfil the requirements of their family role and vice versa. According to Barnett (1998), despite consistent evidence of the benefits of work-family facilitation on well-being, this area has been largely ignored by researchers and policy makers. In Malaysia, only a small number of published research (e.g. Hussin, 2014; Nasurdin, 2013; Mustapha, 201) has been focused in this area. By understanding the role of work-family facilitation in employed women's lives, organisations and policy makers will be able to develop programmes and policies that will benefit

the employees and enhance their productivity. In return, the employees will optimally serve the organisations they work in. This paper aims at investigating the direct effects of work-family facilitation and job satisfaction on psychological strain. Another objective of this paper is to test the mediation effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between work-family facilitation and psychological strain.

### **2.2 Role accumulation**

Researchers (e.g., Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) suggested that role accumulation underlies the notion of work-family facilitation. According to Sieber (1974), individuals earn multiple rewards when participating in work and family domains, such as more role privileges (e.g., job control and job autonomy) and greater status enhancement (e.g., networking and invitations to social gathering). Marks (1977) also stressed that certain roles such as being a parents at home might create energy (e.g., enjoyment and happiness) for individuals and the energy benefits them when they perform other roles (e.g., be in a good mood at work).

This perspective was supported by empirical research in which work-family facilitation was found to be negatively related to distress (Shimada, Shimazu,

Bakker, Demerouti, & Kawakami, 2010) and intentions to leave (Russo & Buonocore, 2012). Past studies also shown that work-family facilitation predicted better physical health, lower absenteeism, and increased job performance over time (van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009).

### **2.3 Work-family facilitation, job satisfaction, and psychological strain**

Previous studies found that both directions of work-family facilitation (WFF and FWF) were associated with work and non-work outcomes. Work-to-family facilitation (WFF) is associated with lower turnover intention (Russo & Buonocore, 2012), increased job satisfaction (Hunter, Perry, Carlson, & Smith, 2010), and higher organisational commitment (Gordon et al., 2007). Family-to-work facilitation (FWF) is positively associated with job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005), organisational citizenship behaviour (Balmforth & Gardner, 2006), and elevated family satisfaction (Nicklin & McNall, 2013). While some researchers agree that the outcomes of work-family facilitation are domain-specific (e.g., Nicklin & McNall, 2013), others did not find any difference in the outcomes of WFF and FWF (e.g., Balmforth & Gardner, 2006; van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009). Thus,

it is generally accepted in the literature that work-family facilitation increased well-being (Russo & Buonocore, 2012).

Job satisfaction on the other hand was found to be related to positively flexible work hours (Scandura & Lankau, 1997) and organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), and negatively related to strain and burnout (Ramirez, Graham, Richards, Gregory, & Cull, 1996). Apart from its direct effects, job satisfaction also acts as mediators between predictors and criterion variables. For example, job satisfaction was found to be a mediator between role overload and lack of career development on organizational commitment. Specifically, employees who perceive (a) the assignments and duties required by the job to be far more than they can tolerate, and (b) that there are no opportunities or very few opportunities for advancement in the job might be less satisfied with the job and in turn less committed to the organization (Yousef, 2002).

Hence, in this study, it is hypothesized that (i) the higher the work-family facilitation and job satisfaction, the lower the psychological strain and (ii) job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work-family facilitation and psychological strain.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The participants in this study consisted of full-time (at least those who worked 30 hours per week) employed women in Malaysia representing the local authority, construction industry, education and training industry, manufacturing, finance, and other industries (i.e., legal, optometry, jewellery, and automobile). The questionnaires and returned envelopes (with stamp and researcher's name and address) were distributed to all participants through Human Resource Managers. A number of 740 participants returned the completed questionnaires via mail.

The questionnaire consisted of thirty three items measuring three constructs and four demographic variables. All constructs were assessed with pre existing measures from the literature. The constructs include:

#### *Work-family facilitation*

The Multidimensional Work-Family Spillover Scale (Hanson et al., 2006), which consists of 22 items, was utilised to measure facilitation. The scale consists six types of work-family facilitation: WFF affective ( $a = 0.90$ ), WFF behaviour ( $a = 0.94$ ), WFF value ( $a = 0.94$ ), FWF affective ( $a = 0.83$ ), FWF behaviour ( $a = 0.95$ ), and FWF value ( $a = 0.95$ ) (Hanson et al., 2006). Participants were asked to

indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree".

