Predictors and Outcomes of Work-Family Conflict: A U.S. and Singapore Cross-Cultural Comparison

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the predictors and outcomes of work-family conflict in a cross-cultural comparison between nationally-representative samples from the United States (N = 1870) and Singapore (N = 1035). As expected, schedule flexibility was positively related to mental health in the United States, but in Singapore its relationship was negative. Likewise, work-to-family conflict was negatively related to marital satisfaction in the United States, however, it was positively related to marital satisfaction in Singapore. Similarly, family-to-work conflict was positively related to job satisfaction in United States, but was negatively related in Singapore. The findings suggest that theoretical relationships in the work-family interface developed in the individualistic West may need to be adapted when studying populations in the collectivist East.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Much of the research regarding the work and family interface has been conducted in the United States and Western Europe, leading to the development of Westernized models of work and family interactions. Recently, work-family studies have proliferated in the East (see Aryee, Lu, Leung, & Lo, 1999; Larson, Xie, & Dworkin, 2001), and have demonstrated that Western models may not always be appropriate.

Singapore is a hub for international business and has a unique workplace environment that may contribute to unique interactions between work and family. Globalization of the workforce is more commonplace and Singapore offers several features, which may enhance our understanding of work-family conflict.

Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, and Cooper (2008) suggested that antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict have been better examined among westernized cultures and need to be explored in non-westernized countries. There also have been many inconsistencies among Western and Asian cultural studies, such as the predominant use of convenience samples and a focus on a small range of outcomes (Spector et al., 2004).

Of the studies that have been done, none have specifically compared Singapore and the U.S. while examining work-family conflict and its relation to broad range of outcomes such as mental health, marital satisfaction, and job satisfaction. This study also employs a sound framework while utilizing a large representative sample from a collectivist society to demonstrate the effects of work and family demands on work-family conflict and family-to-work conflict.

Q1) How are respondents in Singapore and the United States similar and different on measures related to the work-family interface?

Q2) Is work-to-family and family-to-work conflict negatively related to mental health, marital satisfaction, and job satisfaction in both Singapore and the United States?

Q3) Is perceived schedule flexibility negatively related to work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict and positively related to mental health, marital satisfaction, and job satisfaction in both Singapore and the U.S.?

STRENGTHS OF PRESENT STUDY

Provides a cross-cultural comparison of nationally representative samples from both the United States (N = 1870) and Singapore (N = 1035).

Considers the applicability of Western theories of the Work-Family Conflict in a non-Western country.

METHODS

MEASURES: WORK-TO-FAMILY CONFLICT

Work-to-family conflict was measured by a scale consisting of 5 items:

1. How often have you NOT had enough time for your job because of your family life?
2. How often have you NOT had enough time for your job because of your family life because of your job?
3. How often has work kept you from doing a good job at work as you could?
4. How often have you NOT been in as good a mood as you would like to be at work because of your job?
5. How often have you NOT been in as good a mood as you would like to be at home because of your job?

Family income (in U.S. Dollars)

Family income was measured by number of working hours and number of working days, as well as the number of young children in the home.

The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .83 in the United States and .82 in Singapore.

Family-to-work conflict was measured by a scale consisting of 5 items:

1. How often have you NOT been as good a mood as you would like to be at home because of your job?
2. How often have you NOT have enough time for your family or other important people because of your job?
3. How often have you NOT have enough time for your family or other important people because of your job?
4. How often have you NOT be in as good a mood as you would like to be at home because of your job?
5. How often have you NOT be in as good a mood as you would like to be at work because of your job?

The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .64 in the United States and .92 in Singapore.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important conclusion to be derived from this study is that culture is important in understanding the relationship of predictors and outcomes to work-family conflict.

- Models developed in the individualistic West may not be directly transportable to countries in the collectivist East.
- The foregoing research using nationally representative samples has shown that work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict are important to studies of the work-family interface in both the United States and Singapore.
- However, notable differences were found in both the antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict. We observed many differences between countries.
  - In general, the difference between collectivist and individualist culture and the rigid work ethic in Singapore yielded logical explanations for the differences between the countries.
  - The meanings that individuals associate with interactions in the work-family interface may be more important than the actual interactions.
  - Further quantitative and qualitative exploration of cross-cultural work-family dynamics and developing model for Eastern work-family conflict could be helpful for our growing international workforce and economy.

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model Comparing the US and Singapore