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## Personal Factors and Work-Life Conflict: A Study of a Malaysian Statutory Body

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### Abstract

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Work-life conflict has been discussed prominently in the literature for the last two decades because the workforce is increasingly composed of individuals who struggle with multiple roles. A number of empirical investigations have been carried out to examine its nature, variance, and outcome. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between personal factors and work-life conflict among employees of a Malaysian statutory body using a sample of 120 personally-distributed questionnaires. The variables for personal factors consist of career commitment, household responsibilities, and financial needs. The findings indicated that two out of three variables of personal factors (i.e. household responsibilities and financial needs) are positively and significantly related to work-life conflict. The finding also reveals that career commitment is not significantly related to work-life conflict. Therefore, this study adds to the body of knowledge of work-life conflict that validated the positive relationship between employees' personal factors of household responsibilities and financial needs with work-life conflict. On the other hand, this study also proved that an employee's career commitment does not relate to work-life conflict, thus showing that a committed employee would not be feeling any conflict in fulfilling the demands of both of his or her work and non-work lives. Nevertheless, an employee who has higher household responsibilities and financial needs would face a higher conflict in fulfilling the demands of both of his or her work and non-work live. Hence, human resource practitioners could use this information as a reference in their managing their employees.

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**Keywords:** Work-Life Conflict, Personal Factors, Statutory Body.



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## 1. Introduction

People play many roles i.e. as employee, boss, subordinate, spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, and community member. Each of these roles demands us time, energy and commitment to be fulfilled. Work-family or work-life conflict happens when the cumulative demands of these many work and non-work roles are not compatible in some respect so that involvement in one role made it more difficult to involve in the other role. Therefore, work-life conflict (WLC) occurs when the demands for time and energy in satisfying one role make it difficult to participate in other roles. On top of that, increasing escalation of women workers, dual-earner couples, senior workforces, and flexible work schedules have triggered sharp changes in the way individuals balance their work and family lives.

Creating a balance between job responsibilities and family responsibilities is a dilemma for the employees and almost impossible due to a turbulent work environment, and fast moving economic development across the globe which resulted in demanding jobs and long working hours. The issues associated with balancing work and family are of paramount importance to individuals, the organizations that employ them, the families that care for them, the unions that represent them, and governments concerned with global competitiveness, citizen well-being, and national health. Work is taking over the lives of many of us in today's fast-paced, global environment, and if we do not guard ourselves against work-life imbalance, there could be increasing work-life conflicts and stress resulting from long hours and workload escalation.

Initially, work and family researchers focused on the increasing conflict between competing for work and family role responsibilities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified two directions of conflict in the work-family interface. They coined the term work-family conflict and defined it as a conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. Work-family conflict occurred when the demands of paid work interfered in the home setting. Work-life conflict was considered as the main issue for female employees in the past. Factors such as parenting and caring are not expected to impact on men's work and therefore they do not have any work-life conflict. Empirical studies over a decade suggested that there is significance difference in the number of predictors for work-life conflict for male and female employees. However, male employees are also facing the dilemma of how to balance between work and family life.

As the most dual-earner couples are seen the problem of child care and elderly care creates an imbalance between work and family and the problem of a family to work interference sprouted. The majority of women are no longer at home on a full-time basis. As a consequence, responsibilities for food preparation, home chores, childcare, and eldercare must be shared differently. However, is there any relationship between household responsibilities and work-life conflict? How about employees' financial needs and career commitment? Do they also relate to employees' work-life conflict? As nowadays, people are saying that if you are in needs of money, you will neglect your family in doing your work. While others are saying that people who are committed to their work will not really take

care of their family. Therefore, this study aims to identify any relationship between employees' personal factors i.e. career commitment, household responsibilities, and financial needs with their work-life conflict and to prove this relationship in a study setting among employees of a federal statutory body in Malaysia who have agreed to participate in this study.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Work-Life Conflict*

Most work-family research has focused on the conflict caused by participation in multiple roles. As individuals have a finite amount of energy, involvement in multiple roles and the demands of these roles reduce available resources (Becker & Moen, 1998). Work-family conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The time spent by an individual to fulfil a work role cannot be simultaneously devoted to family responsibilities, which he or she also seeks to address. For example, work obligations may prevent an individual from being physically available to pick up a child from school because he or she cannot be in two places at once.

