WORK STRESS AND WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF JOB-FOCUSED SELF-EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the mediating effects of job-focused self-efficacy on the relationship between work stress (e.g., work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload) and work–family conflict. Using latent variable modeling, we found that job-focused self-efficacy mediated the relationship between work stress and work–family conflict. Implications, limitations, and future research suggestions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the revolutionary works of Kanter (1977), Pleck (1977), and Evans and Bartolomé (1981), it has been unanimously agreed upon that the work and family domains influence each other positively and negatively (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Balancing both the work and family demands has often caused conflict and stress for individuals because of incompatible role expectations. With the increasing number of dual income families, single parent families, and families with elders in need of care, the effects of conflict between the work and family obligations are likely to become more evident. Past research (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 1999; McManus, Korabik, Rosin, & Kelloway, 2002) has explored these concerns through an examination of the antecedents of the conflict between work and family.

Although there is a great deal of research on work–family conflict (WFC), shortcomings exist. The relationship between work stress and WFC as mediated by job-focused self-efficacy (JFSE) has yet to be examined. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, we investigated JFSE as a mediator of the relationship between work stress and WFC. Second, examining the relationship between WFC and its antecedents using a latent variable model was undertaken. Prior research suggests that latent variable modeling is the recommended approach because it is more meticulous and accounts for measurement error better than regression analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Thus, the current research attempts to address these gaps in the literature by utilizing a structural equation model of work–family conflict that is mediated by JFSE across a diverse sample. We provided theoretical underpinnings for work–family conflict and used a specific personality characteristic (Bandura, 1977) to develop the research hypotheses. As a result, this research will provide potential, practical implications and add to the richness of the existing body of knowledge about the conflict between work and family to human resource

practitioners and managers.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

According to Staines (1980), spillover theory asserts that what occurs in the work and family environment are parallel, meaning that happiness at work will result in happiness in the family. In addition, an individual's work experience is expected to influence what an individual does away from work (Champoux, 1978). Furthermore, it is assumed that attitudes are carried over from work into the home life (Kando & Summers, 1971). In other words, no boundaries exist for an individual's behavior between the work and family.

With regard to the aspect of this study that examines a specific personality characteristic, self-efficacy theory presented the theoretical underpinning. The proposed research examined whether JFSE mediated the relationship between work stress and WFC. JFSE has its roots in self-efficacy research. Bandura (1982) classified self-efficacy as an individual's perceptual judgment or belief of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (p. 122). According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977), self-efficacy expectations, which refer to beliefs about one's ability to perform successfully a given task or behavior, may be important mediator of behavior and behavior change. In extending self-efficacy theory to career behavior, Hackett and Bertz (1981) suggested that self-efficacy beliefs serve as an important cognitive influence on career decisions and achievements, helping to determine people's range of perceived career options and their success and persistence in their chosen options. Therefore, JFSE is an individual's belief that may influence the impact of work stress on WFC.

WFC has often been used to represent the conflict between the work and family domains. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) offered the definition of WFC as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect whereby participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (p. 77). In essence, WFC results from an individual's attempt to meet an abundance of different conflicting demands. In a model offered by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), illustrative pressures of the work domain variables are work stress.

Work stress is generally conceptualized as work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; House, Schuler, & Levanoni, 1983; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), in which each has the potential to affect WFC (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991). Numerous studies have documented the spillover of work stress to the family (Burke, 1988; Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Matsui, Ohsawa, & Onglatco, 1995; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992; Repetti, 1989). In several models, work stress has been proposed as an antecedent of work–family conflict (Burke, 1988; Greenglass, Pantony, & Burke, 1988).

With respect to work-role conflict, it is described as "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964, p. 19). Therefore, work-role conflict can cause decreased individual satisfaction and decreased organizational effectiveness. Because work-role conflict appears to be attached to role behavior, it is approximately comparable to the work-role ambiguity components that involve the prediction of the outcome

behavior (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Work-role ambiguity is referred to as individuals that lack a clear definition about the behavior expected in a role and the required methods to fulfill their duties (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Thus, work-role ambiguity can augment the possibility that an individual will be dissatisfied with his or her role, will experience anxiety, will distort reality, and will thus perform less effectively. An additional antecedent of WFC, work-role overload, is characterized as having too many role demands and too little time to fulfill them (Baruch, Biener, & Barnett, 1987; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976). Hence, a more comprehensive model would be to exploit all three forms of work stress as it promotes a better understanding of the relationship between multiple roles and stress.

