COGNITIVE SCIENCES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Gender Differences in Work-Family Balance Factors

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ABSTRACT

Influx of women in the paid labor force had been identified as one of the important factors in raising awareness about work-family balance in organizations in developed countries in the west. The same phenomenon also occurs in Malaysia. Malaysia is considered as having traditional gender role ideology, whereby men and women have separate role in the workplace and in the family. Specifically, this study aims to identify whether there are differences in perception between men and women in public sector towards factors associated with work-life balance. Work-life balance factors examined in this study are work demands, supervisor support, organization's family-friendly policies, family demands, work-family conflict (WFC) and family-work conflict (FWC). Sixty questionnaires were administered to employees in a government health training institution in Sarawak, Malaysia. Data were analyzed using SPPS version 17 and independent t-Test was employed in testing the hypotheses. The study found that men and women are significantly different in terms of supervisor support, work-family conflict and family demands. However, there was no significant difference between men and women employees with regard to work demands, family-work conflict and utilization of family-friendly policies. In line with previous Western findings, women experienced higher level of work to family conflict (WFC) than men employees. In addition, women also reported higher family demands than men. These findings strengthened the traditional gender role ideology ascribed by majority of Malaysians and lend support to the gender role theory. Therefore, the organization could provide relevant training, such as, time and stress management. Supervisors could be trained to be more aware of work-family balance issues faced by their employees and assist them accordingly.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing number of women in paid jobs worldwide is just one of the changes that has indirectly forced organizations and countries to develop appropriate policies and initiatives to assist employees in juggling their role as workers (work domain) and as parents, and members of a family (family domain). Thus, the issue of work-family balance, which is rooted in the quality of work life framework, gained attention in the 1960s with the introduction of paid parental leave and child care service in Scandinavian countries (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997).

As Malaysia aspires to be a developed nation by 2020, employment trend in this country also mirrors development in the Western countries. For instance, women accounted for about half of the population in Malaysia. The female labor force participation rate has risen from 47.2% in 2000 to 47.9% in 2011 (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development & UNDP, 2014). Of this total, about 70% of working women are married or having families of their own and also contribute to the increasing number of families with dual-careers (Jamilah, Rahim, & Aminah, 2006). Therefore, work-life balance issues are also pertinent to Malaysians.

According to Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia in The Women's Summit 2009, women in the workforce are struggling to balance their family and career demands. For many women, when there is no work-life balance, work is perceived as a struggle and has caused them to suffer from stress, become unmotivated and less productive (Anne Hashim, 2010).

While globalization and other changes are taking place in the work organizations, gender roles ideology has not changed much whether in the West or the East (Lewis, 2000). Generally, Malaysians hold traditional gender role ideology (Ministry of Women, Family and Community, 2008). Traditional gender role ideology believes in separate roles and responsibilities for men and women, whereby men's roles focus on work and women's roles concentrate on the home (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). Although more and more men are involved in household chores and childcare, women are still the primary managers for household responsibilities and childcare, regardless of whether they are in paid formal jobs or not (Dex, 2003; Noor, 1999). Moreover, studies demonstrate that pressures and conflicts experienced by employees are deeply gendered in nature. Therefore, most work-family balance research takes possible gender differences into account (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Research on dual-career men and women has revealed inconsistent findings in regard to gender differences in work and family experiences and outcomes. Gender has frequently been cited as an explanation for these incongruent findings (Byron, 2005; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). The main conclusion emerged from the review has presented that men and women are still sustained in a traditional model by a broad set of societal normative values. Thus, this study aims to investigate the differences between men and women in perceiving their level of work demands, organizational family-friendly policies, supervisors' support, family demands, work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

GENDER ROLE THEORY

Gender roles are "socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women" (Anselmi & Law, 1998, p. 195). Gender roles are not fixed but are rather

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constantly negotiated among individuals. Gender roles are very much associated with the stereotypes.

Gender role theory suggests that women persist to execute most of the domestic duties and thus they consider paid work as an interference with those tasks. Compared to women, men do not expect to share equally in housework duties and find that family responsibilities and household tasks interfere with their career demands and aspirations (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991). An accumulating body of research has shown that knowledge about gender has started since early childhood. The importance placed on socially defined sex-roles on behavior has increasingly become an area of great concern.

From a traditional perspective, men have been viewed as the main family financial providers or breadwinners and yet play a minimal role in the functioning of the family. On the other hand, more often, women partners remained at home and carry out most of the household chores.

Nonetheless, "modern norms concerning the gender-role division are becoming increasingly common, stressing an egalitarian role division in which both sexes value to participate in paid labor and domestic work" (Cinamon & Rich, 2002, p. 532). The occurrence of modern norms goes against the assumption that men and women separate their roles according to traditional gender-role norms.

