

# Work/Family Conflict: A Study Of Women In Management

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## Abstract

*This study examined the work/family role conflict experienced by female managers and the variables affecting this conflict. The sample, drawn from members of the Women in Management national organization, yielded 633 respondents. Results from regression analysis indicated that managerial women with high levels of family role salience and long work hours experienced the highest levels of work-family conflict. However, women managers with high levels of job satisfaction and family satisfaction experienced the lowest levels of work/family conflict.*

## Introduction

Work and family domains are the two most important areas affecting one's overall life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976). In most cases, these domains are interdependent and influence one another. Accordingly, interest in the interaction of work and family has spawned considerable research. (Excellent summaries and reviews are available. See, for example, Voydanoff, 1987; Nieva, 1985; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985.)

Perhaps, no realm of work and family concern has generated greater interest than the conflict experienced by female managers due to the joint demands of work and family. Demographically and socially, this attention appears warranted. Today, females constitute 44% of the workforce and hold nearly 40% of management positions. Two-thirds of the expected growth in the work force over the next ten years will be from women, and the number of females occupying managerial positions should parallel this growth. Further, traditional sex role orientations - where males focus on career and females focus on family - are exceptions rather than norms (Farrell, 1986).

Lambert (1990), in her excellent recent review, noted that while differing theoretical views may be used to explain work and family linkages, the most popular characterization of the relationship between work and family is that they do, indeed, spill-over and affect one another. Therefore, for growing numbers of likely to create conflict - known as work/family role conflict. Work/family role conflict is defined as interrole conflict

in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are incompatible (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal, 1965).

Recently, Coverman (1989) has highlighted the distinction between role conflict and role overload, indicating that two unique processes are present. Performing multiple roles, while enhancing the likelihood of role overload, does not necessarily result in role conflict. Conflict arises when the demands of one role "make it difficult to fulfill the demands of another role." She concluded that the presence of perceived conflict led to decreases in the psychological health of female respondents, but the presence of role overload did not.

Previous studies of the work/family conflict experienced by women have generally focused on broad cross-sections of the population. Often, survey participants were selected if they worked outside the home, with little attention given to the type of work or position held (for example, Macewen and Barling, 1988; Voydanoff, 1988; Coverman, 1989). Even studies that have specified occupational categories have typically limited their focus to professionals within a specific industry (for example, Bedeian, Burke, and Moffett, 1988; Frone and Rice, 1987). The career orientations and typical time demands expected of managerial personnel suggest that the behaviors and perceptions of a female managerial group warrant specific attention. Accordingly, this study examines work/family conflict for women in managerial positions. The specific variables expected to influence work/family conflict for this group are dis-

cussed in the next section.

## Variables

### *Family Structure and Support*

The impact of family structure on work/family conflict has drawn significant attention. Research on family structure has focused on both the size and composition of the family. Higher levels of work/family conflict have been associated with larger families (Keith and Schafer, 1980). Parents of younger children (presumably more demanding of parental time) experienced more work/family conflict than did parents of older children (Greenhaus and Kopelman, 1981). Some studies have noted that this effect is particularly pronounced for parents of very young (pre-school age) children (Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984; Katz and Piotrkowski, 1983), while Voydanoff (1988) found that the presence of children under eighteen years in the home was positively related to work/family conflict. The number and ages of children currently living at home, as well as the marital status of the female manager, will be examined in this study.

The degree of family support is another important factor affecting work/family conflict. Support from the family has an important role in reducing or relieving work/family conflict (Holahan and Gilbert, 1979). However, family support, as considered in previous studies, has been of an emotional or psychological nature. This study focuses on behavioral support - the extent to which family members actually help - as a factor affecting work/family conflict.

### *Time Devoted to Work*

Time pressures bear prominently on the incidence of work/family conflict. Quite naturally, as more time is spent on work roles, less time is available to be devoted to family roles. Accordingly, it is expected, and studies have confirmed, that work/home conflict is directly related to the number of hours worked (Burke and Bradshaw, 1981; Keith and Shafer, 1980; Staines and Pleck, 1983; Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984; Voydanoff, 1988).

