



## ROLE SALIENCE, WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND SATISFACTION OF DUAL-EARNER COUPLES

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### Abstract

*The study investigated the relationship between work-family role salience, work-family conflict and satisfaction with work and family. Data were collected from 202 married working couples with a structured questionnaire. Family salience was significantly and positively correlated with work salience and work-family conflict. Both family and work salience was correlated with work satisfaction. A negative correlation was found between work-family conflict and work satisfaction and between family-work conflict and both work and family satisfaction. Regression analysis results showed a significant main effect of family role salience and family-work conflict on both work and family satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** Role salience, Work family conflict, Satisfaction.

### Introduction

The last two decades have been marked by striking changes in the world of work and nature of the family. Market competition has increased pressure on organizations and employers to be more adaptable, flexible and responsive to change as long hours, increased workload, job insecurity, uncertainty and stress are characteristics of most jobs. These changes have important implications for the employees as well. One important change in the nature of the workforce is the ever increasing number of in paid employment. This change has introduced new challenges for most families (Davidson & Burke, 2004) having implications for family structure, responsibilities, child and elderly care and everyday household chores. Dual earner couples are now the norm and have increased the likelihood that both male and female employees will have substantial household obligations as well as family responsibilities (Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000; Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998). Technological advancement has blurred the

boundaries between work and family life by making it easier for work to intrude into family and vice versa resulting in increased difficulty for most employees to maintain a balance between these two central life domains successfully. According to Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993), this translates into a difficult effort to combine career and family.

Two competing arguments, enrichment and depletion have been put forward to understand the process of being engaged in multiple roles. While the former focuses on the benefits of engaging in multiple roles (Marks, 1997), the latter focuses on resource scarcity (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) and role conflict (Merton, 1957; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Engagement in a role refers to one's psychological presence in or focus on role activities (Rothbard, 2001). According to Reitzes and Mutran (1994), roles provide individuals with a framework for developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and agency. These roles are attached to statuses and identity. Each role identity has a meaning and is viewed as descriptive of oneself (Thoits, 1995). The concept of role or identity salience has been proposed to explain the behaviours associated to social roles (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Although an individual may be engaged in multiple roles and have multiple identities, these identities are not equally salient. Role salience also known as role centrality (Martire, Stephens & Townsend, 2000), role commitment (Brown, Bifulco & Harris, 1987) and personal involvement (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992) provide individuals with meaning, self worth and purpose (Noor, 2004). An individual has many roles and identities attached to the roles; however, these identities are not equally salient to the person (Noor, 2004). Evidence suggests that the more salient a role is to an individual, the more time and emotion are devoted in the role (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

Work and family are two important domains in the life of adults. Gender role theory establishes that family and work roles have traditionally been gender specific, where men are socialized to be work oriented and women to be family oriented (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Empirical evidence also shows that work is more central for a man's identity and family is more central for a women's identity (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Maunno & Kinnunen, 2000, Parasuraman, Greenhaus & Granrose, 1992). However, with a constant rise in women's participation in paid work across the world, traditional notions about men and women have begun to decrease and more egalitarian notions have increased among both men and women ((Botkins, Weeks, & Morris, 2000). On the one hand, women are a significant presence in the workforce today and are more visible in managerial and professional positions, while on the other hand, men are accepting more responsibility for childcare, meal preparation and cleaning (Bird, Bird & Scruggs, 1984). Despite this engagement in multiple roles, the importance accorded to each role is not the same. Consequently, people organize their many identities hierarchically according to their importance (Stryker, 1980). Although there are individual differences in the salience of the family and work roles, the general consensus is that family is more important to the women and work to the men. When put into the work context of today, this translates in difficulty in balancing work and family role for most adults engaged in paid work.

As a result of globalization and competition, there is increased pressure on organizations and employees to be more flexible and responsive to change. In developed countries, there has been an increase in the proportion of employees working long hours (Kodz, Davis, Sheppard, Rick, Strebler, Bates, Cummings, Meager, Anxo, Gineste & Trinezek, 2002), which is often attributed to increased workload, job insecurity, and long hours culture resulting in high levels of stress and related illness. One consequence of trying to juggle work and family responsibilities is the experience of work - family conflict (WFC). Role theory is one of the most popular theoretical framework used by researchers to explain work-family conflict and predicts that