MEDIATION OF THE WORK STRESS AND WORK–FAMILY CONFLICT RELATIONSHIP

Even though previous research has focused on the relationship between work stress and WFC, none have looked at the mediating relationship of JFSE between work stress and WFC. Work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload have been found to be directly and positively related to WFC (Boyar, Maertz, Pearson, & Keough, 2003; Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1980; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Greenhaus, Bedeian, & Mossholder, 1987).

Bandura (1986) postulated that an individual's sense of self-efficacy operates to reduce perceptions of and reactions to stress. Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, and O'Brien's (2001) opined that the level of conflict between work and family responsibilities decreases as self-efficacy in their work-role augments and with greater perceived support from work supervisors and husbands. Therefore, it appears that individuals' confident in their ability to perform many roles successfully would experience fewer situations of work-role conflict and work-role overload.

Earlier research on self-efficacy revealed that a person's performance or outcome is augmented because the individual has the belief that he/she has the ability to perform both his/her work and family duties (Bradley & Roberts, 2004; Chen, Greene, & Crick, 1998; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986). Wood and Bandura (1989) suggested that efficacy beliefs are an important mechanism in self-regulation. From the perspective of self-efficacy perceptions, individuals who are more confident in their ability to perform at work should be more likely to cope constructively (Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989) and thus be less likely to withdraw from work.

In addition, Brief and Aldag (1981) implied that one of the immediate effects of job-related stress may be to lower one's level of efficacy. Reductions in self-efficacy beliefs, sequentially may lead to higher work stress. Thus, self-efficacy may be a mediating variable. Prior research suggested that a negative significant relationship existed between self-efficacy beliefs and emotion-focused coping (Stumpf, Brief, & Hartman, 1987). Therefore, reductions in self-efficacy beliefs lead to more emotion-focused coping.

Based upon Luthans' article (2002), self-efficacy "theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) and considerable research support clearly indicates that the more confident the individual, the more likely the choice will be made to pursue the task and welcome the challenge" (p. 700). Therefore, due to an individual's excessive work demand, JFSE may influence the relationship between work stress and WFC, that is, levels of JFSE may determine whether a person believes the

responsibilities of the job can be handled. Whereas, if self-efficacy is low, individuals are likely to perceive self-competence in a narrower range of activities as compared to others (Brown & Lent, 1996; Lent & Brown, 1996). Thus, individuals with higher levels of JFSE may reduce the work stress impact on the conflict between work and family, making the individual's potential WFC lesser. According to spillover theory, work stress can "displace the potential for positive family interactions, while requiring family members to expend their personal resources in assisting the worker to manage the stress" (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990, p. 241). Based on the previous discussion, we advance that JFSE will mediate the positive relationship between work stress and WFC and offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. JFSE will mediate the positive relationship between work stress and WFC. Specifically, the positive relationship between (a) work-role conflict, (b) work-role ambiguity, and (c) work-role overload and WFC will be mediated by JFSE.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

The age of the participants in this study ranged between 21 to 65 years. Females constituted 71.9% of the sample. In terms of ethnicity, the sample consisted of 77.3% African Americans, 16.9% Caucasians, 1.9% Hispanics, 0.4% Asian, and 1.9% Other. The marital status of respondents was as follows: 45% single, 38.5% married, 11.9% divorced, and 2.7% widowed. In our sample, 41.9% had a college degree, 32.3% had a master's degree, 2.7% had a doctorate, and 22.3% had a high school diploma or a general education diploma (GED). Most respondents (85.4%) had been employed in their present position for at least one year. Respondents indicated that 42.3% of them had children under the age of 18.

The survey was administered electronically to various United States citizens including employees of the Southeastern state agency, alumni of northeastern and southern universities, and current graduate business students who were employed in diverse organizations and across various functional areas. The criteria for inclusion in our study were that the participant be employed in an organization and work at least 40 hours per week. Interested individuals who met these criteria were electronically sent an invitational letter with a link to the survey entitled, Job Satisfaction Survey. The electronic invitational letter explained the purpose of the survey with the link included. Participants were instructed to complete and submit the questionnaire online. To reduce nonresponse error, two electronic reminders were sent to the same email addresses in 2-week increments after the initial invitational letter.