Again, the strain produced in the work domain spills over into the family domain making it difficult to fulfil family duties. For example, a stressful day at work may make it difficult for an individual to conclusively fulfil household chores or to patiently engage family members at home. Family-to-work conflict occurs when involvement in a family activity interferes with participation in a work activity (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This type of conflict may be affected by several factors such having a working partner, spousal support, equity in the division of labour at home, adequacy of child care or eldercare provisions, gender and marital status of the person working, impairment level of adult-care recipients, and age of dependent children.

Work-family conflict has been shown to encompass three forms: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict is defined as multiple roles competing for a person's time, in that, time spent on activities in one role generally cannot be spent on activities in another role. An example of this would be if an individual had to work overtime and in consequence, missed their child's football game. Strain-based conflict exists when to strain such as tension, anxiety, or fatigue in one role affect's performance in another role. An example of this would be if stress from a bad review at work, spilled over and caused tension between an individual and their spouse. Behaviour-based conflict occurs when specific patterns of in-role behaviour may be incompatible with behaviour expectations in a second role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). An example of this would be if a manager displays a dominant personality at work and finds that the same pattern of behaviour is ineffective with his or her children

## *2.2. Personal Factors*

According to Tang and Chang (2010), personal life is the course of an individual's life, especially when viewed as the sum of personal choices contributing to one's personal identity. The importance of a role is determined by a commitment to the role, which includes attitudes and emotions, participation in the role, and knowledge about the role. An important issue in career development is how individuals integrate the various life roles. Ahmad, Fakhr, and Ahmed (2011) found certain variables of personal roles that affect work-life conflict faced by women in the banking sector such as women earning potential, workplace environment, household responsibilities, and financial needs. Whereas, Noriece's (2014) study affirmed that there are relationships between work-family conflict, role salience, and the career commitment of full-time working mothers. Ballout (2009) suggested that individual-specific variables will be more likely to predict family-to-work conflict and perceived career success, while work-specific variables will be more likely to predict work-to-family conflict and perceived career success. He also suggests that such domain-specific variables influence both work-family conflict and career success. Therefore, this research focuses on the three main variables which are career commitment, household responsibilities, and financial needs.

### *2.2.1 Career Commitment*

Career commitment is seen as a determinant of career success (Ballout, 2009). It is defined as "the strength of one's motivation to work in a chosen career role" (Ballout, 2009). The economic downturn, the changing work environments, and the pace at which careers are being developed within organizations have led employees to illustrate more commitment to their careers and less and/or conditional commitment to their organizations (Ballout, 2009). As many organizations become flattered and less able to provide secure careers, an employee's career commitment has become a more significant source of meaningful work, work enrichment, and job satisfaction (Ballout, 2009). Yet women's careers are decidedly different from those of men. Men's careers tend to follow more linear career paths or traditional career progression. Whereas, women's careers are more non-linear in nature, disjointed, and interrupted. Even today, many organizations and work structures still conform to the traditional career model and point of view that an ideal worker does not allow his or her outside responsibilities to interfere with him or her working hours and career commitment. This profile does not fit the reality of women's lives, especially working mothers.

Hence, employees' perceptions of how supportive their employer is towards work-family aspects affect their attitudes, dispositions, and orientations toward their careers. For example, when employees experience greater conflict in the workplace that intrudes into the home, their disposition and attitudes relating to career roles will be affected. If this is the case, then employees may become preoccupied with managing the imbalance between work and home. Lack of balance has a detrimental effect on how committed employees feel toward their career competencies. Martins (2002) found strong support for their hypothesis that work-family conflict and career satisfaction for both male and female managers and professionals were negatively related. They also reported that work-family conflict had a stronger association with lowered career satisfaction for women than men.