multiple life roles result in inter-role conflict as individuals experience difficulty performing each role successfully because of incompatible role pressures from work and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964). This perspective on inter role conflict stems from the scarcity hypothesis, which assumes that individual have a fixed amount of energy and time. Occupying multiple roles creates inter role conflict and role overload which causes psychological and physical exhaustion (Marks, 1977). Work-family conflict occurs when demands in one domain make it difficult to meet the demands in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The direction of the conflict between work and family is inherently bidirectional (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). That is, work may conflict with family domain (WFC) and family may conflict with work domain (FWC). Although these two types of work- family conflict are strongly correlated, they are conceptually distinct constructs supported by empirical evidence (Duxbury, Higgins & Lee (1994) ; Frone, Russell, & Cooper (1992); Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993) theorized that women managers varied in their salience toward work and family roles which were reflected in career primary, family primary and career and family. The career and family orientation was likely to produce extensive role conflict and stress referred to as work- family conflict by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). As proposed by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993), women's family experiences had direct and indirect effects on their career outcomes and that career experiences had direct and indirect effects on their family outcomes---they described these as facets of work- family conflict. In the same vain, Cinamon and Rich (2002) investigated males and females simultaneous attributions to relative importance of family and work roles and the contribution of these attribution to experience of work family conflict. Results showed that members of the work and dual profile demonstrated higher work- family conflict than individuals in the family profile. Contrary to expectations, members in the family profile did not show a significantly higher level of family-work conflict relative to members in the other profiles. These results partially support the research of Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk & Beutell (1996), where work salience of male and female entrepreneurs led to work- family conflict whereas family salience led to family- work conflict. In sum, the salience of work and family roles has implications for experience of type and level of work- family conflict.

Research on the consequences of work-family conflict suggest that high levels of such conflict are related to dysfunctional outcomes for individuals and organizations. At the individual level, high work-family conflict levels are related to lower level of job satisfaction, life, marital and family satisfaction and increased distress (Allen, Hurst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Boles, Johnston & Hair, 1997; Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997; Higgins, Duxbury & Irving, 1992; Kinunnen & Mauno, 1998; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). At the organizational level, high levels of work-family conflict is found to be related to absenteeism (Barling, MacEwen, Kelloway, & Higginbottom, 1994; Hepburn & Barling, 1996; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Thomas & Gansters, 1995), intentions to leave work (Aryee, 1992), low organizational commitment and job performance (Allen, et al., 2000), and burnout (Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991). From a systems perspective, recent work by Westham, (2001) shows that work- family conflict can produce "crossover effects" of stress and strain across members of a couple. Another consequence of changes in the nature of work and family is individual's satisfaction with their work and family. The global environment in which organizations operate today (completion, long hours, downsizing) have important repercussions for employee satisfaction which in turn affects commitment, turnover intentions, motivation, performance and health. According to Sparrow (2000), employees now work in an environment characterized by a permanent flux. They face fear of job loss and unemployment, low wages,

long hours, demanding work - loads and a diminishing sense on control over work (Grosswald, Ragland, & Fisher, 2001).

Although work and family satisfaction can be determined by a multitude of factors, it is chosen as an outcome variable because of its relationship with work family conflict. Given the impact of work-family conflict on an individual's functioning, empirical research testing models of the work-family interface have proliferated in recent years. One common feature of these models is the inclusion of aspects of satisfaction of work and family (Bedeian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; Coverman, 1989; Frone et al., 1992; Gvelzow, Bird & Koball, 1991; Higgins et al, 1992; Kopelman, Greenhaus & Connolly, 1983; Rice, Frone & McFarlin, 1992; Saxena, Ansari, & Shankar 1995). In the context of work and family, satisfaction as a variable has received maximal consideration. Saxena, Ansari & Shankar (1995) define satisfaction as "a subjective experience toward some aspect of life that is manifested in the individual's attitudes and behaviour" (p 39). It is an attitude which an individual builds after evaluating the situation around his/her expectations. While Mottaz (1986) and Vroom (1964) support the global nature of satisfaction, others talk of various facets in one's life, the sum total of which gives an overall satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Near, Smith, Rice, & Hunt, 1983). Past research indicates a negative relationship between work-family conflict and satisfaction with either work or family (Bedeian, Burke & Moffett, 1988; Coverman, 1989; Jones and Butler, 1980; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992; Pleck, Staines & Lang 1980; Saxena et al, 1995). Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat & Lang (1990) found that women who are low on such conflict, experience greater satisfaction from their respective work and family roles.

In sum, the aims of this study were to:

- (1) Investigate work and family role salience of 101 dual earner married couples
- (2) Understand the relationship between work and family role salience, work-family and family-work conflict and work and marital satisfaction.
- (3) Investigate the main and interaction effects of role salience (work and family) and work family conflict (WFC and FWC) on work and marital satisfaction

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of 101 dual-earner married couples living together at the time of data collection. The average age of the sample was 35 years. More than two third had a two children family with the youngest child having a mean age of 7.98 years. The couples had, on an average, 11.9 years of service.