#### *Job Satisfaction*

The Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire by Cammann and colleagues (1979), consisting of three items was, used to measure overall job satisfaction. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .77 (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981). Responses were on a five-point scale, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree". This scale consists of two positively worded items (e.g., "All in all, I am satisfied with my job") and one negatively worded item (e.g., "In general, I don't like my job"). The score for negatively worded item was reversed before further analysis.

#### *Psychological strain*

The General Health Questionnaire-8 (Kalliath et al., 2004) was used to measure psychological well-being. The scale consists of two subscales (i.e. social dysfunction and anxiety/depression) with four items each. Participants were asked to rate on a 6-point scale ("1 = never" to "6 = all the time"), indicating how they felt over the previous three months. The coefficient alpha for this scale was .91 (Kalliath et al., 2004).

**4. RESULTS**

Confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted to examine the factor structures of each measure (work-family facilitation, job satisfaction, and psychological strain), to test the goodness of fit and to verify the factor structure of each measure. The work-family facilitation measure used in this study consisted of two dimensions, work-to-family facilitation (WFF) and family-to-work facilitation (FWF) (Hanson

et al., 2006). Each dimension comprised three types of facilitation which included affective, behaviour, and value. The CFAs for WFF and FWF were conducted separately because both were measuring different directions of work-family facilitation (work-to-family and family-to-work). Tables 1 and 2 present the fit indices for WFF and FWF measures. The final one-factor WFF and FWF models with nine items each, were used for further analysis in this study.

**Table 1: Fit indices for the WFF measure**

| Model                 | $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2/df$ | SRMR | RMSEA | CFI  | GFI  | $\Delta\chi^2$ |
|-----------------------|----------|----|-------------|------|-------|------|------|----------------|
| <b>n = 740</b>        |          |    |             |      |       |      |      |                |
| 1-factor <sup>a</sup> | 453.13   | 27 | 16.78       | 0.05 | 0.14  | 0.90 | 0.85 | -              |
| 3-factor              | 360.98   | 41 | 8.80        | 0.05 | 0.10  | 0.94 | 0.91 | 92.15          |
| 1-factor              | 1556.03  | 44 | 35.36       | 0.09 | 0.21  | 0.76 | 0.65 | 1102.89***     |

**Table 2: Fit indices for the FWF measure**

| Model                 | $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2/df$ | SRMR | RMSEA | CFI  | GFI  | $\Delta\chi^2$ |
|-----------------------|----------|----|-------------|------|-------|------|------|----------------|
| <b>n = 740</b>        |          |    |             |      |       |      |      |                |
| 1-factor <sup>a</sup> | 433.39   | 27 | 16.05       | 0.04 | 0.14  | 0.92 | 0.87 | -              |
| 3-factor              | 358.41   | 41 | 8.74        | 0.04 | 0.10  | 0.95 | 0.91 | 74.98          |
| 1-factor              | 1288.50  | 44 | 29.28       | 0.06 | 0.19  | 0.83 | 0.71 | 855.11**       |

The three-item job satisfaction measure (Cammann et al., 1979) was run as a single factor model at Times 1 and 2. According to Kline (2011), models with less than four indicators within a single latent variable are likely to be underidentified. Therefore, two parameter

estimates of the error terms needed to be constrained to be equal (O'Brien, 1994). The CFA analysis was then performed for the job satisfaction scale by inserting equal parameter estimates of 1 for items JS1 and JS2. The fit indices yielded that the model was a reasonable fit to the data.

**Table 3: Fit indices for the job satisfaction measure**

| Model                  | $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2/df$ | SRMR | RMSEA | CFI  | GFI  |
|------------------------|----------|----|-------------|------|-------|------|------|
| <b>Time 1, n = 740</b> |          |    |             |      |       |      |      |
| 1-factor               | 0.06     | 1  | 0.06        | 0.01 | 0.01  | 1.00 | 1.00 |

Table 4 presents the fit indices for the one-factor and two-factor models of psychological strain. As predicted, the

two-factor model provided a better fit than the one-factor model in both phases.