According to Crouter & Bumpus (2001), there is an antithesis between these outcomes and the outcome desired by an average dual-career couple, especially in African culture where family obligations often take priority. In circumstances where employees seem caught between satisfying organizational and family obligations, research evidence suggests that people will spend more time engaged in roles that are more important to them (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Since rising work demands may limit a couples' ability to meet the African cultural values for family care, it is logical to expect that employees will choose to devote less time to their career, if their work roles spillover into family roles. Consequently, career commitment will be negatively affected by work–family conflict.

### *2.2.2 Household Responsibilities*

Tang and Chang (2010) explained that individuals have a limited amount of energy, and when one is asked to give energy to multiple roles, there is less to give to each role. When the demand of one role exceeds the amount of resources available to the individual, the result is role conflict. While demands placed on an individual from multiple roles may lead to conflict, research has also found that holding multiple roles can have an enhancing effect. They assume that involvement in more than one role can produce positive spillover, rather than solely negative spillover as had been previously argued. The variables of family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enhancement are the two main systems in our lives which the work and family are not separate spheres and in fact spillover into one another. Wadsworth and Owens (2007) discussed social support factors that may be related to work-family conflict and said that sources of support within the workplace enhanced family-to-work facilitation. More study needs to focus on how work emotion on the job affects work-family conflict and facilitation. This study found that work emotion, such as surface acting, was related to an increase in family-to-work conflict.

Several studies have looked at how children might be a predictor of spillover. The presence of children and the presence of young children both were related to increased negative spillover. Stewart (2013) contributed further to this finding in noting that employed caregivers with disabled children experience greater family-to-work conflict than those without disabled children. Hyde et al. (2004) also stated that for employed mothers, having a child with difficult behaviour symptoms can increase family-to-work spillover. In a study using an objective indicator of family-to-work conflict (low productivity), Wallace and Young (2008) examined the impact of children on the productivity of women and men in the workplace, finding that the presence of school-aged children lead to lower productivity for working mothers (compared to non-mothers) and that the presence of preschool aged children lead to higher productivity for fathers (compared to non-fathers). Additionally, a meta-analysis stated that stressors within the family role such as parent and time demands, children, and role overload lead to family-to-work conflict (Michel et al., 2011).

### *2.2.3 Financial Needs*

Income and work-family conflict are important to study given the adverse impact that financial strain can have, often leading to stressful conditions across role domains, including a conflict between

work and family spheres (Schieman & Young, 2011). In fact, the hardships people face due to the economy cause some of the most prominent and persistent stress in their lives (Schieman & Young, 2011). According to the American Psychological Association, for several years, money, work, and the economy have been the three leading sources of stress for Americans. Several outcomes from the recession of 2007 to 2009 may be the cause of this stress. For instance, the recession caused an enhancement in the unemployment rate and caused people to be cautious in pursuing the stock and housing markets.

For some years after the financial crisis, financial difficulties and/or losses caused Americans to experience sharp declines in their life satisfaction. As employees struggle through a recovering economy, many people are returning to work but it is projected that many of the higher paying jobs lost in the recession will not return. Consequently, many people are forced to take jobs with lower wages and less job security than they held in the past. These jobs tend to have few, if any, benefits, have little opportunity for advancement, and create challenges between the work and family roles. Besides, employees are forced to work overtime to maintain the same status of living that they held in the past, causing less time to be spent with their families.