The time issue is a particularly relevant arena of concern for female managers. It may be argued that managerial work roles evoke such strong time demands that a decrease in home responsibilities is inevitable. If the time demands for home responsibilities decrease proportionally to the increased time necessary for managerial work demands, the level of work/home

conflict may be minimized and largely unaffected. However, research indicates that working wives experience only slight, noncommensurate redistributions of family role expectations and are expected to retain primary home responsibilities (Pleck and Rustad, 1983). Fully employed husbands and wives do not share household duties equally (Pleck, et al., 1980). Reed and Fanslow (1984), in a study of married female entrepreneurs with children, found that despite time pressures from their businesses, the women were still expected to bear the major responsibility for household work.

Given these circumstances, it is expected that increased time demands of the job - as measured by the number of hours worked - will lead to increased work/home conflict. Accordingly, the relationship between the number of hours worked per week and work/family conflict will be examined.

### *Role Salience*

Role salience may be viewed as the extent to which a given role (work or family) is of importance to one's total self-image (Lodahl and Kejner, 1965). Thus, strong psychological identification with a particular role is indicative of role salience. Greenhaus and Kopelman (1981), utilizing a male sample, demonstrated a positive relationship between work-role salience and work/family conflict. They argue that increased ego-involvement and time commitments associated with high work-role salience may explain their findings. In a recent study, Frone and Rice (1986) examined two types of family involvement or family-role salience (spouse and parent) and two types of work/family conflict (job-spouse and job-parent). Their objective was to determine how family involvement moderated the job involvement and work/family conflict relationship. Job involvement and job-spouse conflict were positively related for individuals high in spouse involvement, and job involvement was positively related to job-parent conflict regardless of the level of parental involvement. Their sample of professionals was 57 percent male. Thus, it appears that work-role salience as well as family-role salience may affect work/family conflict.

Pleck (1977) alleges that work-role salience should be related to work/family conflict for males, but not for females. However, family-role salience should be positively related to work/family conflict for females. Some empirical support for this perspective has been noted (Beutell, 1983). However, in a study of dual career couples, Holahan and Gilbert (1979) found no significant relationship between career commitment and work/family conflict for either men or women. Green-

haus and Beutell (1985) suggest that individuals high in both work and family-role salience may be particularly vulnerable to work/home conflict.

In short, clear and consistent results on the relationship between role salience and work/family conflict are lacking. Studies isolating these factors for managerial and professional women appear particularly warranted. Both work and family-role salience will be examined in this study.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Jackson and Schuler (1985), utilizing meta-analysis, noted that job satisfaction was generally found to be negatively related to role conflict. Similarly, Bartolome and Evans (1980) have argued that an inverse relationship exists between job satisfaction and work/family conflict. Their explanation, a "negative emotional spillover", indicates that negative job feelings spillover and detrimentally impact on the family realm. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) note that when a work role produces strain, work/family conflict may result. In this view, a variety of work demands may be related to work/family conflict (Burke, Weir, and DuWors, 1980). In addition, work/family conflict has been inversely related to task challenge, variety, and importance (Jones and Butler, 1980) and positively related to job burnout (Jackson and Maslack, 1982).

It has been suggested that job satisfaction may interact with gender roles in its influence on work/family conflict. Pleck (1977) has argued that women are less likely to allow their work roles to intrude into their family roles than are men. Empirical work offers some support for this perspective. While an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and work/family conflict was found in a study of male professionals and managers (Voydanoff, 1982), no significant relationship between job satisfaction and family role strain was present in a study of employed black females (Katz and Piotrkowski, 1983). One must question whether this perspective remains valid given the changing role demands of our current cultural environment.

Married women and those with children have been shown to have higher levels of job dissatisfaction than other women (Gutek, Nakamura, and Nieva, 1981), suggesting a role conflict explanation (increased home responsibilities negatively affecting job satisfaction). However, in a recent survey of employed women, Valdez and Gutek (1987) found the lowest levels of job dissatisfaction for married or cohabiting women. This may be due to increased levels of family support or a

role accumulation explanation where increased home responsibilities energize and positively affect job satisfaction (Sieber, 1974). It appears that the impact of job satisfaction on work/family conflict for managerial women demands additional empirical attention and thus, will be examined in this study.