Of the 914 questionnaires distributed, 298 responded. However, the convenient sample consisted of 260 completed questionnaires for a 28% response rate. Before conducting this study, we obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board for scientific research

MEASURES

The constructs were measured by using the following instruments found in the work–family conflict literature using a seven-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 7 (*strongly agree)*.

Work stress. Rizzo et al. (1970) developed an instrument that assessed work-role conflict with eight items (e.g., work-role conflict item, "I have to do things that should be done differently") and work-role ambiguity with six items (e.g., "I know that I have divided my time properly"). In addition, work-role overload was measured with three items utilizing a scale adapted by Veloutsou and Panigyrakis (2004) (e.g., "I do not have time to finish my job"). Higher scores are associated with greater work stress. The internal reliability (alpha) for work-role conflict is .806, work-role ambiguity is .740, and work-role overload is .779.

Work–family conflict. WFC was measured using the Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian (1996) scale. This scale contains five items measuring general demand and time- and strain-based conflict. Higher scores are associated with greater interdomain conflict for the scale. An example item from the WFC scale is "The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life." The alpha for WFC is .919.

Job-focused self-efficacy. The Personal Efficacy Belief scale, a 10-item scale developed by Riggs, Warka, Babasa, Betancourt, and Hooker (1994), was used to measure JFSE. Example items include "I have confidence in my ability to do my job" and "I doubt my ability to do my job"). Higher scores are associated with greater JFSE. The alpha for JFSE is .743.

ANALYSIS

The proposed work–family conflict model presented in Figure 1 was tested using latent variable structural equation modeling (SEM) to evaluate the research hypotheses by using the AMOS (analysis of moment structures) computer program (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1995). SEM's major strength is that using latent variables permits estimation of relationships among theoretically interesting constructs that are free of the effects of measurement unreliability. The covariance matrix was used as the input for all models, and the maximum likelihood estimation procedure was employed to produce the model parameters. Because the data followed a nonnormal distribution (kurtosis = 82.554, *t* value = 9.599), bootstrapping techniques and the Bollen-Stine corrected *p* value were employed to obtain unbiased model parameters (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1995; Bollen & Stine, 1992). To examine model fit, we utilized measures of absolute fit and incremental fit to determine how well the data fit the hypothesized model (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).
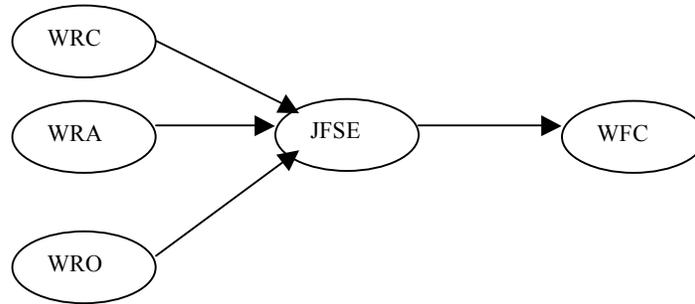
FIGURE 1: WFC MODEL.

Note: WRC = work-role conflict; WRA = work-role ambiguity;
WRO = work-role overload; JFSE = job-focused self-efficacy;
WFC = work–family conflict.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and zero-order correlations are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1. MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS, AND RELIABILITY ESTIMATES

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. WFC	12.80	7.49	(.92)				
2. WRC	22.86	7.38	.30**	(.81)			
3. WRA	16.96	5.60	.25**	.29**	(.74)		
4. WRO	10.10	4.73	.46**	.39**	-.26**	(.78)	
5. JFSE	30.57	4.08	-.24**	-.14*	.23**	-.27**	(.74)

Note:N = 260. Reliability estimates are on the diagonals in parentheses. $* p \leq .05$ $** p \leq .01$. WFC = work–family conflict; WRC = work-role conflict; WRA = work-role ambiguity; WRO = work-role overload; JFSE= job-focused self-efficacy.