Previous research has found that income has an inconsistent relationship with work-family conflict. Byron (2005) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the relationship between income and work-family conflict. The findings suggest that income was related to work-family conflict only in a trivial way and thus concluded that the relationship between income and work-family conflict tends to fluctuate (Byron, 2005). Most people experience some form of work-family conflict; however, that upper-income workers are more likely to have the resources to cope with the conflict when compared to their low-income counterparts. Odle-Dusseau, McFadden, and Britt (2015) noted that because of the increased resources and control over work, the negative impact of work-family conflict may be reduced for those individuals in high-earning jobs. Consistent with this, Ford (2011) found that while high levels of income did not appear to lower the rates of work-family conflict, higher levels of income did seem to provide resources to lower the influence of work-family conflict onto family strain.

### **3. Research Methods**

In this study, the researchers conducted correlational research which is one of the non-experimental research methods. Correlational research is a study that examines the relationship between variables in order to provide an indication on how two or more variables are related to each other. The target population for this study was all employees in Malaysian federal statutory bodies and using convenience sampling technique, a representative sample of 120 respondents was surveyed in one of a Malaysian federal statutory body. This technique is the best way of getting some basic information quickly and efficiently. Data was collected personally by one of the researchers within two weeks time in June 2016 using a standardised questionnaire that were developed based on validated measurements from prior researchers i.e. 8-item and 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) of work-life conflict from Parise (2002), 5-item and 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) of

career commitment from Aryee and Tan (1992), 5-item and 5-point Likert scale (very easy to very difficult) of household responsibilities from Parise (2002), and 5-item and 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) of financial needs from Burns (2015). The questionnaires were divided into three sections which were Section A, comprise of the demographic profile of respondents, Section B was the respondents’ feedback on independent variables of personal factors i.e. career commitment, household responsibilities, and financial needs, and Section C was the respondents’ feedback on the dependent variable of work-family conflict. All collected data was analysed using SPSS Version 20.

#### **4. Findings**

Table 1 shows the respondents’ profile of this study that consists of employees in one of Malaysian government federal statutory body. From the total of 120, 44 (36.7%) were male and followed by 76 (63.3%) female respondents. Furthermore, 57 respondents (47.5%) were in the age group of 20 to 30 years old, 53 respondents (44.2%) were in the age group of 31 to 40 years old, and 10 respondents (8.3%) were in the age group 40 to 50 years old. The respondents in this research were mostly married i.e. 88 respondents (73.3%) in total, while the rest are singles i.e. 32 respondents (26.7%). For the working period, most of the respondents were working in the organization for 4 to 6 years i.e. 41 respondents (34.2%), followed by respondents those were working more than 7 years i.e. 38 respondents (31.7%). While, 31 respondents (25.8%) were working in the studied organization since 1 to 3 years ago, and the rest were 10 respondents (8.3%) that were working less than 1 year.

In addition, 50 respondents (41.7%) did not have any children. Whereas, 42 respondents (35.0%) were having between 1 to 2 children, followed by 24 respondents (20.0%) with 3 to 4 children and the rest 4 respondents (3.3%) were having 5 to 6 children. Reliability analysis was performed to ensure reliable measurements across time and across the items in the tool. Based on the results, the Cronbach’s alpha for work-life conflict was 0.953, career commitment was 0.846, household responsibilities was 0.910 and financial needs was 0.733. Thus, the internal consistency reliability of the measurements used in this study can be considered to be acceptable. Therefore, all measurements used in this study were reliable.

**Table 1.** Respondents’ profile

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	44	36.7
Female	76	63.3
<b>Age</b>		
20- 30 years old	57	47.5
31- 40 years old	53	44.2
41 – 50 years old	10	8.3
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	32	26.7

Married	88	73.3
Working Period		
< 1 year	10	8.3
1 – 3 years	31	25.8
4 – 6 years	41	34.2
> 7 years	38	31.7
Number of Children		
None	50	41.7
1 – 2 children	42	35.0
3 – 4 children	24	20.0
5 – 6 children	4	3.3

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the study variables which are work-life conflict, career commitment, household responsibilities and financial needs. Based on the table, it shows that highest mean was for career commitment, i.e. 4.1150 out of 5 points on the scale, followed by financial needs of 3.7883, work-life conflict of 3.4177, and finally household responsibilities of 3.3133. Meaning in average, employees in the studied organization were committed, having high financial needs and facing high work-life conflict. On the other hand, the level of household responsibilities for them could be considered as moderate only.