### *Marital, Family, and Life Satisfaction*

The studies related to marital satisfaction, family satisfaction, and life satisfaction have resulted in conflicting outcomes. Some studies have noted that the wife's employment has no effect on marital satisfaction (Ladewig and White, 1984; Houseknecht and Macke, 1981). Other studies have reported that work/family conflict is related to lower marital satisfaction (Pleck, Staines, and Lang, 1980; Barling, 1986). Thus, while one may expect both family and marital satisfaction to exhibit an inverse relationship with work/family conflict, these factors need more careful attention.

Similarly, the impact of life satisfaction on work/family conflict needs further empirical investigation. In general, working women, when compared with their non-working counterparts, have reported higher levels of life satisfaction (Freudiger, satisfaction would be associated with lower levels of work/home conflict. In this study marital, family, and life satisfaction will be examined and related to work/family conflict.

## **Method**

### *Sample and Procedure*

The sample for this study was comprised of members of the Women in Management (WIM) organization. This national organization consists of a cross-section of career-oriented management and professional women. The national membership list comprised the sampling frame.

A survey of 1500 WIM members was conducted. A comprehensive mail questionnaire, utilizing both closed and open-ended questions, was completed and returned by 633 women - a response rate of 42%, which compares favorably with similar surveys.

The demographic characteristics of this sample revealed that the mean age of the respondents was 42 years, with the range from 22 to 70. The median age was 40 years. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were college graduates, with an additional 29 percent having some college background. Seventy percent of the respondents were married and reported an average

work week of 49 hours. Fifty-three percent of the respondents had no children presently living at home. Of those with children at home, 96 percent have three or less children (median = one child).

### Measures

The eight items in the work/family conflict index were drawn from the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn and Staines, 1979) as refined by Kopelman, Greenhaus, and Connelly (1983). A five-point rating scale with anchors ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" was utilized. An additional "does not apply" category was also included. Prior to developing the index that corresponds to the scores on the work/family conflict construct, the internal consistency of the eight items was measured using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The value of the standardized alpha for this construct was .89, indicating a high degree of reliability of the eight-item scale.

Job satisfaction was assessed through a three-item facet-free scale, reflecting global affect toward the job. The items assessed whether the respondent's job measured up to the kind of job she wanted when she took it; was the type of job she would take again; and assessed the overall satisfaction with the job. Four-point itemized rating statements with appropriate labels for each item were utilized. The standardized alpha for this scale was

The measure of overall life satisfaction was drawn from ten items. First, life satisfaction was assessed through eight mood or affect questions. These questions were drawn from the work of Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) and were utilized in the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn and Staines, 1979). Here, respondents were asked to describe their lives for eight, seven-point Semantic Differential scale items (e.g., boring-interesting; full-empty). In addition, two overall satisfaction questions, "Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days", and "In general, how satisfying do you find the ways scale. The standardized alpha for the ten items comprising the life satisfaction index was .92.

Single-item measures were used to assess role salience for both work and family. The items were "The most important things that happen to me involve my family (job)". Both items were measured on a five point rating scale, with labels ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Family satisfaction was drawn from a single, facet-

-free item expressing overall satisfaction with family life. Likewise, family help was drawn from a single item assessing the extent of help from family members living in the household. Both items were measured on a five point rating scale ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree").

Marital happiness was drawn from a single, facet-free item. A four point rating scale, ranging from "extremely happy" to "not too happy" was utilized.

Statements designed to assess the number of hours worked in an average work week, and classification questions (such as the nature of their businesses) were included. Standard demographic information such as marital status, number and ages of children living at home and respondent's age and education was sought.

### Results

The dependent variable in this study is the extent of perceived role conflict between work demands and family life (CONFLICT). The various independent variables of interest are: satisfaction in life, job satisfaction (JOB), number of hours worked, help from other family members, family role salience, work role salience, family satisfaction, marital happiness, and demographic variables (years married, number of children and ages of children, age of respondent). Table I presents intercorrelations for the major variables included in the analysis.

The regression model with the above variables is estimated by stepwise forward entry of variables using the ordinary least squares procedure. The default criteria of  $p < .05$  is used for entering a variable in the equation. The final estimates of the model showing the significant variables are shown on page 72 in equation 1 (standard errors of the coefficients are shown in parenthesis; the multi-item constructs are shown in uppercase and single indicator measures are shown in lowercase letters).

The multiple correlation coefficient is .61 with R-square of .37. The model is significant at  $p < .001$ .