**Table 4: Fit indices for the psychological strain measure**

| Model          | $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2/df$ | SRMR | RMSEA | CFI | GFI | $\Delta\chi^2$ |
|----------------|----------|----|-------------|------|-------|-----|-----|----------------|
| <b>n = 740</b> |          |    |             |      |       |     |     |                |
| 2-factor       | 60.33    | 19 | 3.17        | .02  | .05   | .98 | .98 | -              |
| 1-factor       | 944.03   | 20 | 47.20       | .19  | .25   | .58 | .70 | 883.70**       |

Table 5 presents the direct effects of work-family facilitation and job satisfaction with psychological strain. Work-to family facilitation was not related to both social dysfunction and anxiety/depression. Family-to-work

facilitation (FWF) however was significantly related to social dysfunction, in which higher FWF was related to lower social dysfunction. Additionally, higher job satisfaction was related to reduced social dysfunction and anxiety/depression.

**Table 5: Hierarchical regression of social dysfunction and anxiety/depression on work-family facilitation and job satisfaction**

| Variables<br>(n = 740) | Social dysfunction |          | Anxiety/ depression |          |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|                        | $\Delta R^2$       | $\beta$  | $\Delta R^2$        | $\beta$  |
| <b>Step 1</b>          | 0.05***            |          | 0.06***             |          |
| <b>Step 2</b>          | 0.16***            |          | 0.09***             |          |
| WFF                    |                    | -0.03    |                     | -0.15    |
| FWF                    |                    | -0.09**  |                     | 0.18     |
| Job satisfaction       |                    | -0.52*** |                     | -0.46*** |

The model in this study yielded a good fit to the data with  $\chi^2/df = 2.47$ , RMR = 0.02, RMSEA = 0.04, GFI = 0.94, and CFI = 0.97. Thus, this model was used for further analysis in this study. The main purpose of this analysis was to test the specific mediation effects of job

satisfaction in the relationships between work-family facilitation and psychological strain. Hence, the direct, indirect, and total effects of job satisfaction with work-family facilitation and psychological strain (social dysfunction and anxiety/depression) were examined and are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Mediation effects of job satisfaction between work-family facilitation and psychological strain**

| Predictor → Mediator → Criterion            | Direct effect | Indirect effect | Total effect | Mediation types |
|---|---------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| WFF → job satisfaction → social dysfunction | 0.00          | -0.12           | -0.12        | No              |
| FWF → job satisfaction → social dysfunction | 0.00          | -0.23*          | -0.23*       | Full            |
| WFF → job satisfaction → anxiety/depression | 0.00          | -0.03           | -0.03        | No              |
| FWF → job satisfaction → anxiety/depression | 0.00          | -0.07**         | -0.07**      | Full            |

The results indicated that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship of family-to-work facilitation and psychological strain (social dysfunction and anxiety/depression).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As predicted, employees with higher family-to-work facilitation and higher job satisfaction experienced lower psychological strain. Interestingly, high work-to family facilitation was not related to low psychological strain. One possible explanation is even Malaysian women may be the joint-breadwinners of the family, they are still expected by society to be the primary homemakers. Hence, positive experience between work and family domains might not be enough to reduce their psychological strain.

This study also found that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between family-to-work facilitation and psychological strain (social dysfunction and anxiety/depression), but not work-to family facilitation. The results of this study indicate that employees’ family domain facilitates their work domain, which most

likely may result in high job satisfaction among them; and in turn may reduce their social dysfunction and anxiety/depression. As a collectivist society, Malaysians view the concept of work differently from an individualistic society. Collectivists believe that family welfare is very important in order to achieve happiness and a meaningful life (Lu, Robin, Kao, & Huang, 2006). Therefore, salary as a work resource might improve family quality and, as a result, increase job satisfaction, which in turn, might reduce psychological strain.

However, the results did not support the mediating effect of job satisfaction between work-to-family facilitation and psychological strain. These findings illustrate that work-family facilitation is not domain specific (Haar & Bardoel, 2008), as FWF but not WFF was related to work outcome. In relation to this, the mediating roles of work and family variables such as job distress, organisational change, or an onset of a

critical illness might be worth testing to explain this relationship. Thus, future research that includes mediating variables between work-family facilitation and well-being is needed.

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