**Table 2.** Variables.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career Commitment	120	4.1150	.54675
Financial Needs	120	3.7883	.72844
Work-Life Conflict	120	3.4177	.92929
Household Responsibilities	120	3.3133	.96832

This study used correlation analysis to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Pearson correlation is used to measure the strength of a linear or straight line relationship between two variables following rules of thumbs that were proposed by Davis (1997). Table 3 shows the relationship between three independent variables (career commitment, household responsibilities, and financial needs) and dependent variable (work-life conflict).

Firstly, for the relationship between career commitment and work-life conflict, the finding in this study shows that r- value which is 0.077. According to the rule of thumb, this result indicated a very low relationship between these two variables. The p-value of 0.400 indicated that the relationship was not significant because p-value higher than 0.01 significant level. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between career commitment and work-life conflict.

The second independent variable was household responsibilities. Table 3 shows that household responsibilities had a very strong relationship with work-life conflict. The correlation coefficient ( $r =$



0.788) was also significant at 0.000 significant level. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between household responsibilities and work-life conflict. The final independent variable was financial needs. Table 3 states significant and very strong relationship between financial needs and work-life conflict whereby coefficient ( $r = 0.713$ ) and p-value at 0.000. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between financial needs and work-life conflict.

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis between all variables in this study.

	Work-Life Conflict	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Career Commitment	.077	.400
Household Responsibilities	.788**	.000
Financial Needs	.713**	.000

Note. \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Based on the analysis conducted, it reveals that there were relationships between household responsibilities and financial needs with work-life conflict. However, there was no relationship between career commitment and work-life conflict. Therefore, only two hypotheses developed in this study were accepted. Career commitment was found as not a significant personal factors related towards work-life conflict. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected. Based on the overall impact of different elements, it was found that a household responsibility was related to the work-life conflict among employees in a Malaysian statutory body. This result was in line with the developed hypothesis of there is a significant positive relationship between household responsibilities and work-life conflict. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was accepted. Next, this study found that employees' financial needs would relate with their work-life conflict. The result exhibited that financial needs and work-life conflict were significantly associated with a positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted.

Based on the results of this study, it was found that the level of work-life conflict was quite high among the surveyed employees. Since the employees' household responsibilities and financial needs were significantly and positively related to their work-life conflict, thus employers should be aware on this in order to ensure their employees would not be suffering from high level of conflict. The results of this study conformed to Boles (2004) who found that jobs that create a high level of conflict may expect an increase in the tendency of employees to leave the organization and eventually would increase turnover scenario in the organization. Therefore, human resource practitioners could offer flexible work schedules to enable their employees to take care of their household responsibilities efficiently.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, other work-life benefits such as provided nursery in office, financial assistance and counseling program could also be offered by all employers. On the other hand, companies should also concern in employing a committed worker with regards to his or her career. This is because as proven in this study if the workers are committed to their career, they will not be experiencing work-life conflict. This might be due the fact that the career commitment that they possess would not be a

significant factor in juggling their time, focus, and energy between both of their work and life interfaces. Additionally, governments should have some policy like rules and labour legislation to reduce work-life conflict.

For future research, it is recommended that on the same study should be conducted for the employees at other industry such as educational institution in order to provide a deeper understanding of the work-family experience. Next recommendation is for future researchers to enlarge the sampling of respondents so that the feedback and finding will be more accurate and precise. Future research needs to also focus on other personal factors that could lead to work-life conflicts such as travel-to-work conditions, family supports and much more. In conclusion, this study has proven that an employee's personal factors of household responsibilities and financial needs would be associated with the increased of his or her work-family conflict and the same time, career commitment would not be associated with the employee's work-family conflict.

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