### **Measures**

A self-administered questionnaire in English consisting of various scales and measures was used in this study.

### ***Role Salience***

Work and family role salience was measured with the 10 – item scale developed by Amatea, Cross, Clark and Bobby (1986). The response scale was a 5 – point, Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample item for family salience included "I expect my family life to give me more real life satisfaction than anything else in life". The alpha value for

the 5 item scale was .73. A sample item for work role salience included “Having work that is interesting and exciting to me is my most important life goal”. The scale had an alpha value of .59.

***Work-family conflict***

The 10 - item scale developed by Netmeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996) was used to measure work-family conflict and family work conflict. Sample items include “The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life” and “Family related strain interferes with my ability to perform related duties”. The response scale was a 5 – point, Likert scale from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). The alpha value for work – family conflict scale was .82 and .72 for family – work conflict scale.

***Work and Family Satisfaction***

Work satisfaction was measured with a 5 – item scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990). Sample item includes” I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career”. Alpha value for the scale was .82. Family satisfaction was assessed with a 5 – item Satisfaction with Life scale of Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). Sample item includes” I am satisfied with my marital life”. One item was dropped from the analysis to enhance” reliability value. Alpha value for the scale was .85. For both scales, responses were assessed on a 5 – point scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). For all the scales, higher scores indicated higher role salience, satisfaction and work family conflict.

**Results**

Independent samples T-test showed significant gender differences in only experience of work- family conflict with males reporting more work- family conflict: t (df = 200)= -1.20; p.04). To investigate the relationship between the study variables a correlation analysis was performed. Results are presented in Table 1. Family role salience was significantly and positively correlated with work role salience, work- family conflict and work satisfaction. Work role salience was positively correlated to work satisfaction only. Work-family conflict was positively correlated to family-work conflict and negatively to work satisfaction. Family- work conflict was negatively correlated to both aspects of satisfaction, that is, work and family. Lastly, work and family satisfaction were positively correlated.

**Table 1**

**Table 1: Means, SDs, and Inter-correlations of study variables**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Family role salience</b>	<b>Work role salience</b>	<b>Work-family conflict</b>	<b>Family-work conflict</b>	<b>Work satisfaction</b>	<b>Family satisfaction</b>
<b>Family role salience</b>	1.00					
<b>Work role salience</b>	.22**	1.00				
<b>Work-family</b>	.14*	.09	1.00			

<b>conflict</b>						
<b>Family-work conflict</b>	.00	.02	.60**	1.00		
<b>Work satisfaction</b>	.14*	.14*	-.21**	-.25**	1.00	
<b>Family satisfaction</b>	.12	-.08	-.03	-.15*	.34**	1.00
<b>Mean</b>	21.37	19.18	14.16	12.46	18.13	17.09
<b>SD</b>	2.61	2.60	3.85	3.11	2.91	3.42

\*\* p < 0.01 level (2 tailed), \* p < 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Regression analysis was performed to investigate the causal relationship (main and interactions) between role salience, work family conflict and satisfaction. Items were checked for collinearity and scores were centered prior to running the regression analysis. The variables were entered as follows: Role salience (family and work), work-family conflict (WFC and FWC) and the cross product terms between role salience and work family conflict (family role salience x work family conflict, family role salience x family work conflict, work role salience x work family conflict, work role salience x family work conflict). Separate regression analysis were carried out for each of the two outcome measures (work and family satisfaction). Results showed a significant main effect of family role salience and family work conflict on both work satisfaction (explaining 8.7 % of variance) and family satisfaction (explaining 3.0 % of variance). There were no significant interactions.

**Table 2**

**Table 2: Regression Analysis Results**

<b>Predictors</b>	<b>Work Satisfaction</b>		
	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Family Role Salience</b>	.160	2.07	.03
<b>Family -Work Conflict</b>	-.194	-2.26	.02
	<b>Family Satisfaction</b>		
<b>Family Role Salience</b>	.94	2.42	.01
<b>Family -Work Conflict</b>	-.182	-2.06	.04