The similar phenomenon is occurring in Malaysia. For instance, government aims to have 30% of women policy makers and currently there exists 70:30 ratio of female to male students in higher learning institutions (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2014). Therefore it is interesting to gauge to what extent these scenarios influence the perception of work-life balance of men and women employees.

Gender differences and work demands

Yang, Chen, Choi and Zou (2000) defined work demand as "pressure arising from excessive workloads and typical workplace time pressures such as rush jobs and deadlines" (p. 114). Williams (2000) as cited in Cleveland, Cordeiro, Fisk and Mulvaney (2006) describes ideal worker as "one who will work long hours per week, to an inflexible and demanding work schedule, with an unpredictable work routine and within a greedy organizational climate" (p. 247). Typically, those expectations might be hard for women to meet since they are the main contributor to the household tasks.

When organizations expect long working hours for senior management positions, women are less likely to comply with those expectations as they have the limitation to access to the resource of time rather than men do. Women's time commitment to paid employment is affected by the needs to preserve time for family responsibilities and dependent care (Fagan, 2001).

In a longitudinal study in Malaysia, Hassan and Hamidi (2012) found that job demands (work demands, overload and work involvement) lead to WFC over time by creating time and strain-based conflict for both men and women. Wayne, Musisca and Fleeson (2004) suggested that "limiting work hours may benefit workers' level of work–family balance because fewer work hours was associated with less work–family conflict" (p. 126). Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, and Cooper (2008) also found that greater scheduling flexibility at work reduce WFC and enhance job satisfaction and commitment.

Working more hours means that the employee is dedicating more hours to work and may has more work duties as well as less time for other activities (Frone,

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Yardley & Markel, 1997). As working hours have increased, so one's level of perceived work demand will increase too (Greenhaus, Bedian, & Mossholder, 1987). Thus we proposed:

H_o1: There is no significant difference between men and women in job demands.

Gender differences in family demands

Family demands could be conceptualized as family care responsibilities and denoted as the amount of hours spent on providing care to the family (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Family tasks are normally measured by the number of children (Lautenbach, 2006) or the perceived quantitative, emotional and mental demands of the home (Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005).

The growing participation of women, single parents, and dual-earner partners in the workforce, mostly with responsibilities for the care of their aging parents (Neal & Hammer, 2007), has caused employees in facing difficulty to deal with their work and family duties. Most of the time required to care for children is allocated within households to mothers (Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Zenger, 2004). For instance, UNDP (2005) reported that among Australian and Japanese men; proportion of non-market activities to total work hours is 38% for Australian men, while 7% for Japanese men. Australian men spent 2 hours and 39 minutes per day on non-market activities and Japanese men spent only 25 minutes per day (UNDP, 2005). However, Talbot (2005) showed some positive changes in men's involvement in domestic and childcare. Therefore we proposed:

H_o2: There is no significant difference between men and women in family demands.

Family friendly policies in organizations

Many researchers exhibited that the implementation of work-life balance policy could yield benefits to both employees and organizations. For the employees, work-life balance policy supports them in managing and balancing their work and family domains. Furthermore, effective execution of work-life balance programs by employees would be more likely to reduce personal stress from work-family conflict, mental health and also physical health, as well as, more positive work experiences and job outcomes. In contrast, from the standpoint of organizations, provision of the policy improves recruitment and retention, reduces hiring and retraining costs, lowers the rate of absenteeism, increases productivity, as well as, satisfaction (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). As a whole, recruitment and retention are the major outcomes that organizations expect from the work-life policy implementation (Wise & Bond, 2003).

Gender-related perceptions of policy deployment may contribute to the low uptake of work-life policies in most of the organizations. As McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005) noted that, although apparently gender neutral, the work-life balance policies revolve merely around facilitating the working conditions of women in practice. Family friendly policies are more aiming at group of women who mainly carry most of the domestic responsibilities although both men and women might experience work as debilitating of their lives.

Indeed, women with dependent children have been the largest demographic group to utilize work-life arrangements (Dikkers, Geurts, Dulk, den Peper, & Kompier, 2004). For that reason, men and non-parent employees are unwilling or less likely to employ this program (Doherty, 2004; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley,

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2005).

Provisions which focused typically at men, such as, paternity leave, may help to foster a greater sharing of occupational and social responsibilities between men and women (Bercussen & Dickens, 1996). However, European evidence suggests that even though longer periods of parental leave is offered, the use of this leave by male employees remain low (International Labour Review, 1997). Hence, we proposed:

H_o3: There is no significant difference between men and women in usage of family-friendly policies.