Confirmatory factor analysis models were conducted to assess dimensionality and fit of the measures used in the model. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is a measure of absolute fit of the model by comparing the fitted model with the actual data, and ranges from 0-1. Values greater than 0.90 demonstrate that the model fits the data well (Hair et al., 1998). Every construct had acceptable fit indices, which are provided in Table 2. That is, each construct held together well and demonstrated unidimensionality; thus, each was deemed appropriate for inclusion in the model.

TABLE 2. CFA RESULTS OF THE CONSTRUCTS IN THE WFC MODEL

Model	X^2(df)	p value	RMSEA	GFI	TLI	CFI
WFC	0.254(2)	0.947	.000	1.000	1.009	1.000
WRC	10.419(9)	0.488	.025	.987	.992	.995
WRA	9.653(7)	0.399	.038	.988	.983	.992
WRO	4.171(1)	0.089	.011	.989	.962	.987
JFSE	5.763(5)	0.588	.024	.991	.991	.996

Note: N = 260. Degrees of freedom (df) are in parentheses after the chi-square value. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; TLI = Tucker Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; WFC = work–family conflict; WRC = work-role conflict; WRA = work-role ambiguity; WRO = work-role overload; JFSE = job-focused self-efficacy.

The absolute fit measures, maximum likelihood ratio chi-square statistic (X^2) and GFI, provide a measure of the extent to which the covariance matrix estimated by the hypothesized model reproduces the observed covariance matrix (James & Brett, 1984). In addition, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was considered as it provides an estimate of the measurement error. Another fit index, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), was used to assess model fit; the TLI assesses a penalty for adding additional parameters to the model. The normed fit index (NFI) provides information about how much better the model fits than a baseline model, rather than as a sole function of the difference between the reproduced and observed covariance matrices (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The comparative fit index (CFI) has similar attributes to the NFI and compares the predicted covariance matrix to the observed covariance matrix and is least affected by sample size.

TEST OF THE MODEL

The two-step approach to SEM was employed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First, the measurement model was inspected for satisfactory fit indices. After establishing satisfactory model fit, the structural coefficients were interpreted.

Measurement model. The measurement model (baseline) had acceptable fit indices (see Table 3). That is, the chi-square statistic was at its minimum, and the p value was nonsignificant. The GFI was above its recommended threshold level of 0.90 (Hair et al., 1998), and the RMSEA was less than 0.08, indicative of an acceptable model (Steiger & Lind, 1980). The chi-square divided by the degrees of freedom coefficient was less than three, which indicates acceptable model fit (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1995). The CFI, NFI, and TLI all indicated an acceptable fit of the model to the data.

TABLE 3. FIT INDICES FOR THE BASELINE AND MEDIATION MEASUREMENT MODELS

Model	χ^2(df)	p value	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	TLI	NFI	CFI
Baseline	705.535(684)	0.276	1.031	.008	.910	.994	.876	.995
With mediation	619.001(675)	0.939	0.917	.001	.919	1.016	.989	1.000

Note: N = 260. Degrees of freedom (df) are in parentheses after the chi-square value. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; TLI = Tucker Lewis index; NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index.

Mediation model. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a mediator is any variable that accounts for or explains the relationship between the predictors and the outcome variables. The alternative strategy to assess mediation is the use of an SEM approach (Brown, 1997; Ping, 1998; Schumacker & Marcoulides, 1998). To test for mediation in SEM, Ping (1998) recommends centering the exogenous, endogenous, and mediator variables. Then one indicator of the exogenous variable is multiplied by the mediator variable; this indicator is then used to form a single indicator latent variable that is a predictor of the endogenous variable; a significant outcome indicates partial evidence of the presence of a mediation effect.

To assess the mediation effects of JFSE, we inspected the Beta matrix of the SEM analysis. The path from JFSE to work–family conflict was significant. The path from work-role overload to JFSE was significant. When both work-role overload and JFSE were included as predictors of work–family conflict, the coefficient of the path from work-role overload to work–family conflict was reduced, but was still significant, which indicates partial mediation. The path from work-role ambiguity to JFSE was significant; however, inspection of the indirect effects of the model indicated that when JFSE and work-role ambiguity both were predictors of work–family conflict, the path from work-role ambiguity to work–family conflict became nonsignificant, indicating complete mediation. The path from work-role conflict to JFSE was not significant; therefore, JFSE did not mediate the relationship between work-role conflict and work–family conflict. The fit indices for the mediation model are presented in Table 3.