## Discussion

In this study, there were no significant gender differences in the salience of work and family roles. Studies on role salience have generally found that although women report greater commitment to their family than work role and were more likely to view home and family as a valued and salient part of their life (Naidoo & Jano, 2002). At the same time, women are also committed to their work (Noor, 2004). Earlier research suggests that although men and women

both allocate their time to the two life domains according to normative expectations (Major, 1993), both view work and parental roles as psychologically important (O, Neil & Greenberger, 1994). Correlation results show that family role salience and work salience was significantly and positively related suggesting that one role helps to define and shape the other role. Although one would expect gender to influence the priority of roles with work identity being more salient for men and family identity more salient for women (Wiley, 1991), in this study, the two roles (work and family) are not hierarchically organized by gender. Research by Bielby and Bielby (1989) reported that when women and men had similar work status, experiences and domestic responsibilities, the commitment of women with work was as strong as that of men, and commitment of men with family was as strong as that of women. Family role salience was also positively correlated to with work-family conflict. Although both family and work role are important, the mean score for family salience was slightly higher than that of work salience suggesting that family holds more importance for the sample. One reason for this may be due to cultural influence with models of work and family being an important cultural dimension. Mauritius, like India, is characterized by a gender culture that leans towards strong family relationships and support systems for both genders (Sharma, 2012). The family remains a strong institution but interestingly, the family's importance emerges as a significant cause of work-family conflict for only males in this study. More men see their family role as conflicting with work experiences. As compared to women, men's socially defined role has been as work oriented and they may see the family role as an extra role which intrudes into their work role. As a result they report more work-family conflict. While for women, even their work role is seen as bringing in benefits for their traditional role as family caretakers. This may allow them to more successfully integrate the two roles and therefore they experience less work-family conflict.

Contrary to expectations, where family salience was expected to strongly relate to family satisfaction and work salience to work satisfaction, in this study, both family and work salience was positively correlated to only work satisfaction and not marital satisfaction. Both men and women assess the family role, as opposed to the work role, as being more important in their life, although the difference between the roles was not significant. Results obtained do not support the proposition that, when the roles that are central to one's identity are threatened by other roles, negative attitudes towards the threatening role are developed (Carlson & Kacmer, 2000; Grandey, Cordeiro & Crouter (2005); Greenhaus & Beutell, (1985). Respondents in this study may not be perceiving their family role as a threat to their work role suggesting successful integration of the two roles resulting in high work satisfaction. However, their family satisfaction may not be contingent on just role salience but may be determining satisfaction in combination with some other factors. The results of the regression analysis support this contention. Although no significant correlation between family salience and family satisfaction was found, the main effect of family salience on family satisfaction was significant.

The two dimensions of conflict were strongly and positively correlated, although they are reported to be conceptually and empirically distinct constructs (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992) with each having a different predictors and outcomes. Interestingly, both dimensions of conflict negatively correlated with work satisfaction but only family-work conflict negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. Additionally no gender differences were found in either work or family satisfaction. This is in contradiction to studies which support the proposition that the relationship is stronger in women than in men (Bruck, Allen, & Spector (2002); Grandey Cordeiro & Crouter (2005); Kinnunen, Geurts, & Mauno, (2004) and that work-family conflict has a negative relationship with job satisfaction among men, but not among women (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose (1992).

The results of regression analysis show a significant main effect of family role salience on both work and family satisfaction. With no significant gender differences in work and family salience, these results do not fully support the propositions of gender role theory, that if, family salience should result in family satisfaction and work salience in work satisfaction. As family role is more salient for respondents in this study, it would suggest that work, through the benefits it brings for the family consolidates family salience resulting in satisfaction with one's work. Work as the secondary role is satisfying to the extent that it can help the family directly or indirectly. In addition, a significant main effect of family-work conflict on work and family conflict was found. The more respondents saw the family conflicting with work, the less work and family satisfaction they experienced. For respondents in this study, their family role is more salient for their identity and is also positively correlated with their work role. Even in the work context, their family role remains psychologically more salient as a result of which they experience more family-work conflict and report low work and family satisfaction.

In conclusion, though both men and women in dual earner families integrate their work and family role, the latter remains somewhat more dominant in their hierarchy of roles. The study contributes to the work family literature by showing that peoples experience of roles and conflicts between roles are experience differentially in different cultural contexts. Future research should identify specific cultural factors that impinge on work family experiences. The present study is not free of potential limitations. Self reports were used subjecting the results to method variance. Although other objective measures would strengthen the study, this may not be feasible when subjective measures are being assessed (Noor, 2004). Additionally, the data was analyzed at individual level. As the data was collected from couples, analysis at the level of the dyad may provide interesting results. Lastly, the measure used to capture work and family role salience captured absolute salience and not relative salience which may be a better predictor of satisfaction

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