Supervisor support and gender differences

Allen (2001) found that supportive supervisors increased the perceptions of employees in regard of the sensitivity of the organization to their family commitments, which in turn will reduce the level of work-family conflict experienced. This is due to the reason that a supportive supervisor would help the employees to fulfill domestic responsibilities and avoid these individuals from being punished if they choose to prioritise family rather than work. In essence, supervisor support is positively associated with work-life balance.

Nevertheless, the traditional male gender role emphasizes independence and invulnerability; help-seeking behavior might be interpreted as admitting weakness (Helgeson, 2005). As a result, men may therefore be unwilling to seek support from others especially their superiors. In addition, the supervisor may also perceive that women require more needs in relation to work family related support than do by men (Thomson, Kirk, & Brown, 2005). Therefore, we purposed:

H_o4: There is no significant difference between men and women in supervisor support.

WFC and FWC and gender differences

Work-family conflict is defined as "a form of interrole 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, p.77). Livingston and Judge (2008) believe that "gender role orientation may be a better lens to examine work-family conflict" (p. 207).

However, there is indecisive evidence of constant gender differences in perceptions of WFC and FWC. A number of studies have demonstrated a few differences between men and women in their perceptions of WFC and FWC (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992). Furthermore, some researchers suggested that experiences of men and women in WFC and FWC may differ from each other. According to Gutek, Searle and Klepa (1991), women are more likely to experience and report high levels of WFC when they have long working hours.

Both men and women may be slow in responding to change the role demands due to their perception of what is expected of them in their traditional gender roles. This may explain why men have been hypothesized to experience more work-to-family conflict while women are having more family-to-work conflict as work and family role identities are central to men and women, respectively (Ford, Heinen, & Langmaker, 2007). Further, Gutek, Searle and Klepa (1991) also have discovered that women reported greater WFC than men, while men reported greater FWC than

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women when men and women spent time equally on paid work.

In the Malaysian context, Hassan, Dollard and Winefield (2010) in their study among 506 public and private sector employees in Sarawak found significant differences between men and women in WFC and FWC; whereby women reported experiencing higher conflict in both directions. However the variance is very small (1.0%), thus it can be concluded that gender differences in conflict for this sample is minimal. Therefore we proposed:

H_o5: There is no significant difference between men and women in their perception of WFC and FWC.

METHOD

Population was employees in one public sector health training institution in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. Respondents were contacted through the human resource manager and were requested to complete a voluntary self-administered questionnaire. A simple random sampling was utilized. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and 60 employees responded, representing a response rate of 60.0%.

The majority of the respondents was male (53.3%), executive (75.0%), married (91.7%), in the age group of 26-30 (31.7%), had 11 years of education (45.0%), have been working for 1-3 years (38.3%) and have basic salary between RM 1001-2500 (48.3%).

Measures
All 35 items are scored on a 5-point scale (*1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).*

Work demands
This was assessed using 5 items using The Quantitative Workload Inventory (Spector and Jex, 1998). Another two items were

developed based on the study from literature review. Higher score indicates a greater degree of work demands ($\alpha = .79$).

Family-friendly policies
Eight items measuring an organization's strategy to work-family issues were derived from Kirchmeyer's framework (1995). Higher score indicates more support in terms of family-friendly policies ($\alpha = .81$).

Supervisor support
Supervisor support is assessed using the five-item scale adapted from supervisory support factor of Thompson, Beauvais and Lyness' (1999) work-family culture scale. Another three items were developed based on literature reviewed. Higher score represents more supportive supervisors ($\alpha = .75$).

Work-family conflict and Family-work conflict
In this study, Work-Family Conflict (WFC) was measured using an eight-item scale. The first four items in the scale measure WFC (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983). FWC was measured using four items (Burley, (1989, as cited in Eagle, Miles and Icenogle, 1997). Higher score indicates more conflict in both directions ($\alpha = .81$).

Family demands
Perceived family demand (PFD) scale is measured using four items (Boyar, Carr, Mosley, & Carson, 2007). A high score represents a high level of family demands in terms of household chores ($\alpha = .74$).

ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 17. Normality was tested using Skewness and Kurtosis and items were assumed to

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be normally distributed. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and KMO were used to determine the validity and reliability and all items were found to be valid and reliable. Independent Sample t-Test was used to test the hypotheses. Eta squared was calculated to identify the effect size.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of the t-Test. It was found there were significant differences between employees' gender and supervisor's support, family demands and WFC, with women showed higher supervisor's support, family demands and WFC than men. The results supported Hypotheses 2, 4 and 5.

The findings showed there were no significant differences between male and female employees in term of work demands, utilization of family-friendly policies and FWC, thus not supporting Hypotheses 1, 3, and 6.