Interpretation of structural equation model. Table 4 presents the path and structural coefficients for the mediation model. Hypothesis 1 stated that JFSE would mediate the work-stress–WFC relationship. We determined the mediation effects of JFSE by inspecting the Beta matrix of the SEM analysis. No support was established for Hypothesis 1a because work-role conflict did not significantly influence JFSE and, therefore, JFSE did not mediate the relationship between work-role conflict and WFC. However, Hypothesis 1b and 1c were supported. That is, JFSE completely mediated the relationship between WFC and work-role ambiguity. In addition, JFSE partially mediated the relationship between work-role overload and WFC.

In sum, we found empirical evidence to support our claim that JFSE did mediate both the work-role ambiguity to WFC and the work-role overload to WFC relationships.

TABLE 4. STRUCTURAL COEFFICIENTS FOR THE MEDIATION MODEL (STANDARDIZED VALUES)

Parameter	Path coefficient	t value
Job-focused self-efficacy		
Work-role conflict	.036	0.353
Work-role ambiguity	.297	-2.964*
Work-role overload	.231	-2.240*
Work–family conflict		
Work-role conflict	.168	2.005*
Work-role ambiguity	.025	0.340
Work-role overload	.325	3.814*
Job-focused self-efficacy	-.123	-1.700

*Note: N = 260. *Significant at the 0.05 level.*

DISCUSSION

WFC, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload were significantly correlated with JFSE. Previous work found WFC to be significantly correlated with JFSE (Erdwins et al., 2001). It is also important to note that the intercorrelations among the research variables in our sample differed from previous findings in that Erdwins et al. (2001) did not find a relationship between self-efficacy and work-role overload. In contrast to our findings, Jex and Gudanowski (1992) did not find a relationship between work-role ambiguity and self-efficacy.

Work-role conflict was not a significant predictor of WFC in the mediated model. As shown in Table 4 and consistent with the literature, work-role overload had a positive relationship with WFC (Boyar et al., 2003; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Wallace, 2005), and work-role ambiguity had a direct relationship with WFC (Voydanoff, 1988). JFSE was negatively related with work-role ambiguity and work-role overload; in addition, WFC was negatively related to JFSE in our structural equation model.

CONCLUSION

Using structural equation modeling, the current research investigated the mediator effects of JFSE in the relationship between work-family conflict and its antecedents (work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload). Work-role ambiguity and work-role overload were significant predictors of work-family conflict, and JFSE mediated these relationships. However, work-role conflict was not a significant predictor of work-family conflict, and JFSE did not mediate this relationship. JFSE was significantly correlated with work–family conflict, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and work-role overload. These findings are tentative and we encourage replication.

Our findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge because this study is the first to examine JFSE as a mediator of the work–family conflict and work stress relationship. We believe our research approach provides a more sensitive analysis at the individual level. Another contribution of the current research is that our sample contained a large percentage of African Americans, which adds to the richness of the extant literature. Further, analyzing diverse samples may provide additional insight into employee behavior for human resources practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Findings from this study have important and practical implications. Management should consider the individual's self-efficacy level whenever possible because the beliefs about one's ability to perform successfully might influence career decisions, achievement, job satisfaction, and performance (Hackett & Betz, 1981; Locke & Latham, 1990). As is true of most empirical studies, the current research has some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for causal inferences. Another limitation of the study was that all data were collected via self-reports, which may lead to the problem of common method bias and inflated predictive relationships.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A future area of inquiry would be to compare and contrast robust samples of minority group members in this area of research. Another interesting research avenue would be to utilize different constructs for measuring work and family role stress in order to determine which scale has the superior psychometric properties. We also believe that longitudinal designs are needed in this area to examine the behavior of these constructs over time. Finally, exploring these constructs across contingent and noncontingent worker groups may be of some value as well, especially when using a multisample, structural, equation-modeling framework.

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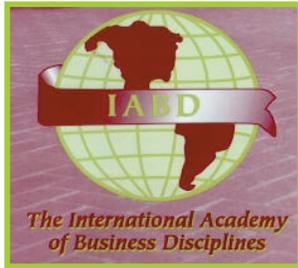
JOURNAL OF
INTERNATIONAL
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DISCIPLINES

Volume 2, Number 2   May 2008

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