The estimated model deserves a few comments. First of all, since a number of variables did not enter the equation, the question arises about the lack of significance of these variables, and the stability of the variables in the equation. Regarding the latter, the model is re-estimated with the backward deletion method. The final estimated model is identical to the earlier equation 1.

$$\text{CONFLICT} = 36.60 - .71 (\text{JOB}) - 2.88 (\text{family satisfaction}) + .75 (\text{family role salience}) + 1.47 (\text{hours worked})(1)$$

(.18)                      (.33)                      (.34)                      (.25)

Regarding the lack of significance of other variables, one needs to examine the simple correlation of each of these with the dependent variable CONFLICT. The variable that deserves a comment is LIFE (satisfaction in life). The simple correlation between LIFE and CONFLICT is -.32 and is significant at  $p < .01$ . One explanation for LIFE not entering the equation may be due to multicollinearity. The correlation of LIFE with JOB (job satisfaction) is .54. Since the variable JOB is in the equation, the additional variance explained by LIFE is not significant.

The final comment refers to the interpretation of the regression coefficients of Equation 1. Since each of these independent variables has a different scale (units) of measurement it is not possible to determine the relative importance of these variables. In order to judge the relative importance of the variables, it is essential to consider the standardized coefficients. The estimated model with standardized coefficients is shown in equation 2.

$$\text{Conflict} = -.19 (\text{Job}) - .45 (\text{family satisfaction}) + .11 (\text{family role salience}) + .29 (\text{hours worked}) \quad (2)$$

## Discussion

The number of hours worked per week is significantly and positively related with work/family conflict. This is expected and supportive of a role conflict model (Voydanoff, 1988; Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984). In short, the time demands of work "strain" the family role due to the finite amount of time available. However, marital status, the number of children, and the ages of children are not significantly related to work/family conflict. One would not expect this given previous research outcomes. For example, Voydanoff (1988) has reported that increased work time and job demands and the presence of children in the home were positively related to work/family conflict. Similarly, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have noted that work/family conflict is the result of role pressures from both family and job domains.

The findings of the present study suggest that work/family conflict is more likely to be intensified by increased work demands than increased family demands. Part of the explanation for this result may reside in Coverman's (1989) notion that increased family demands - while creating additional burdens and overload - may not result in role conflict. Family demands are consistent with traditional female role expectations, so that increased demands in this area may be more readily accepted. Interestingly, these findings are revealed in a managerial sample, where increased work hours are generally expected of those striving for managerial success.

Family satisfaction is significantly and positively affected by family role salience, family help, years married, and marital happiness, but not by increased parental demands (either the number of children or their ages) (Table 1). These results parallel previous findings noting that parental demands were unrelated to marital satisfaction or job satisfaction (Bedeian, Burke, and Moffett, 1988). Accordingly, the spouse and his role and behavior seems to be the most critical familial factor affecting family satisfaction. Also, a strong positive relationship exists between family satisfaction and job and life satisfaction. Drawing from spillover themes - particularly those of Pleck (1977) - a woman who is experiencing family problems may see these reflected in her work and her feelings about that work. Our results are consistent with this explanation and reveal that family satisfaction and job satisfaction influence one another. If the family situation is sound, positive outcomes in the job situation are very likely.

Consistent with previous studies (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1986; Bedeian, Burke, and Moffett, 1988), job satisfaction is inversely related to work/family conflict. As job satisfaction increases, work/family conflict decreases. Note the positive, albeit small, relationship between hours worked and job satisfaction ( $r = .07$ ). Female managers who work longer hours are likely to receive satisfaction from their work, but they are also likely to experience more work/family conflict and lower family satisfaction. Marital happiness is unaffected by the number of work hours. The finding that marital happiness is significantly related to work/family conflict but not to hours worked is most interesting. This implies that it is the content and not the time that affects marital happiness.

The regression equation indicates the family role salience is positively and significantly related to work/family conflict (1). Consistent with role theory, this result indicates that as the family becomes more central, conflict

increases. However, contrary to literature review expectations (Frone and Rice, 1987; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), work role salience did not enter the final regression equation. Perhaps, those with high work role salience have come to grips with critical role issues and have made appropriate or necessary prioritizations or realignments of activities, so that perceived conflict is less dramatic.