DISCUSSION

This study examined whether in a Malaysian traditional gender role society, factors contributing to work-life balance would differ based on gender. The findings showed that there were significant gender differences in terms of family demands, supervisor support and WFC.

Consistent with traditional gender role ideology, women in this study reported higher family demands than men (eta squared = .36). This finding is in line with Choi and Chao's (2006) study which involved 153 married Chinese employees, which revealed that women perceived a higher level of family demands than men. The gender difference in work at home is also found in some other studies. The results of the studies showed that women are more likely to take on more familial responsibilities, such as, cooking or taking care of children, if compared to men (Perkins & DeMeis, 1996), although men are more involved in housework compared to previous decades. In this context, women feel more responsibilities for tending to the family domains, which strengthened previous perception that Malaysians in general are holding traditional gender role ideology (Ministry of Women, Family and

Table 1: Independent t-Test between gender and work-family factors (N=60)

Variables	Gender (n)	*M*	*SD*	*t*	df	*p*
Works demands	Men (32)	3.34	.78	-.81	58	.42
	Women (28)	3.50	.69	-.82	57.9	.42
Supervisor's support	Men (32)	3.29	.68	-3.21	58	.002
	Women (28)	3.82	.61	-3.53	57.9	.002
Utilisation of family-friendly policies	Men (32)	3.37	.79	-.09	58	.93
	Women (28)	3.39	.68	-0.9	57.9	.93
Family demands	Men (32)	3.03	.74	-5.81	58	.00
	Women (28)	4.10	68	-5.84	57.9	.00
WFC	Men (32)	2.68	.74	-2.85	58	.006
	Women (28)	3.21	69	-2.86	57.9	.006
FWC	Men (32)	2.81	86	-.50	58.0	.62
	Women (28)	2.93	94	-.49	57.9	.62

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Community Development, 2008).

In terms of supervisor's support, women received higher support from their supervisors than that of men (eta squared = .15). Once again this finding reinforced traditional gender role ideology ascribed by the society. Although in the same organization, men and women perceived that they received different degree of supervisor support – signifying either women are more willing to ask and received support from supervisor or supervisor are more keen to assist women in work-life balance issues as family is women's priority in this culture. This also implied that men are unwilling to ask for support from their superiors, or men are not comfortable with receiving support. This finding is supported by Barbee et al. (1993) who found that both men and women tend to presume that men do not want or need social support.

Women in this study experienced higher WFC than men. However, the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small (eta squared = .12). This result was consistent with previous findings, whereby they found that women reported higher levels of WFC than men (e.g., Cinnamon & Rich, 2002; Cleveland, Cordeiro, Fisk, & Mulvaney, 2006; McElwain, Korabik, & Rosin, 2005); even though they were spending the same amount of time in paid work as men. This is typically due to their greater home responsibilities and their allocation of importance to family roles. Women are expected to fulfill the demands associated with both work and family duties.

We found no significant differences in work demands, FWC and utilization of family-friendly policies based on gender. The findings implied that Malaysia too is using male model of employment in the workplaces, whereby work demands were allocated equally, not based on gender. Based on the findings, as men and women

perceived they have similar level of work demands, it can be inferred that organization is fair in assigning tasks.

Similar perception towards family-friendly policies depicts that no discrimination is being practiced; although previous studies showed that women are more frequent in utilizing the policies. However, Hassan, Dollard and Winefield (2007) found that overall usage of family-friendly policies among private sector employees in Sarawak is low.

Even though in a traditional gender role society, women's place is in the family, their level of family to work conflict is similar to men. This finding suggests that women employees in this study have developed effective coping skills to ensure family matters did not interfere with their work. No significant differences in the perception of FWC for both genders also implied that work domain is not as permeable as the family domain. Although women tend to prioritize family domain, they learn not to allow family matters to interfere with work. Women have to fit into the male model of employment, whereby good employees are those who could work without interruption, particularly from the family domain.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study suggested that supervisors should be trained to be more supportive of employees' family responsibilities and to understand that family business is not only women's affair. Organizations could also conduct courses on family well-being, such as, on fatherhood and parenting and encourage male employees to attend. Furthermore, to minimize WFC, job should be redesigned by incorporating elements of autonomy and flexibility.

Future studies should be conducted on larger samples and include private

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sector employees. Besides examining the negative aspects of work-life interface, the positive aspect, i.e. work-family enrichment should also be explored.

The study strengthened the fact that Malaysians are still holding traditional gender role ideology. Significant differences in family demands, supervisor support and WFC are indicating that this ideology is still strong even though participation of women in decision making positions and in labour force are increasing.

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