The overall findings from the regression model are that managerial women with high levels of family role salience and long work hours experience the strongest work/family conflict. Yet, these impacts can be mitigated by positive job and family satisfaction. The job must be fulfilling, yet the family must be strong enough to allow one to actively pursue the job opportunities or else conflict will intensify (most likely due to the high family role salience).

There are two specific recommendations for future research. First, numerous studies have explored correlates of role conflict, and comprehensive reviews are available. Fisher and Gitelson (1983) used meta-analysis procedures to analyze 43 role conflict and ambiguity studies. Jackson and Schuler (1985) used similar meta-analysis procedures to analyze 29 correlates of role conflict across 96 studies. Given the growing number of recent studies focusing on work/family role conflict, a meta-analysis of work/family conflict correlates should be a logical and beneficial agenda for future research.

Additionally, future studies should focus on the interactions and relationships between the antecedents and consequences of work/family conflict. While some studies have attempted to model the linkages between work-related role stress, family demands, work/family conflict, job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Bedeian, Burke, and Moffett, 1988; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1986) continued efforts in this arena are warranted. Path analysis and causal modelling approaches appear particularly fruitful techniques for such investigations.

#### Footnotes

- 1 Although family role salience has a significant influence on CONFLICT in the regression, its simple correlation with CONFLICT (Table 1) is not significant. This apparent inconsistency is due to the variable "family satisfaction," which is referred to as a suppressor variable (so called because it suppresses the relationship between CONFLICT and family role salience.

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Table 1  
Intercorrelations for Major Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Conflict																
2. Job Satisfaction	-.27 <sup>b</sup>															
3. Life Satisfaction	-.32 <sup>b</sup>	.54 <sup>b</sup>														
4. Family Satisfaction	-.51 <sup>b</sup>	.21 <sup>b</sup>	.47 <sup>b</sup>													
5. Family Role Salience	-.03	-.03	.10 <sup>b</sup>	.24 <sup>b</sup>												
6. Family Help	-.05	-.09 <sup>a</sup>	.17 <sup>b</sup>	.12 <sup>b</sup>	.13 <sup>b</sup>											
7. Hours Worked	.33 <sup>b</sup>	.07 <sup>a</sup>	.03	-.14 <sup>b</sup>	.14 <sup>b</sup>	.05										
8. Years Married	-.12 <sup>a</sup>	.12 <sup>b</sup>	.18 <sup>b</sup>	.12 <sup>b</sup>	.11 <sup>b</sup>	.08 <sup>a</sup>	-.07 <sup>a</sup>									
9. Marital Happiness	-.20 <sup>b</sup>	.22 <sup>b</sup>	.45 <sup>b</sup>	.47 <sup>b</sup>	.10 <sup>a</sup>	.11 <sup>b</sup>	-.04	-.07								
10. Number of Children	.04	-.01	.01	-.02	.04	.06	.06	.08	-.04							
11. Children < 5	.01	.10	.13	.12	.03	.09	-.14	.18 <sup>a</sup>	.01	.40 <sup>b</sup>						
12. Children 6-12	-.04	.13	.13	.02	-.09	.02	-.12	.07	.09	.39 <sup>b</sup>	.21					
13. Children 13-18	-.05	.15	.13	-.04	.02	.04	.05	.16 <sup>a</sup>	-.07	.29 <sup>b</sup>	-.19	.02				
14. Children > 18	.01	-.02	.02	-.03	.14	.04	.06	.01	.10	.53 <sup>b</sup>	-.50	.00	.06			
15. Age	-.17 <sup>b</sup>	.10 <sup>a</sup>	.11 <sup>b</sup>	.10 <sup>a</sup>	-.03	.13 <sup>b</sup>	-.03	.51 <sup>b</sup>	-.12 <sup>a</sup>	-.12 <sup>a</sup>	.13	-.06	.03	-.10		
16. Work Role Salience	.09 <sup>a</sup>	.18 <sup>b</sup>	-.03	-.13 <sup>b</sup>	-.29 <sup>b</sup>	-.01	.30 <sup>b</sup>	-.00	-.09 <sup>a</sup>	-.06	.01	.04	-.06	-.15	.11 <sup>b</sup>	

a = \* p < .05  
b = \*\* p < .01